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## Playing Echo in Eleemosynary: A Creative Thesis Project

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The University of Southern Mississippi

PLAYING ECHO IN *ELEEMOSYNARY*: A CREATIVE THESIS PROJECT

by

Hayley Barnes

A Thesis

Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre (Acting)  
in the Department of Theatre and Dance

May 2012



Approved by

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## Abstract

In this thesis, I will explain on paper my creative process of researching, rehearsing, and performing the role of Echo in *Eleemosynary*. *Eleemosynary* is a one-act play by playwright Lee Blessing about three women and how their lives intersect and affect each other. I played Echo, the youngest of the three; her mother is Artie and her grandmother is Dorothea. The play takes place in 1985 and is non-linear in structure. It alternates between scenes in the present in which the characters are speaking directly to the audience, and scenes in various points of the past. Echo is raised almost entirely by Dorothea and so she has a strained relationship with her mother, Artie. After Dorothea dies, Echo is forced to reconcile her feelings about Artie and their relationship. The set and costumes in our production (and presumably most others) were extremely simplistic in order to reflect the simplistic, non-linear nature of the play. This play is an exploration of strong women and how they can make a difference in their own lives and each others'.

It may assist the reader in understanding my research and process to read a short plot summary. Dorothea is raised by loving and wealthy parents but is unsatisfied with being a quiet girl, so she chooses to become eccentric. She is forced into marriage out of high school and has three boys and one girl, Artemis. Artie dislikes her mother's eccentricity and thus rebels, running away several times throughout her adolescence. Eventually she obtains a graduate science degree and marries a man named Richard, with whom she has a daughter that she names Barbara. Richard dies shortly after the child's birth and so Dorothea comes to live with them, renaming Artie's daughter Echo. Artie becomes dissatisfied with her life after the death of her husband and the birth of her daughter, moving to Europe for a career in research and leaving Echo in the care of Dorothea. Eventually Artie returns to the United States but still refuses to care for her daughter, claiming that she is not fit for motherhood. Dorothea and Echo live quite happily together until Dorothea has a stroke, rendering her unable to speak or move and eventually causing her death. Artie returns to live with Echo after Dorothea's stroke, and eventually they reconcile their differences and agree to live a life together as mother and daughter, carrying on Dorothea's memory.

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## I. Prospectus: Planning My Creative Thesis

### Part One: Performance

The performance is the most important part of my creative thesis project. Since I am earning my Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Performance, it is imperative that my thesis project be rooted in performance. In the fall of 2011, I auditioned for a role in one of the mainstage or studio productions being produced for the fall semester. I was cast in a special project led by Alicia Hanley, a second-year MFA student in directing. This exciting opportunity enabled me to go through a rehearsal process which culminated in my performance of the role of Echo in Lee Blessing's *Eleemosynary*. This rehearsal and performance process, the actual doing of the acting, is an experiential component necessary to my growth as an actress.

### Part Two: Character Analysis

For my character analysis, I have written a first-person narrative of my character's life using Uta Hagen's questions, including but not limited to who am I, what time is it, where am I, what surrounds me, what do I want, what's in my way, and what do I do to get what I want. In this biography, I have developed a voice for my character that aided my performance.

### Part Three: Research

Although the research portion of my project is unique to acting, I still used information that I learned in my Prospectus class to aid me. The research section of my project is analogous to a literature review, because I have consulted the relevant literature and applied it to my own knowledge of the play. Since I know the value of

research and the way to perform scholarly research, I was able to adapt these methods to my own creative work. Although I definitely have used these aforementioned research methods, my process has been unique because I am only using those sources that are necessary and useful to my performance and understanding of the role. This has included sources on time period in which the play is set and written, the playwright's life and body of work, the location of the play, and historical context. These are just a few examples of the kind of research I have done to understand my role and how it interconnects with the other roles in the play, the play itself, and other female roles in plays past and present.

#### Part Four: Script Analysis

After a thorough reading of the play, I have conducted a script analysis, beginning with analyzing the structure of the play by breaking down exposition, rising action, climax, denouement, etc. Then I analyzed the play based on my character's lines, dividing beats and units and assigning intentions and tactics to each. I have also added any character secrets, obstacles, and moment before that are relevant throughout the script.

This section of my research project is similar to a methodology section, as I will have a sort of blueprint for my performance in the script itself.

#### Part Five: Daily Rehearsal Log

In my daily rehearsal log, I have written about my expectations and goals for each rehearsal, whether or not I met those goals, and my reflections on the rehearsal, including technical notes given to me by the director and my own views about how I am



progressing in the process. My rehearsal log sometimes includes sketches, printed pictures, or other visual aids to help my process, as well as bits of research I have gathered along the way.

### Part Six: Post-Show Analysis

After a show closes, one must reflect on one's performance. I have written a post-show analysis essay, reflecting upon the entire rehearsal and performance process, from auditions to casting to beginning rehearsals to ending rehearsals to performance. I am using this essay as a tool to take note of what I did well and what I could have improved upon, citing specifics as well as more general impressions. All of these processes will come together into a final product in the form of a book that includes all the analysis, research, and writing I have done as well as the actual scored script itself.

## II. Character Analysis

In order to better understand characters in theatre, there are several different forms of character analysis that actors use and that we are taught here at Southern Miss. The one that speaks to me the most is the Uta Hagen method in which you ask questions of your character as follows. It is best to answer the questions from the perspective of the character in first person. After answering all the questions in detail, it is important to track each mention of my character by other characters. Since there are only three characters/cast members in the play, it seems like it wouldn't take that long, but Echo is a very central character of the play, and so the other two characters mention her quite a bit. Although analysis of what the other characters say can be useful, it is often more helpful in the actual performance of the play.

Who am I?

I am Echo Westbrook. I am sixteen years old, and I have lived with my grandmother Dorothea as long as I can remember. My family relationships are extremely important to me, so it's easy to define myself by them sometimes. My mother has been in and out of my life since birth, so I really consider Dorothea my mother more than Artie (my actual mother). My father died exactly one month after I was born, so obviously I don't remember him. I can't even really remember ever feeling much of his influence or legacy on my life. My mother seems to have bottled up whatever memories she has of him and pushed them deep down inside herself so that we cannot share them.

Other than my family, one of the defining characteristics of my life is my intelligence. My grandmother is an incredibly intelligent and interesting woman, and she taught my mother (and me) to learn constantly. Since Artie didn't raise me, she didn't really impart this lesson on me herself, but Dorothea definitely taught me this. Mom and Dorothea both tell stories of when I was still in my crib, as young as three months old, Dorothea would try to teach me the Latin and Greek alphabets. My very first word was "Yah yah mou," which is Greek for "Grandmother." The knowledge I have and the intelligence which with I use it are important to me because of their direct ties to both my mother and my grandmother.

The other part of me that I find important although sometimes ultimately absent in expression from my personality is the fact that I am a teenager. So much of my life has been about being special, extraordinary, and different. But when you really think about it, I'm just a young girl who is trying to negotiate growing up and reconcile who I am with what the world expects of me. Despite all the hardships I have encountered, however, and all the strangeness that has happened in my life, I am well-adjusted and happy with my life. I find refuge in the serenity that comes with accepting my world and staying sane among insanity. Part of this comes from my grandmother, I think, because she began to be happy when she found eccentricity. I have a healthy dose of eccentricity in my life and my behavior, but most of my happiness is simply from acceptance that I will be able to face whatever comes my way.

Where am I?

I am often in a separate area of collective consciousness that manifests itself in the Hartwig Theatre in Hattiesburg, MS. Echo does not live here, but much of my story is shared with an audience, and the current audience happens to be here. I consider this to be the “narrative” space that is removed from the world of the play and shared directly with the audience.

The action of the play other than in the present or narrative space occurs in multiple places. One location which has special significance to me is the nursing home in which my grandmother resides after she has her stroke. In this space, I talk to my grandmother about what is going on in my life and imagine what she would say back to me if she could still talk.

Another important place in which action occurs is my grandmother’s house on the East Coast. This is the house in which I grew up. We moved there when I was only a year old, and I lived there until I briefly moved to live with my uncle’s family after my grandmother passed away. I was only with my uncle’s family for a few weeks, though. I soon returned to live in that same house, which serves as my home base.

There are a handful of other places in which I exist, one of which being my mother and father’s house in California. I only lived here for a year, but during this year I experienced my own birth, the death of my father, meeting and bonding with my grandmother, and the upheaval that is moving cross-country. There’s also the National Spelling Bee, which is an important place because firstly, it is where I take the title of National Spelling Bee Champion. It is also the place that I see my mother for the first

time in a number of years and where she forsakes me by leaving directly after my victory and I don't see her again until my grandmother dies.

What time is it?

The span of time I experience is from ages three months until sixteen years. Although the play is not presented in a linear fashion, my youngest age occurs in April of 1969. Throughout the play, we drop in on April 1969, May 1971, sometime in 1973, 1975, 1976, 1977, September 1981, March 1982, May 1982, June 1982, June 1984, September 1984, January 1985, and February 1985. These times are gathered from the playwright's choice of the year in which the play takes place, as well as different ages given in the dialogue.

The "present" or "narrative" structure of the play takes place in a time after which all of the events of the play have already happened, almost from the perspective of an omniscient narrator who can look back on the times I have experienced and comment on them, sharing my story.

What surrounds me?

The most prominent thing that surrounds me is my family. Whether it is my complete family at birth, my grandmother only for most of my life, or the tenuous cord between my mother and me for life after Grandma's stroke, my family is the most present thing in my life most of the time. I am physically surrounded by books much of the time, too, because they hold so much significance for me and for my grandmother, especially. We both value doing things and experiencing things firsthand, but there is also such a vital part of life that comes from reading books and experiencing things

through the eyes of someone else. I am also surrounded by artifacts of my life, my grandmother's life, and my mother's life. Things hold a special meaning for me, and simply being in my grandmother's house makes me feel surrounded by her presence. The wings she used to conduct her flying experiments with my mother are an ever-present artifact in my life, whether I am playing with them as a baby, experimenting with them as a teenager, or simply seeing them around my house after my grandmother passes as a reminder of her, they are important to me.

What are the given circumstances?

It is the year 1985 and we live on the East Coast in a fairly large city. I was born in 1969 in California and I have lived with my mother and my grandmother (or at times, just my grandmother) for most of my life. Things that have happened before the play begins are somewhat convoluted because although the play begins in 1985, there are multiple flashbacks to different times in my life, Artie's life, and Dorothea's life. "What are the given circumstances" can best be answered by asking other questions of when, where, who, what, why, and how.

What is my relationship?

My primary relationships are with my mother and my grandmother. My grandmother is my first and (for much of my life) only influence. She is my mother's mother and my caregiver. She is raising me and teaching me everything she can. She adores me and I adore her. We have a happy relationship that is about shared knowledge, learning, friendship, and the discovery of the world. My other relationship is

with my mother. She obviously birthed me, but I have never had as strong a connection with her as I have had with my grandmother. Our relationship grows and changes throughout the years; she is a mix of supervisor, educator, caregiver, friend, long-distance parent, and enabler. Although I have relationships with others besides these two, they are the most important and present in my life.

What do I want?

Overall, I want to find my place in the world. My overall want changes subtly throughout the play as I learn and grow and change, but at any given moment, it is safe to say that I am trying to find my place. This want comes from feeling stuck between my grandmother and my mother. Their two identities are so large that sometimes I feel squished in between the two women. I want to forge an identity that is my own although it is culled from experiences I have had with my mother and and grandmother.

What's in my way?

At different points in my life, I want it different amounts. When I was younger, finding my place came in the form of deciding whether I wanted my mother or my grandmother more. As I have grown older, it has become more and more important for me to be my own person and have control of my identity and ultimately, my destiny. I have been pigeonholed for a long time as my mother's daughter and my grandmother's granddaughter, as a relative of the Wesbrooks. I enjoy these labels and relish them as part of my life, but I want them to be a part of me, not all of me. I would rather them be an influence to my life and a support system and background than what solely defines

me. As I grow older and understand more about life, I desperately desire to find my place in the world.

What do I do to get what I want?

Part of finding my place in the world comes from distancing myself from my family, although a large part of it comes from getting closer to my family. If I get closer to them, I can learn more about them and figure out what it means to be like them and what it means to be different from them. When I distance myself from them, I see what it is like to be my own person and be independent, which helps to a degree.

When/where do other characters mention me?

Scene One

page 9

ARTIE. "Never have a daughter. Never have a child, for that matter, but *never* have a daughter. She won't like you."

page 12

DOROTHEA. "Why are you so afraid to make history?"

ARTIE. "No daughter of mine will ever ... no daughter of *mine*..."

*This is hugely important to Artie's and my relationship because it shows her reluctance to be a mother and have a daughter. Echo has to constantly battle the feeling of being unwanted.*



Scene Two

page 14

DOROTHEA. "We're all waked up and we're three months old, and we're ready to go to *school.*"

DOROTHEA. "...Listen, Artie -- how much she likes the thought of school. She's laughing."

ARTIE. "Her name's not Echo.

DOROTHEA. Of course it is. I named her.

ARTIE. / named her. Months ago. I named her Barbara.

DOROTHEA. That was before I got here."

page 15

ARTIE. "...My daughter -- Echo -- sometimes thinks I'm against education. I'm not against education. I'm just against remembering what you learn."

*This exchange about Echo in Scene Two clearly shows that Dorothea wants to educate Echo as much as possible, and Artie has a somewhat different approach: she wants to relieve her daughter from being saddled with the responsibility of remembering everything. Dorothea's insistence on renaming her granddaughter also shows that she wants Echo to feel free to be eccentric, while Artie would like her to live a more normal life.*

Scene Four

page 25

DOROTHEA. "...Do you know why I named you Echo?

ECHO. So kids would laugh at me.

DOROTHEA. No, so you could give back to others what you find beautiful about them.

So you could reflect what's lovely in others."

page 28

DOROTHEA. "Oh, this one will fly. She'll fly. I can feel it."

*Dorothea's lines in Scene Four about Echo reinforce the idea that Echo should feel free to be her own person, whatever that is. Dorothea knows that Echo is special and has a lot going for her, and Dorothea is doing everything possible to ensure Echo will reach her creative and intellectual potential. Although this is encouraging, it's also a little daunting for Echo.*

Scene Five

page 29

DOROTHEA. "... I wanted Echo to see a few things. We made all sorts of educational stops..."

page 30

DOROTHEA. "Echo saw things it took me years to see.

ARTIE. Echo saw things that weren't there."

DOROTHEA. "She's bright, isn't she?"

DOROTHEA. "She already speaks Greek, a little.

ARTIE. She doesn't know what she's saying.

DOROTHEA. Yes, she does. Other people don't, but she does..."

DOROTHEA. "Well ... are you planning to take Echo with you? She'll grow up speaking a foreign language.

ARTIE. She already does."

DOROTHEA. "...She likes me. She's used to having me around. Almost more than you, I sometimes think."

page 31

DOROTHEA. "I have to come visit, I have to see Echo for one ...

ARTIE. You can see her here. Every day. I want you to keep her.

DOROTHEA. Keep her? For how long?

ARTIE. For good. Echo."

page 34

DOROTHEA. "Do you want Echo back, or anything like that?"

ARTIE. No. ..."

ARTIE. "Things went on this way for ... six years, actually. And in that whole time, I never saw Echo.

ECHO. Once you did.

ARTIE. Well, once -- yes. By accident. ... I saw her. She was a long way away, but I knew it was her -- Dorothea'd sent me pictures. But pictures don't move. She was beautiful. ..."

page 35

ARTIE. "...Echo calls me a bad mother. But if she could see me at night -- how good I am then, how much care I take."

*Scene Five covers a lot of things, but the central theme is Artie's withdrawal from Echo's life and her family and how it affects all three of them. Echo is young when Artie departs, but her repetition of her grandmother's name clearly shows that she is already attached to Dorothea before Artie even leaves. Echo's struggle in determining her feelings for her mother can be seen by Artie's lines: Artie wavers between saying she doesn't want her daughter and then exclaiming how beautiful Echo is and how much she misses her.*

Scene Six

page 37

DOROTHEA. "They held it in a big room, with lots and lots of lights and cameras and reporters. Reporters from all over -- each one following a child from their own region. Lots of children, too. All of whom looked nervous. All except Echo.

ARTIE. Echo looked ... wonderful.

DOROTHEA. She had no trouble at all in the early going -- spelling words that were, I take it, English.

ARTIE. All the kids were good, but only Echo had no fear at all. ..."

page 38

ARTIE. "Echo was a little different than I thought she'd be. I mean, she was terrific and everything, but she seemed so ... desperate."

DOROTHEA. She was frightening, is what she was. More frightening than anyone I can remember. Oh, Hitler and Mussolini were worse, certainly, but from them you expected it."

page 39

ARTIE. "I didn't know why she was behaving that way, so competitive. I mean, that's good to be, but ... not *too* much."

DOROTHEA. "I remembered when Artie had first suggested the Spelling Bee. I didn't like the idea. 'Why do that?' I said, 'If you already know the word, why beat someone to death with the fact? I mean, is that what I raised her for?'"

DOROTHEA. "When the boy missed the word, his little head collapsed -- just collapsed down on his chest. As though it were on hinges. Echo didn't notice. She was looking at the woman who gave the words. Echo's eyes were as wide as an owl's. Not the 'wise old owl' -- not that at all. No, more like the real one. The one that hunts.

*Scene Six is a great departure in what the other characters say about Echo because Echo's behavior is so different. Much of my characterization in this scene came from reading what the other women said about my character. Their comparisons to hunting owls and dictators led me to where I needed to be when Echo takes vicious turns in this scene.*

Scene Seven

page 42

DOROTHEA. “ ... I thought Echo would be the one to preoccupy my thoughts in the last year or two of my life. But it wasn't her. It was Artie. ...”

page 47

ARTIE. “We kept the wings. We even kept the movie. Echo makes me watch it now and then. She tries to point out what's positive in it. I must admit, she tries very hard. She made me promise not to leave her. I'm one person who can't forget a promise.”

*Since Scene Seven is the last in the play, much of the language is concerned with wrapping things up. I like to look at the very beginning and the very end of the play to get clues about characters, and this play certainly offers apropos material for such a cause. For example, even though Echo is Dorothea's main focus in life, Artie becomes her focus in death, which says to me that Echo should move on with her life, taking the lessons her grandmother taught her. Artie's talk of promises to Echo speaks to hope for the future and a successful mother-daughter relationship.*

### III. Research

#### A. Scholarly Research

The unique hybrid nature of this undertaking requires several kinds of research. The kind of research that I would normally do as an actress has to be supplemented with scholarly research. Although I may very well conduct this type of research outside the setting of a thesis, I would likely take notes in a more bullet-point way than fleshing out ideas through essay form. That being said, doing this kind of research and writing in detail about it has helped my process and helped me to really focus in on who Echo is and what she wants throughout the play.

#### Spelling Bees

Although most children experience spelling bees at some point in their lives--even if only in their elementary school classrooms--few go onto the big leagues like Echo Westbrook does. A prodigy in spelling and extremely intelligent in all areas, Echo advances to the National Spelling Bee and wins first place at age thirteen. When I was in elementary and middle school, I was an extremely good speller, but I never participated in spelling bees outside my own school. In order to get a better idea of how Echo would behave in the local, regional, and then national spelling bees, it was necessary for me to do some research beyond the realm of the play. How would Echo react to this journey of winning and winning and winning? How do other children react? What makes Echo's journey special?

In Caroline Tompkins's account of being a word pronouncer at the 2002 county spelling bee in her hometown, she describes at length the process of selecting the words for different rounds. As the competition narrows, Tompkins explains her selection



process: the beginning words should be easy enough for a young competitor who has heard the word to spell it without much difficulty; after all, they did get this far. Further into the bee, the words are designed to eliminate a certain kind of speller. Students who came from schools without much competition are nixed pretty soon, leaving those who had tougher competition to begin with. Of these kids, some are the memorizer-spellers, some are intuitive-spellers, and some are a combination of both (Tompkins 400). It is likely that the memorizers have worked hard, and the intuitives have a bit of both luck and intelligence, but the kind of speller that will prevail at the national competition must have studied hard and have a knowledge of English spelling and word construction that surpasses even most American adults (Tompkins 400).

When Tompkins discusses the final rounds of the Bee, you can feel the tension mounting. Twelve children remain in her Bee's fifth round, but by the end of the sixth, it is only the top three spellers left (Tompkins 402). She describes the personalities of these three boys (two eighth graders and a sixth grader): they are confident, forthright, and intense (Tompkins 402). Reading her account of the boys' battle to the finish (only two will advance to the state competition), it is easy to imagine that Echo and her final competitor in the National Spelling Bee would behave similarly to these children. Once the contestants finally make it to round nineteen, one of the boys makes a mistake:

In round nineteen, Trevor trips on *discrepancy*. He grimaces and clenches his jaw all at once, waiting with closed eyes while Daniel spells. Daniel gets it right, and then goes on to spell *demeanor*, securing his place in the state contest. He grins broadly and starts to wave his arm,

then reins himself in when he sees Trevor's disappointment. But no tears from Trevor... (Tompkins 403-4)

In this account, it seems Daniel tries to restrain himself from overzealous celebration; this empathy in an eighth-grade boy is surprising and exemplary. And although Trevor is disappointed, he is still a good sport. These real-life children in a real-life spelling bee are far more reserved and kinder than Echo and her poor opponent. Reading about these boys' reactions to the situation helps me to identify just how high the stakes are for Echo in scene six, the spelling bee scene of *Eleemosynary*. Since the stage directions and lines in scene six indicate that Echo is basically bludgeoning her opponent with her knowledge, it is helpful to contrast this heightened state of emotion with the boys in this bee and their relative state of calm. Perhaps if these boys had advanced all the way to the national spelling bee, they would be similarly excited. Even with the disparity in stakes, it is helpful in character development to know that these real winners and losers had comparable reactions in their circumstances. Though this essay was helpful in identifying some of the ways Echo might behave, I was interested in reading about what some scholars might have to say about the subject.

In his article about the American spelling bee, Sam Whitsitt questions why the spelling bee is uniquely American, what makes it a folk institution, and why we still conduct them in the first place. One notion Whitsitt puts forth that I find particularly useful is that of arbitrariness. He connects it (a bit abstrusely) with early American Puritanism and Calvinism, positing that perhaps people found comfort in being able to spell words whose structure was arbitrary (read: silent letters, multiple phonemes per letter, etc.), similar to the doctrine of predestination found in these sects of Christianity

(Whitsitt 889). Although a bit of a leap, this comfort in order despite the arbitrary nature of the world strikes a chord in me when thinking of Echo. Consider this: “Wasn’t there the possibility of an analogy between spelling and overcoming in general...?--Wasn’t that, perhaps, the meaning of the spelling bee?” (Whitsitt 892-3). Echo uses the spelling bee as a way to triumph over her circumstances. Although she cannot control the way her grandmother behaves or where her mother is, she can learn the spelling bee words. She can memorize them and regurgitate them for an audience of adoring fans; perhaps if she can control these words and this bee, she can control her own future. If she “wins the approval” of the judges at the bee by actually winning, Echo thinks that she can win the approval of her mother. Whitsitt offers further apropos observation: “That the spelling bee became such a widespread event ... argues for the possibility that what [it] performs is a certain drama, in language, of the triumph both of and over the arbitrary” (Whitsitt 893). His depiction of the spelling bee as a dramatic interpretation of the triumph over the arbitrary is precisely where Dorothea’s, Artie’s, and Echo’s thoughts on the bee all intersect. Dorothea and Artie see the bee as a drama, a place where Echo is drawn out of her usual shell and thrust onto the stage, under the lights, and in front of the cameras to perform in a drama of language. Echo, as I said before, sees this dramatic event as an opportunity to triumph over the arbitrary pitfalls of her life; to have control over her fate and be in charge of what happens to her.

#### Exceptional Children and Their Education and Family

With the notion of spelling bees tackled, the next big thing I wanted to take on in my research was that of the mother/daughter relationship Artie and Echo have, and how their intelligent and creative personalities shape it.

Echo's relationship with her mother is rocky to say the least. Artie left Echo in order to take a job overseas when Echo was very young, and so the two do not have the same natural mother/child bond that most mothers and children begin to foster at a very young age. Even when Artie eventually gets a job back in the States, she chooses not to "take Echo back," as Dorothea suggests she might. Perhaps because of her lingering sadness over the loss of her husband (Echo's father, Richard), or perhaps just because she has done such a lackluster job of mothering so far, Artie refuses to be more than a tiny part of Echo's life. This affects Echo in some profound ways, and what interested me most was discovering how this relationship manifested itself in Echo's behavior off the page. What happened that Lee Blessing did not write about, and what did that mean for Artie and Echo's relationship? I am lucky enough to have a fantastic mother who has a deep and abiding interest in my life and has been extremely good at being a disciplinarian, mentor, and friend. Since I have such a good relationship with my mom, I looked to the literature on mother/child relationships to discover how Echo would behave in her everyday life as well as in her brief interactions with her mother.

In his study on the correlation between parental attitudes and intelligent children, Robert C. Nichols finds that mothers who are more authoritarian tend to have less creative children. These children are often better rated by their teachers and receive better grades, but they rate lower in originality and creativity (Nichols 1047). These findings are interesting to me in my process of creating the character of Echo. Echo is an intelligent child, but she also has a creative side. Although I would not necessarily consider Artie an "authoritarian mother," she is stricter than Dorothea. Dorothea is definitely an eccentric and a free spirit, and although she takes good care of Echo, she

would never behave in a way that could be considered authoritarian. Perhaps because Dorothea has raised Echo for most of her life, Echo's personality and creative interests come more from that eccentricity than Artie's relative conservatism. It is my conclusion that because Artie is stricter and Dorothea is more free with her discipline, Echo has had a variety of influences that have shaped her personality. Although her intelligence is genetic, its expression is in both expected "brainy" behavior like participating in spelling bees and nonconformist thinking as retaining her grandmother's eccentric artifacts. The findings of this article along with analysis of the script lead me to believe that Artie's partial absence from Echo's life is ultimately a good thing. If she had been continually present in Echo's life, it is possible that Echo's attitudes and creativity would have been stifled.

Since education is such an important issue in the lives of these women, it is worth looking at some of the parts of the educational system that were either thriving or troubled in the period of time that Echo would have gone to school. Since Echo is an exceptional child because of her intelligence, I have chosen to look into articles that discuss exceptional and gifted children and how their educational environment affected them.

In her Saturday Evening Post article, Joni Winn looks into Glenn Doman's methodology of teaching babies in order to raise their IQ. Although this method is variously shunned and championed, the results are indisputable: children who follow this course learn much more than infants normally learn, and they are able to apply this knowledge (Winn 47). Although it is not specified what methodology Dorothea uses to teach Echo, it is possible that Dorothea studied Doman's teachings. After all, she is

teaching Echo Latin and Greek as an infant. The presence of this teaching and her success later in life is analogous to Dr. Doman's practices and offers insight into the systems of education present in the world of the play.

In his exploration of the equality of education given to exceptional children, Thomas Stephens uncovers an uncomfortable truth: children, whether exceptional because of giftedness or handicap, were often treated less well than their average counterparts in schools across America because of their differences (71). He likens the struggle to equal rights for exceptional children in schools to the civil rights or women's suffrage movements, saying that, "such movements traditionally seek change through demonstration ... [and] through the courts" (Stephens 73). The famous case that ended racial segregation in schools also "...became the basis for litigation involving the education of the handicapped" (Stephens 73). These laws that would protect handicapped and gifted children, however, would not be implemented in schools until 1977 (Stephens 74), when Echo would have been in first grade. Since she was just beginning her schooling when these regulations were beginning, it is possible that she would have been discriminated against within her schools. Indeed, in one of the scenes in the play in which a seven-year-old Echo is discussing the provenance of her name with her grandmother, Dorothea asks, "Do you know why I named you Echo?" and Echo responds, "So kids would laugh at me?" Now obviously, these mean schoolchildren Echo speaks of do not necessarily represent the climate of the whole school, but it is interesting to note that those attitudes were present among the students--perhaps they were present among the teachers, too.

## Economics/World of the Play

While the economic situation of these characters is never specifically addressed, they do not live in an economic vacuum. In her article on the economic implications of grandmothers who care for their grandchildren, Harriet Presser addresses some of the issues that Dorothea, Artie, and Echo might encounter. She puts forth the idea that when children are cared for by their grandparents--especially their grandmothers--they are generally assumed to be in a non-complicated, less problematic situation than those who are being cared for by non-relatives, but this is not always so (Presser 589). In her study, some of the grandmothers were employed and thus could not devote full ownership and attention to the child, especially if the mother held a job also. In the cases in which the grandmother was not employed, the mother often paid the grandmother wages in compensation for the child care. Presser explains, "Our findings suggest that there may be a more complicated negotiation of work and family roles between grandmothers who provide child care and employed mothers who rely on such care ..." (Presser 588). Although we already know of the logistical and emotional complications of Dorothea and Artie's situation in caring for Echo, this information about their possible economic woes is relevant as well.

## Feminist Themes

While Lee Blessing's work is not overtly feminist, a play with only women characters is surely going to face some criticism or acclaim for being a feminist work. In her article on the intersection of theatre and politics, Vera Gottlieb explains, though, that "Concerns previously seen as 'women's issues' -- childcare, the family, education -- are now accepted as integral to social policy" (7). So even though some may associate

feminism with this play because it is entirely populated with women, it may be more correct to think of it as a relevant play for both men and women. Basically, just because this play concerns things formerly considered “women’s issues” does not mean it is for women only. Gottlieb says that the acceptance of these issues in the modern theatrical vernacular “... partly accounts for the emphasis in the new drama on the domestic and personal, on relationships, rather than ‘public’ issues” (7). Blessing’s work is much more focused on these women’s personalities, eccentricities, and character flaws than the simple fact that they are women. Similarly, the relationships in the play -- mother/daughter, grandmother/granddaughter -- are important because of the people in them and the issues that arise because of human conflict, not necessarily conflict between females.

#### Disability’s Affect on Family Relationships

The last significant area that I wanted to explore and that I thought would benefit from scholarly research was the stroke. One of the larger plot points of *Eleemosynary* involves Echo’s grandmother, Dorothea, having a severe stroke that eventually strips her of the ability to talk or understand others and most of her motor skills. This is obviously a devastating blow to Echo, who views her almost as a mother, and certainly as a role model and caregiver. The tragedy also significantly impacts Echo’s relationship with her mother, Artie, since Artie is forced to come live with Echo and Dorothea after the stroke. In order to better understand how Echo would react in this terrible situation, I read about several studies that looked into stroke victims and their families. The results and discussions in these studies were generally very interesting. I found that stroke victims and their families can have a great impact on each other as far as attitude and



coping mechanisms go, and this helped me to form a clear characterization for Echo in the scenes in which she is interacting with her grandmother and mother after the stroke. It also helped me to define the stakes Echo has to reach when discussing with the audience (via direct address) what has happened. Although the lines can seem glib, it is clear that what Echo is feeling is a mixture of shock, depression, and anger. Her outward attitude stays positive, however, as she is an eternal optimist who will always try her best to see the positivity the future may hold.

In a study on the reactions and adjustment children have after one of their parents suffers a stroke, some surprising results were found. Although one would think the health of the affected parent would be the biggest indicator of the child's adjustment, this is not the case. What affects the child more is the attitude of the non-affected parent. The more stressed or depressed the other parent is, the stronger the child's reaction and the less stable their adjustment (Visser-Meily et al. 239). Although it is Echo's grandmother and not her actual parent that has a stroke in the play, Dorothea is more of a mother to Echo than Artie has ever been. According to the article, "caregiver strain was a significant determinant of the children's functioning;" in the case of *Eleemosynary*, Echo's frustration with Dorothea's predicament could be largely based on Artie's reaction (Visser-Meily et al. 239). Although Artie is clearly upset that her mother (Dorothea) has lost so much cognitive ability, her distress manifests itself mostly in frustration and strain, rather than sadness and caring. This frustration wears on Echo, who has been approaching Dorothea's stroke in a remarkably level-headed way. Artie's constant disparagement of Echo's treating Dorothea like she's still mentally present saps Echo of her positive energy, causing her to snap on her mother in scene four. One

finding in this article that particularly helped me decode Echo's behavior relates to family routines: "It is likely that the spouses' burden relates to disruption of parenting, for example because family routines change or because the parent has less time to support a child..." (Visser-Meily et al. 240). Since before Dorothea's stroke, Artie literally spent no time with Echo other than over the phone, moving back to live with the two of them was a huge disruption of her life. This disruption likely is the cause of her stress and strain over the situation, as well as Artie's ambivalent feelings toward her mother in general. And even though this particular article researches only two-parent families, I think it's safe to extrapolate the results to Echo's family situation, given that Artie has a familial bond with both Dorothea and Echo and that she is, post-stroke, Echo's primary caregiver.

The emotional state of the stroke patient and their family can affect each other, also. Although it is obvious that a loved one being sick could negatively affect a family member, the overall attitude of the family member can affect the patient as well. According to Barskova and Wilz, "[t]here is some empirical evidence that the partners' acceptance of a post-stroke life-situation influences the patients' emotional and cognitive recovery" (1488). It is clear that Echo feels this intuitively and thus attempts to "heal" her grandmother by maintaining a positive attitude. Echo's insistence on continuing to talk to Dorothea and pretending that she responds is the way that Echo tries to maintain normalcy. She is sometimes forced to deal with the reality of the situation, as when she exercises Dorothea's limbs so they don't atrophy; even so, Echo maintains the illusion that everything is okay whilst doing this by having "conversations" with her grandmother and practicing spelling, behaving as if Dorothea is actually

responding. Since Echo is aware that this positive attitude may eventually help Dorothea recover at least somewhat, Artie's harsh reactions toward Echo's positive attitude are especially hurtful. Another reason that Artie is reacting so negatively is probably because of the degree of Dorothea's impairment. Because Dorothea is so incapacitated in her everyday life and activities, Artie's depression is more severe (Barskova and Wilz 1489). This disparity between Artie's and Echo's reactions adds to the dramatic conflict in the play, especially in the scenes dealing with Dorothea after her stroke.

Reading from the scholarly canon of research on the main subjects and themes in the play enabled me to make some informed decisions about how to play Echo and enriched my characterization. Since the play is a mixture of realism and non-realism, I was able to take from these articles how "real people" react in the situations Echo is faced with and decide whether or not to react that way in the play. This scholarly research ultimately improved my character and aided my process in a way that I did not previously think possible.

## B. Musical Research

Depending on what kind of play you are acting in, research can take on many different formats. Since *Eleemosynary* is a fairly modern play, there has been virtually no criticism written on it. Since scholarly articles were not available in my research of this role, it was necessary to do most of my research within the play itself. Aside from that, two of my great avenues of research were music and images. I made a character playlist for Echo that encompassed some modern music which I thought applied to Echo's life, thoughts, and relationships.

## Eleemosynary Character Playlist Notes

### “Hardliners” (Holcombe Waller)

The bar closed and the whole day went  
Not much to your liking  
Fresh rain on the beer-green glass  
Broken where you're biking  
A dark cloud over your bed  
You're so sad that you just might die  
But the sun will still rise  
The sun will still rise

Now don't laugh 'cause I just might be  
The soft curve in your hardline  
There's no doubt that you are mine, babe,  
There's no doubt that you are mine

You act so shy  
But you know you're pretty  
You act like there's no one left  
Alive in the whole city  
Well maybe the end is upon you  
And what then?  
Here, repeat after me,  
It goes, I won't stop loving  
I won't stop loving

You don't have to be perfect  
You don't have to play well  
You don't have to fix everything  
All by yourself

Now don't laugh 'cause I just might be  
The soft curve in your hardline  
There's no doubt that you are mine, babe,  
There's no doubt that you are mine

Here, repeat after me, it goes  
I won't stop loving  
I won't stop loving

Now don't laugh 'cause I just might be  
The soft curve in your hardline  
There's no doubt that you are mine, babe,  
There's no doubt that you are mine

The line "You don't have to fix everything" speaks a lot to me of my relationship with Artie. I'm constantly telling her that she doesn't have to be perfect, but she still thinks that that's the only way to be a good mother.

## “Fooling Myself” (Grace Potter)

Ahhh

Come on, you can talk to me  
Come on, I'm ready to receive  
Well I can't always read your mind

And your words are all one of a kind

Ohh

Lately I feel like I'm fooling myself  
Either that or I'm fooling everyone else  
And lately I feel like a piece of my soul  
Is hanging around for everyone to hold  
Lately it's hard just to let it all go  
But it's going, going, gone right out my door

Come on, try to smile for me  
Open up and try to breathe  
With your face like a sad china doll  
You've been hiding your heart from it all

And lately I feel like I'm fooling myself  
Either that or I'm fooling everyone else  
And lately I feel like a piece of my soul  
Is hanging around for everyone to hold  
Lately it's hard just to let it all go  
But it's going, going, gone right out my door  
Going, going, gone right out my door

Foolin' myself, foolin' myself  
Foolin' myself, foolin' myself  
Foolin' myself, foolin' myself

This song makes me think of Artie's dialogue with Echo and how she tries to make me happy but she's ultimately more concerned with herself and her own issues. She thinks that she is concerned about me and tries to convince herself that is the most important thing to her, but ultimately it is not and cannot be; she has too many issues of her own with which to deal.

## “Wake Up” (Arcade Fire)

Somethin' filled up  
my heart with nothin',  
someone told me not to cry.

But now that I'm older,  
my heart's colder,  
and I can see that it's a lie.

Children wake up,  
hold your mistake up,  
before they turn the summer into dust.

If the children don't grow up,  
our bodies get bigger but our hearts get torn up.  
We're just a million little god's causin' rain storms turnin' every good thing to rust.  
I guess we'll just have to adjust.

With my lightnin' bolts a glowin'  
I can see where I am goin' to be  
when the reaper he reaches and touches my hand.

With my lightnin' bolts a glowin'  
I can see where I am goin'  
With my lightnin' bolts a glowin'  
I can see where I am go-goin'  
You better look out below!

This song is such an anthem of youth and awakening. I relate to it because throughout the play I am learning about myself and finding my place in the world. Echo's main objective throughout the play is to figure out where she exists between herself and her mother and grandmother, and this song captures that well. The lyrics capture how hard it is to grow up and how dangerous growing up can be if you do not have good role models to lead you through life.

## “Float” (Broken Bells)

So you showed me around your town  
To hell again and back  
Our love sucks  
I love the way that you made all the friends you depend on  
I know it might seem wrong  
Because your not the only one  
I remember my self as a lonely child  
So I was  
And you've got me wrong  
You've got me wrong

Ground your sense of worth  
'Cause the spark of morning burns  
And all of your searching eyes  
Could scold your tender mind  
Remember what they say  
There's no shortcut to a dream  
It's all blood and sweat  
And life is what you manage in between

But what you don't know  
Is you're too young and eager to love  
Seething eyes  
So you're about to get into  
The ditch that you opened up  
Sister's allay  
and leave you behind  
You want it sewn  
I cut the light  
of a lot of mood  
Sister you know enough  
But for now just let it go  
Don't run, don't rush  
Just flow  
Through the give and take you had to learn  
How to cross the coals and not get burned  
But you're really just a little girl  
Playing in the park until the sun goes down  
Sometime you want to rise  
One did it's our desire  
No doubt you think you braided your own hair  
So you're all grown up  
Should you want to cross the line  
Which way do you want to fly?  
Pretend that love creating all the ends  
But you got me wrong

This song relates a lot to youth and innocence and about how children often want to grow up before they're truly ready to do so. Echo is simultaneously young and grown, and the plaintiveness of this song speaks to Echo's spirit of youthfulness but her desire to know more things also.



## “Who Needs Shelter” (Jason Mraz)

Good-day sunlight  
I'd like to say how truly bright you are  
You don't know me but I know you  
You're my favorite star  
Follow you I will so lets get moving

Who needs shelter when the mornings coming?  
Absolutely there's no one  
Who needs shelter from the sun?  
Not me, no. not anyone.

By your clock the cock rooster crows  
Then off to work where everybody goes  
Slow, But eventually they get there  
Picking up the day shift back where all left off  
Confined and pecking at relationships  
You know it's only a worthless piece of shit

Who needs shelter when the mornings coming?  
Absolutely there's no one  
Who needs shelter from the sun?  
Not me, no. not anyone.

I'd sleep it all away but the sun wont let me  
I'd miss those lovely days of summer

Good-day sunlight  
I'd like to say how truly bright you are  
You don't know me but I know you  
You're my favorite.

This song is about the remembrance of good times, and how Echo remembers her wonderful times with her grandmother. The singer asks the question, “Who needs shelter?” And gives the answer that no one does when the day is so beautiful. This is a common assumption of youth: there is no need to build a shelter when the sun is shining. Echo’s good times are easy to enjoy when she is not aware of difficult times to come. This song reminds me in the context of the play that I cannot anticipate what is to happen next. When Echo is a young girl, she does not know what her life will hold, so I must not anticipate or project that knowledge that I have as an actor.

## “Careless Love” (Madeleine Peyroux)

Love, oh love, oh careless love,  
You've fly though my head like wine  
You've wrecked the life  
Of many a poor girl  
And you nearly spoiled this life of mine

Love, oh love, oh careless love,  
In your clutches of desire  
You've made me break a many true vow  
Then you set my very soul on fire

Love, oh love, oh careless love,  
All my happiness bereft  
Cause you've filled my heart with weary old blues  
Now I'm walkin' talkin' to myself

Love, oh love, oh careless love,  
Trusted you now it's too late  
You've made me throw my old friend down  
That's why I sing this song of hate

Love, oh love, oh careless love,  
Night and day I weep and moan  
You brought the wrong man into this life of mine  
For my sins till judgement I'll atone

Echo has invested so much in her relationship with her grandmother, only to lose her; then she invests so much in her relationship with her mother, but her mother wants her to leave. This song expresses the anger she has toward how her love relationships have treated her.

## “Home” (Michael Buble)

Another summer day  
Has come and gone away  
In Paris and Rome  
But I wanna go home  
Mmmmmmm  
May be surrounded by  
A million people I  
Still feel all alone  
I just wanna go home  
Oh, I miss you, you know

And I've been keeping all the letters that I wrote to you  
Each one a line or two  
“I'm fine baby, how are you?”  
Well I would send them but I know that it's just not enough  
My words were cold and flat  
And you deserve more than that  
Another aeroplane, another sunny place  
I'm lucky, I know, but I wanna go home  
Mmmm, I've got to go home

Let me go home  
I'm just too far from where you are  
I wanna come home  
And I feel just like I'm living someone else's life  
It's like I just stepped outside  
When everything was going right  
And I know just why you could not  
Come along with me  
'Cause this was not your dream  
But you always believed in me

Another winter day has come  
And gone away  
In even Paris and Rome  
And I wanna go home  
Let me go home  
And I'm surrounded by  
A million people I  
Still feel all alone  
Oh, let me go home  
Oh, I miss you, you know

Although this song is primarily about romantic love, it can also be about missing your family and returning home to them, as difficult as it may be. When Echo is sent to live with her aunt and uncle and cousins, she just wants to return home. She misses everything that has always been familiar to her, and this song captures that homesickness both in lyrics and music.

## “Up in Flames” (Coldplay)

So it's over  
This time I know it's gone salt water tasted it too long  
I only know I'm wrong now I know it's gone up in flames  
We have slowly gone  
So it's over this time  
You're flying on this time  
I know no song can stop it  
Slowly burn can stop  
Can we pour some water on?

This song perfectly sums up Echo's feelings after her mother sends her to live with her uncle. She feels like her life is over and everything has gone up in flames. She is lost and confused and only wants to understand how to put out the flames. This may sound like a slightly dramatic interpretation of her situation, but it really is a dire thing for Echo to be sent away from her family.

## “In My Place” (Coldplay)

In my place, in my place  
Were lines that I couldn't change  
I was lost, oh yeah I was lost, I was lost  
Crossed lines I shouldn't have crossed  
Yeah how long must you wait for it?  
I was scared, I was scared  
Tired and under prepared  
But I wait for it, if you go, if you go  
Leave me down here on my own  
Then I'll wait for you (yeah)  
Sing it, please, please, please  
Come back and sing it

The thriving energy and contained, measured pace of "In My Place" are a good representation of Echo's conflict between being her own person and listening to her mother and grandmother. She often feels caught between them and doesn't know where her "place" is. The singer of this song is addressing someone very specifically and asking them to come back and let them know what their place is. Echo is similarly begging to find out her place.

## “Wait” (Ben Kweller covering The Beatles)

It's been a long time  
Now I'm coming back home  
I've been away now  
Oh how I've been alone

Wait till I come back to your side  
We'll forget the tears we've cried

But if your heart breaks  
Don't wait, turn me away  
And if your heart's strong  
Hold on, I won't delay

I feel as though  
You ought to know  
That I've been good  
As good as I can be  
And if you do  
I'll trust in you  
And know that you  
Will wait for me

This song is almost an apology mixed with a look forward to the future that much of Echo's track throughout the play embodies. Artie is apologizing to Echo, Echo is apologizing to Artie, and they are both apologizing to Dorothea. This apology mixed with sincere repentance is a positive look forward to what the future could be for Artie and Echo.

The composition of a character playlist helps me as an actress in several different ways. First of all, it is helpful to use music to express things you are feeling about a character that may not otherwise be easily expressed through other kinds of analysis. I like to use songs to cull swirling thoughts I have surrounding a character by picking songs that match the mood the character is in at various points of the play. After these selections of songs have been made, I like to listen to my character playlist while doing research and analysis, warming up before rehearsal, and getting ready for the shows. Sometimes the lyrics of the songs make me think of my character, and sometimes the musical qualities of the songs help put me character. I try to select a balance of each, as well as some songs that do both. Although creating a character playlist is not something taught in our acting curriculum per se, outside research and personal character development and exploration is encouraged.

### C. Image Research

Another important avenue of research for this type of play is images. I am not generally an abstract person, so most of the images I gathered were literal photographs of children in spelling bees, mothers and their children, and the like.

Although when I think of image research, I generally imagine a designer's work, it can be greatly helpful for the actor, too. Especially in a play like *Eleemosynary* in which so many people, places, and ideas are only mentioned, it is useful to find images so you can have a visual component to think of when you are talking about something that is not seen onstage. It is also useful to find photographs and paintings of women who are the different ages that my fellow actors and me were playing. Being able to see what Dorothea might have looked like as a young girl gives me a more vivid picture by which to imagine and speak of her. Some amount of abstract images were also particularly useful for this play because of the subject matter with which Dorothea and Echo in particular deal. Subjects such as astral projection and spontaneous combustion are not things you see everyday; it is useful therefore to see depictions of them in art and things that remind me of them. Even images that are not directly related to the play can be helpful in knowing what you do not want your character to be like.



These photographs are from women in the late 1800s, which is when Dorothea was born. They are not the typical late 1800s women, which is why I think of them when I think of Dorothea. She was eccentric growing up and probably faced a lot of adversity in the face of being such a unique woman.

(Left:

- [http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://25.media.tumblr.com/tumblr\\_l1yoxp5KBn1qarrqo1\\_500.jpg&imgrefurl=http://edwardianera.tumblr.com/page/100&h=453&w=500&sz=40&tbnid=XZlrpZLLcpqXZM&tbnh=214&tbnw=236&zoom=1&hl=en&sa=X&ei=BqIVT-2RFqj2sQKBtc3PCQ&ved=0CD4Q8g0&usg=\\_\\_kel-tlHWQxc\\_VNliHccHEoe-9PA=](http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://25.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_l1yoxp5KBn1qarrqo1_500.jpg&imgrefurl=http://edwardianera.tumblr.com/page/100&h=453&w=500&sz=40&tbnid=XZlrpZLLcpqXZM&tbnh=214&tbnw=236&zoom=1&hl=en&sa=X&ei=BqIVT-2RFqj2sQKBtc3PCQ&ved=0CD4Q8g0&usg=__kel-tlHWQxc_VNliHccHEoe-9PA=)

Right:

- <http://weheartit.com/entry/2764653>)





I think of these women when I hear the word “grandmother,” especially because these women are pretty eccentric. I like to imagine that Dorothea was eccentric like these women and that Echo is looking forward to growing up and becoming this kind of eccentric person.

(Clockwise from top:

- <http://acelebrationofwomen.org/?p=62385>
- <http://pollyelizalouise.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/iris-afel-in-vogue-paris.jpg>
- [http://www.pmi.com/eng/about\\_us/charitable\\_giving/pages/charitable\\_giving.aspx](http://www.pmi.com/eng/about_us/charitable_giving/pages/charitable_giving.aspx))



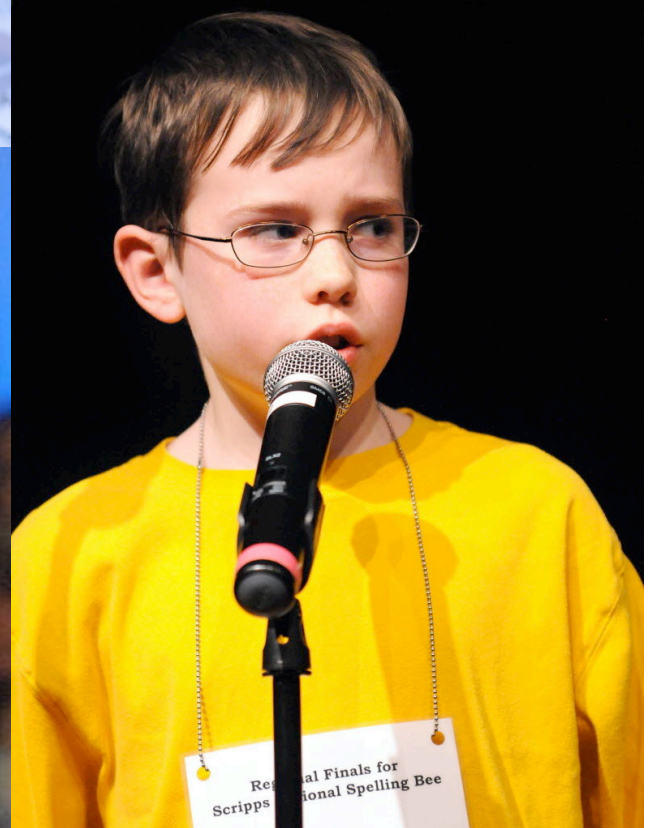
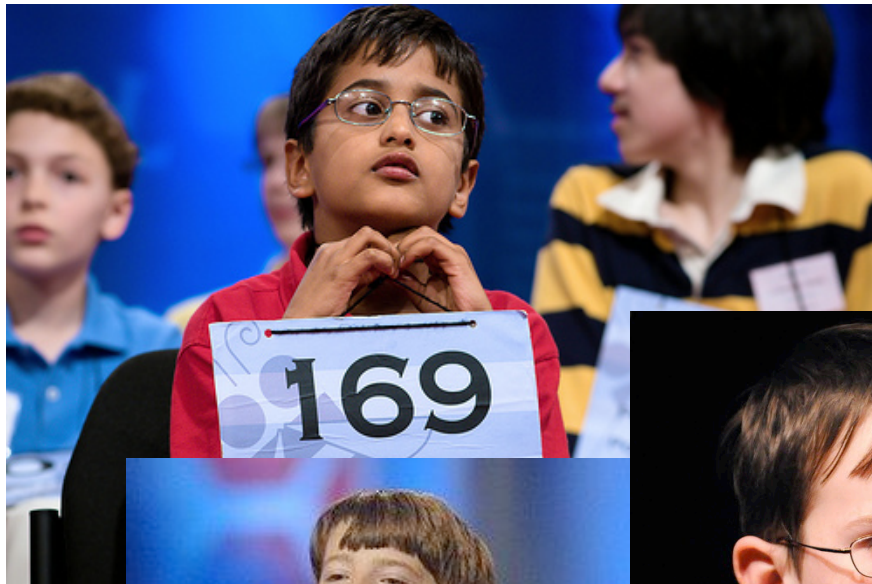
These are photographs of women in the 1950s. They are not necessarily of the “norm” and remind me of my grandmother Dorothea.

(Clockwise from top:

- [http://s3.amazonaws.com/data.tumblr.com/tumblr\\_ly62hcXWCd1qa70eyo1\\_1280.jpg?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJ6IHWSU3BX3X7X3Q&Expires=1331098293&Signature=DxSs2Lj5%2Fya1kk%2BBZHbzKnjH%2Fmk%3D](http://s3.amazonaws.com/data.tumblr.com/tumblr_ly62hcXWCd1qa70eyo1_1280.jpg?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJ6IHWSU3BX3X7X3Q&Expires=1331098293&Signature=DxSs2Lj5%2Fya1kk%2BBZHbzKnjH%2Fmk%3D)

- <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-5qWE-GszNKM/Tbnpg7UpjVI/AAAAAAAAArA/QBiAhhghjHo/s1600/Raufa%2B-zakaria%2Bcopy.jpg>

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2011/12/05/best-photography-books-2011/>)



These children from the spelling bee remind me of the child that Echo defeats at the end of Scene Six. They also remind me of Echo herself. These children are worried about doing their best but they also want to appear as if nothing is wrong. They are intelligent and precocious but in some ways very normal children.

(Clockwise from top:

- <http://flowtv.org/2010/03/the-spelling-bee-model-minorities-and-american-citizenshipshilpa-dave-brandeis-university/>

- [http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/jim-deegan/index.ssf/2011/03/speller\\_swallows\\_tooth\\_moments.html](http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/jim-deegan/index.ssf/2011/03/speller_swallows_tooth_moments.html)

- [http://www.thebizofknowledge.com/2007/06/whats\\_wrong\\_with\\_this\\_picture.html](http://www.thebizofknowledge.com/2007/06/whats_wrong_with_this_picture.html))



Although most of my images are more literal than these, these are some useful images that are more abstract. They are of older hands holding young hands, which represents the difference between the generations in this play. Echo is close to her grandmother, but she also has an important relationship with her mother. These photographs show that the relationship with her mother and grandmother are important and necessary and that they must work together to make their dreams come true.

(Clockwise from top:

- <http://rt.com/news/prime-time/and-counting-the-world-s-oldest-lady-is-not-the-one-we-thought/>
- [http://www.123rf.com/photo\\_9432902\\_old-and-young-hands--two-generations-concept.html](http://www.123rf.com/photo_9432902_old-and-young-hands--two-generations-concept.html)
- <http://www.dreamstime.com/stock-photo-old-and-young-hands-isolated-on-white-image17870750>)



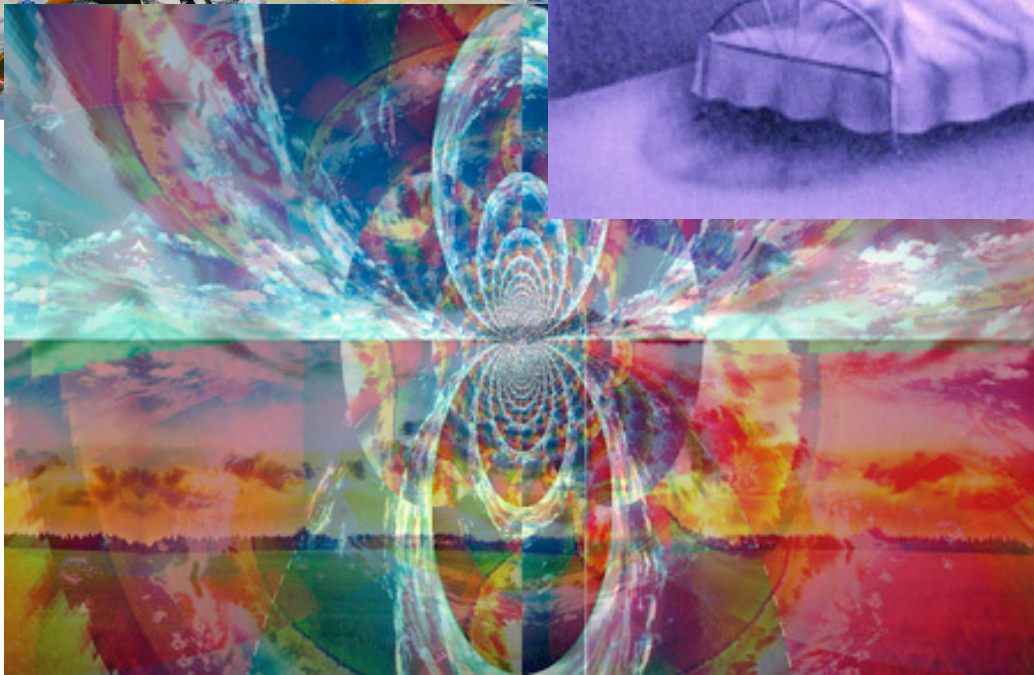
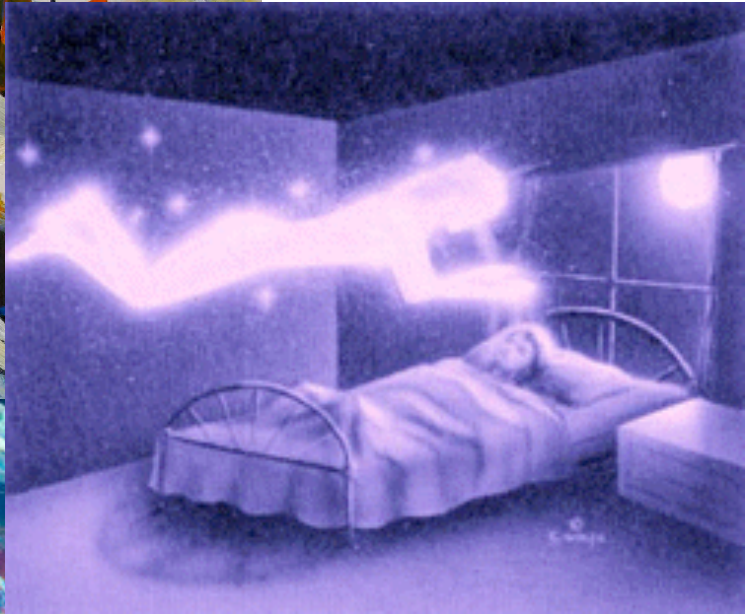
These photographs of birds in flight represent Echo and what she wants to do in her life. She feels so structured and held down in some ways, but she just wants to fly free and be her own person. Most of her life she is torn between her mother and her grandmother, so all she really wants to do is fly free and be her own person. These photographs of birds in flight show just that.

(Left:

- <http://yogaquest.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/birdwings1.jpg>

Right:

- <http://blenderartists.org/forum/showthread.php?210460-Fantasy-Creature>)



Although most of the photographs that I have chosen are more literal, I like some of these more abstract photographs. So much of Dorothea and her life is abstract and ephemeral, so it's exciting to see some pictures of things that may represent what Dorothea is into and how her family might be portrayed. Particularly helpful is the photo of astral projection, which is definitely not a concept with which I am familiar.

(Clockwise from top:

- [http://www.artifolio.com/palbum.php?w=existence&task=view&up\\_id=43275](http://www.artifolio.com/palbum.php?w=existence&task=view&up_id=43275)
- <http://jksalescompany.com/dw/astralprojection.html>
- <http://abstract.desktopnexus.com/wallpaper/345152/>)



The colorful mobile in this set is representative of the Greek and Latin letters that Dorothea held above Echo's crib and used to teach her languages. The child in this picture has been hypnotized, which is something Dorothea and Echo probably did at some point. The diary in the photography represents the diary that Echo discusses that tells some of Dorothea's secrets.

(Clockwise from top:

- <http://www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/exhibition.asp?id=42>
- <http://magyhumans.tumblr.com/>
- [http://img0.etsystatic.com/il\\_fullxfull.312882968.jpg](http://img0.etsystatic.com/il_fullxfull.312882968.jpg)



These two photographs represent Artie's pregnancy and motherhood of me, her live daughter, and her unborn daughter that she still thinks about.

(Left:

- [http://howtokeepaconversationgoing.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/woman\\_on\\_phone.jpg](http://howtokeepaconversationgoing.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/woman_on_phone.jpg)

Right:

- <http://funnyphotosto.com/baby/baby-hands.html>)



### III. Rehearsal Log

Upon being cast in this show, I obtained a notebook to use for rehearsals and performances. I recorded my goals for each rehearsal before the rehearsal began, as well as any notes Alicia may have given us throughout the process. Some of these entries began as extremely stream-of-consciousness, and I wanted to include the notes as realistically as possible without doing too much post-process editing. This log offers a very real portrait of my process throughout rehearsals and performances. The log is organized into thoughts, directors' notes, and personal goals.

It will be most useful for the reader to treat this section as the personal journal that it is. This is a collection of both notes jotted quickly during rehearsal and thoughts that needed recording so that they could be more fully explored later. This rehearsal log is included both as a snapshot of the rehearsal process and a way for the reader (and me) to track ideas as they progressed along the rehearsal process and then came to fruition in performance. For more careful analysis, please see the analysis sections.

Monday, August 29, 2011 8pm

**Thoughts:** First meeting. We held a read-through and discussed some large themes: gender equality and the way women relate to each other. Alicia's preliminary dramatic action statement is "To get what you want." We are especially interested in what connects these characters and what divides them, which is mostly communication. We discussed scheduling, deciding that most rehearsals will be held Monday through Friday nights 6pm-10pm. Our rehearsals will take place in the Hartwig, and we will perform September 29-30. My first task will be looking up pronunciations and definitions

of all the unusual words I have to say and discuss throughout the play. We should be off-book at least a week before opening, and my rehearsal attire will be jeans and tennis shoes since that's what Lee Blessing indicates as my costume.

Tuesday, August 30, 2011 7:30pm

**Thoughts:** Last night after rehearsal I looked up all the pronunciations and definitions for all of the spelling bee words in the play. Some of them I was more familiar with than others, and some I had never heard of. It is imperative for me to include this list here because most of the words have obscure meanings or usages, but Echo is intimately familiar with all of them. Part of her characterization hinges on the fact that she effortlessly knows the spellings and definitions of these words that are so unusual to most people.

eleemosynary -- of, relating to, or supported by charity

prink -- primp: to dress, adorn, or arrange in a careful or finicky manner

zenana -- harem: a usually secluded house allotted to women in a Muslim household

dysphemism -- the substitution of an offensive expression for an inoffensive one

autochthonous -- indigenous, native

limicolous -- living in mud

esurient -- hungry, greedy

periptery -- the region surrounding a moving body

nyctitropic -- a sleep movement in plants

sortilege -- sorcery

charivari -- a noisy mock serenade to a newly-married couple

ungulate -- having hooves

favonian -- of or relating to the west wind

logodaedaly -- arbitrary or capricious coinage of words

zeugma -- the use of a word to modify two words, usually in such a manner that it applies to each in a different sense or makes sense with only one

withershins -- in a left-handed, wrong, or contrary direction; counterclockwise

graupel -- granular snow pellets, soft hail

fogdog -- a nebulous arc or circle of white light seen in a fog bank

revenant -- one that returns after death or a long absence

arataxy -- tranquility, lack of movement

phthisis -- a progressively wasting or consumptive condition

nugatory -- of little or no consequence

ugsome -- frightful or loathsome

derendipitous -- the opposite of serendipitous; that is, the quality of finding disagreeable things not sought for

marmoreal -- relating to marble, especially in coldness

quiddity -- whatever makes something the type that it is: essence

hebetude -- lethargy or dullness

cathexis -- investment of mental or emotional energy in a person, object, or idea

plein-air -- of or relating to painting in outdoor daylight

deodand -- forfeited to the crown for pious uses because it had been the cause of someone's death

detritus -- debris; loose material that results from disintegration

euphrasy -- plant, also called eyebright

bijouterie -- a collection of trinkets

rataplan -- the iterative sound of beating

sylllepsis -- the use of a word to modify two or more words with only one of which it formally agrees in gender, number, or case

paronymous -- formed from a word in another language, conjugate

oppugn -- to fight against

glunch -- to look sour or glum; frown

donzel -- a young gentleman in training for knighthood

palinode -- a poem retracting something in another poem

ovoviviparousness -- producing eggs that develop in the maternal body

hoi polloi -- the general populace

clamjamfry -- rabble, mob

zonule -- a little zone, belt, or girdle

Tonight we have rehearsal from 8-10 to start some blocking stuff.

**Personal goals:** My goal is to bring my ideas about the character fully into the rehearsal process and make bold choices for Alicia to shape.

**Director's Notes:** Further discussion of the Dramatic Action Statement: To get what you want. Individual dramatic action statements: Dorothea's is to protect us, make sure we don't make the same mistakes as her. Mine (Echo's) is to find my place in the world. Artie's is to cause the least damage. Alicia thinks all of us are also working to find certainty because there is so much uncertainty, especially in our relationships. Some words that we talked about were aloneness, silence, rebellion, and damage control. The

set is going to be composed of three platforms, which will serve as three home bases. We need to specify what in our relationships keeps us together, and what keeps us apart. Echo is always looking for her mother, Dorothea is always pushing, and Artie is always running.

Wednesday, August 31, 2011 6pm

**Thoughts:** Tonight is our first 6pm-10pm rehearsal, so it'll be a bit different feel than the shorter rehearsals we've had so far. We're continuing to block the scenes, and I'm trying to use the rehearsals to work on lines as well as shape my character in interactions and connections with the other women.

Thursday, September 1, 2011 6pm

**Personal Goals:** My goal for tonight is to begin to really incorporate the words I looked up the other night into a vital part of the character's life.

**Thoughts:** These words are something she lives with every day and has for quite some time. Some kids have video games or ballet, but Echo has words. She doesn't see them as "ten-dollar words" or particularly difficult to spell or pronounce. They just happen to be words that most people don't know. They are very important and special to Echo, but not in a revered way so much as a friendly way. I want to use this rehearsal to taste the words in my mouth in a way that shows how comfortable Echo is with the things she is saying.

Friday, September 2, 2011 5:30pm

**Thoughts:** I'm not called to rehearsal tonight, so instead I'm journaling about my experiences thus far and what I hope to accomplish in the coming weeks. I'm currently working on script analysis along with learning my lines, because I feel the two go hand-in-hand. Sometimes it helps me to start blocking the scenes before I get any nailed-down script analysis in, but I also know the importance of coming to rehearsal with choices already made. I'm finding a lot of the verbs I have selected have the undertone of "to help," such as aid, allow, connect, boost, or even get through. This helps me to shape the overall objectives for the scenes as well as learn my lines in a specific way. If I have the objectives mapped out, the lines come easier because I understand better what I'm saying and why I'm saying it.

Monday, September 5, 2011 5pm

**Thoughts/Book Work:** Why did our troubles begin in 1958? Dorothea puts her eccentricity above Artie's health and well-being. The trouble begins because the incident in 1958 is just the straw that breaks the camel's back. This begins the trust issues that we see on page 8. An important question to consider is why Dorothea and Echo connect so much when Artie doesn't. Artie chooses biochemistry as her career as a direct rebellion against her mother's more literary eccentric sensibilities. Even when Artie tries to help Echo with words, she fails. Her way of expressing herself is by default very different than Dorothea's or Echo's. This dynamic of Artie and Echo's relationship can especially be expressed by examining their interactions before she wins the National Spelling Bee and then again afterward. The importance of words is a big topic of discussion: the feel of the words connects me to the sound of my mother's voice. This

relates to my line at the end of the play: “Grandma believed she could fly, and I’ve almost got Mom believing it.” When I converse with Artie offstage, those lines are in mine or Artie’s heads. They are memories. It’s a stylistic choice by Blessing and we should recognize it as such. Artie is afraid to make history.

Returning to the 1958 idea, Artie realizes she’s not a little girl anymore. Dorothea is trying to tell Artie she can do great things; she can soar. It comes full circle later when Echo tries to show Artie the same thing. The first scene is my world. I’m introducing things from my perspective.

**Director’s Notes:** We discussed a new or alternate dramatic action statement: To give others what they want. This begs the question: are these women fundamentally selfish, or are they victims of their circumstances? Does Artie want to rebel against her mother or please her? Or both? In a way, Artie thinks there is something better for Echo, so she is pushing Echo away, even if it is not what she wants.

Tuesday, September 6, 2011 6pm

**Director’s Notes/Scheduling:** Tuesday we will work scenes three and four, Wednesday we will work scenes five and six, and Thursday we will work scene seven. Friday we’ll be in the Woods and next Wednesday we will have rehearsal 5pm-9pm so Lou can watch some of what we have so far.

**Thoughts:** I’ve been thinking about scene three a little, and I think a good metaphor for this scene is “insult added to injury.” Echo is thinking not only Dorothea is gone, but this is what I’m left with? A mother who doesn’t care about the woman who was the most important thing in my life and just died? And she also doesn’t care about me? This is a

dark time in Echo's life. I've been really stressed about learning my lines, but I've been sort of learning them just through rehearsing, which is good. This week we have started rehearsals with book work and then running and working scenes and going back over the book work. This format works well for me because I'm a very heady or analytical person, and so to start and end rehearsals by talking and critically analyzing the characters is useful. The only thing that worries me about this format is that it may be too safe for me. I enjoy the safeness, but I feel I am better at making bold choices when I am forced outside my comfort zone.

**Personal Goals:** Incorporate what we have talked about in bookwork--really take the notes up. Make bold choices and go for it.

**Director's Notes:** Why is scene four different in the way Echo behaves toward Artie? I've gone out on a limb for nothing--not only do you not appreciate my spelling, but you're also insulting my grandmother. Are you serious?

We discussed in this rehearsal how Alicia will ask what does your character want in each scene. In scene three, I want to pierce the audience and to connect with Dorothea. I also want to reassure Dorothea, prove her importance, significance, realism, and reality. I also want to distance myself from Artie.

An important concept is forgiveness. Who is asking who for forgiveness? Also, nurturing: did Dorothea nurture Artie? She certainly nurtures me. Artie has inane jealous for our relationship--both parts of it.

We discussed Lee Blessing's frequent use of (*Beat.*) This creates an inherent rhythm that we as actors can either embrace or choose to finesse to suit our choices and ideas.



In scene four, Echo talks to her grandmother, who is in a coma, but Artie combats this choice. Hospice workers often tell you to keep talking to your loved ones because you never know how much is still going on in their minds. Scene four, what do I want? I want to save Dorothea, to make the audience understand, and to implicate Artie.

Tomorrow be prepared to talk about positive verbs for each part of those scenes that we will be working on.

After rehearsal notes. Question: Will we be able to walk across the back wall, or will we have to go outside into the hallway? The upstage curtains will be pulled so we will have a walkway and won't have to go out into the hallway. Will need to fix blocking in seven-year-old scene. Find truth in stakes instead of playing age. Reactions to tonight: I am not as comfortable with scenes three and four as I am with scenes one and two. The next step is clicking into those scenes and seeing where I am going and where I am coming from. Work on monologues about my grandmother. Make them more specific and see what they mean to me. Characters are beginning to emerge and we are in the right place.

Wednesday, September 7, 2011 5pm

**Thoughts:** Tonight we're working scenes five and six and I'm a little nervous, because I haven't prepared as much as I would have liked, especially since scene six is pretty pivotal for me. I'm also a little unclear on how scene six will go since it's such a departure from how Echo behaves throughout the rest of the play. It's also one of the few scenes in which she's completely in the present, which I think is one big factor in the difference of her behavior. My goal for tonight is to offer Alicia and my fellow

actresses bold choices so we can start strong and they will have something good to work with. What do I want? Scene five: to understand myself through Dorothea and Artie and to categorize the world or find my place in the world. Scene six: to be the best, to show everyone the truth, to prove myself worthy, to win Artie's love and approval. For Friday, I will work individually on scene six as in how to access that focused mania that is Echo at the spelling be. I will focus my choices into when and where I am. This time is my turn to open up and be vulnerable.

**Director's Notes:** Yah yah mou moment is to play the uh-oh game. I untie the shoe, she ties it, I untie it again. Tomorrow we will work scene seven and work stuff this Friday in the Woods. Next week we will have Lou and Carlos watching the run at five pm.

Thursday, September 8, 2011 6pm

**Personal Goals:** Scene seven what I want -- To get closure with Grandma, to get commitment from Artie, to carry on Grandma's memory, and to make permanent ties with Artie.

**Thoughts:** We are trying to be charitable and selfless because we really do want the best for each other and ourselves. Artie tries to burn Dorothea's belongings after she dies, but Artie has the nightmare that Dorothea is burning her things, which is a parallel. Artie is sabotaging herself. DeAnnah had an interesting thought that perhaps Dorothea is similar to Michael Jackson: traumatized and therefore a little unhinged.

Director's Notes after rehearsal: "You don't know what you're going to do." Land it harder, really cut her with it. On the "Did you love me?" Don't go quite so far with it; it might be too far to realistically come back. For the uncle speech, keep holding on to the

wings as a constant reminder. We will see later whether or not this should be an exit line at the end of the speech. My line “the one thing I wanted” in the big speech at the end is the climax moment for Artie because that is all she has wanted to hear--that she is what I want.

**Director’s Notes/Scheduling:** Friday we will work monologues and scenes in the Woods. Monday we will do scene work. Tuesday we will work scenes and then run the show. Wednesday we will run the show for Lou.

Friday, September 9, 2011 6pm

**Director’s Notes:** We discussed that although we are involved in a collaborative process, Alicia is the director so we should not give notes to the other actors. Look up actual spelling bees on YouTube to get an idea of how the competitions are run and how the students act and react.

**Thoughts:** Tonight we are working scene six, the spelling bee and Echo monologues. There are lots of beat changes in scene six; we have to frame the stakes for a 13-year-old. How does a child threaten, intimidate, and humiliate in a different way than an adult might? This is largely about Echo protecting her family. The stakes are so high because of that, but it has to be grounded in sincerity. I am speeding this up too much, so slow it down. I am really waiting on the words; I need to take pauses and think about the beat changes. What is my obstacle in this scene? Largely, it is my own self. I want so badly

to do well, and I want my mom to love me and approve of me. Mom is the one that suggested the spelling bees in the first place, so I want her to know she's right. She is so analytical and this was her choice. I know it'll mean more to hear if I say look how compatible we are by showing her something concrete. She doesn't necessarily respond to feelings as much as concrete evidence, which is what I'm trying to show her. This begs the question: is this showing her something that I consciously craft and plan, or is it innate?

Monday, September 12, 2011 5pm

**Thoughts on tonight's plan:** run the show, then scene work, then work scene seven.

Today I worked on analysis for scenes six and seven, which is absolutely necessary for these two scenes. I largely carry these two scenes, and they have a lot of rhythm, tempo, and time shifts that must be anchored through specificity. (Generality is the enemy of art!) Goal for tonight: sequencing! First a stumble-through, so sort of putting the show together and figuring out what goes where with the script so that I can later do it without the script.

**Director's Notes on first run:** The show has a very interesting feel altogether. The stakes are enormously difficult to get to because of the nonlinear nature of the piece. Upon discussing with Alicia, we talked about how the stakes are difficult to rise to. Also the blocking in scene seven shifted a lot. The Echo-confronting-Artie part of that scene

changed a lot due to it following what it actually follows in the sequence of the show. Alicia thinks perhaps if we arrive a little earlier to do a longer warm-up that this will fix the beginning being low energy. Shifting from monologues to action really needs to be specified so the audience isn't confused. We need a moment before for the entire show, and also for each individual scene.

Tuesday, September 13, 2011 5pm

**Thoughts:** Working on unexpressed/unfinished business techniques for the giant monologue in scene seven. Possible unexpressed: I'm back for good, I belong here, listen to me, this can work, I'm not settling, stay with me. I like all of these, but I chose "listen to me" because it seems the most urgent.

Pre-rehearsal work: tonight we're supposed to run and work scenes five, six, one, and two. We worked scene one quite a bit last night, so I'm not sure if we'll do more of that or not. I'm feeling more comfortable with my lines, especially in scenes one, two, and five, but I know I need to work a lot on scene six.

**Personal Goal:** My goal for this rehearsal is to really go for choices without monitoring myself or thinking too much about what I'm doing. Some things we talked about when we worked scene six on Friday were how on the bottom of page 36, Echo is determined and decisive. She wants to impress everyone and show that she brought them together. It is so important to her because it is the first time she fully realizes/shares that she is bringing them together and how important this is to her. At the top of 37 during the conversation with Artie, Echo is sticking it to her. She can't push me around and I have to give her an ultimatum in order for this to work.

**Director's Notes:** On pages 38-39, during the Spelling Bee. Slow down. This is life or death. Make the audience uncomfortable. Hint at the uncomfortableness at the beginning and then really let it go over the course of the scene. It is a desperate act. I'm calling him out and there is an urgency and desperation to that. There is a big divide in the Echo that is public and the one that is private. How do we see that divide? Dorothea and Artie see the desperation because I'm hunting, and they see the hunting because I'm so desperate. It is a vicious cycle. I am promising the judge that the little boy (my opponent) is guessing. I'm threatening the boy and building the threat gradually. In this scene, Echo is showing off. She is glad she gets the answers right but she is not nervous. The ovoviviparousness speech is very dark. The part about God is about bargaining and begging. Artie and Dorothea realize that there is a danger in taking this seriously. The "God" bit needs to be a bit softer but still desperate--a shift in dynamic but not necessarily tactic or stakes. It doesn't necessarily need to be manic, but it does need to keep propelling the scene forward. The "he missed it" beat needs to be a huge release all at once. Slow down and really take time. Overall for this scene: little boy is an obstacle to getting to my mother. Use the stage directions to slow down and stay focused, although overall this is a crisis!

**Director's Notes Post-Rehearsal:** work on scenes five and six--feedback. Scene six feels more solid. Although I'm still ultimately unclear on the "boy's mom made him congratulate me" speech--why am I saying this? What am I saying? Am I still focused on my win? That was so monumentally important five minutes ago and now I'm editorializing on what has just happened. What is my point of view here? I want to come back to reality, but I also want to diminish him, and possibly I even want to muse about

the future. What if this had happened to me? How would I feel? How do you play the dawning of empathy? How do you activate that?

Notes during rehearsal on scene one: opening monologue: same as the end; it's a circle. Try to contribute some of that end feeling to the beginning. Take time with the drapes. In the first phone conversation, I am happy but disappointed at the same time.

Notes during rehearsal on scene two: we tried the phone conversation facing each other to see if that informed the action at all. In the baby part of the scene, really giggle and writhe and connect with Dorothea as a baby. The stage directions indicate that I should still be frozen even when Dorothea is talking to me. We are keeping this and just making a bold choice even though it doesn't totally make sense to us. Find a motivation/justification!

Overall notes and discussion for tonight's rehearsal:

Does Artie want to be a mother when she gets pregnant at eighteen? Or later, when she gets pregnant with me, does she want to have a child? What does this mean for me if she does or doesn't at either time? Does this determine how she treats me? Does she love this other child? If she does, is it a little bit, or perhaps even more than me? What would all our lives have been like if Artie hadn't carried me to term and had had the other baby instead? Would that person have been smart, and if so, would they have been as smart as me?

Wednesday, September 14, 2011 6pm

**Thoughts:** Tonight we have a run of the show for Lou, Monica, and Carlos. I'm very nervous about doing it in front of them, but I'm happy we did the run Monday and that

we had Joe and Carlos in the audience. Until rehearsal, I'm going to do some script analysis and work on lines.

**Director's Notes after the run:** Still need to get stakes up. Work on getting into scene seven, getting into scene six. How do you get the stakes up on a dime? Specify more what you want. On final line, cross to center stage. Scene six, work on boy's mom told him to congratulate speech. Also "Mom" is a climax, but figure out why I don't run to her. Work abortion scene, spelling scene seven. Shift scene one to make a shorter cross into the phone scene. Why are we talking to the audience. There is fulfillment in recognition. Why are words so important? What do they mean to me?

Thursday, September 15, 2011 8pm

**Director's Notes:** Beginning of rehearsal: Lou's and Monica's notes. It's in a good place, but need to work on specifics, especially with monologues. Need to focus on what each character wants in each scene. For the Spelling Bee scene: Clear idea of what I want and specify how much I want it; big moment when I call for Mom and she doesn't respond; she's taking it into her own hands instead of just relying on someone else; yes I want to win the contest but why and how much. As for monologues: mine are more personal; the audience is full of my confidants.

Friday, September 16, 2011 6pm

**Thoughts:** E-mail Alicia schedule for next weekend's schedule.



**Director's Notes on run tonight:** working on sequences, patterns, lines, etc. Lower stakes, marking some things. Leave tonight at 8:30pm. Scene seven: get on stage before my line starts, don't worry about waiting for Dorothea to lie down. Final speech in scene seven needs to go way up in stakes since six went up; seven needs to surpass this. Next week work on one and two, phono conversations, monologues, and "You should've named me mirror" scene.

Monday, September 19, 2011 6pm

**Personal Goals:** Focus on what words mean to me: words in general, words as a way to escape. Escaping to an interesting and a fun place rather than escaping from something bad. Use knowledge gleaned from timeline to aid my scene work. Activate scene one's "random" lines--they come from what's going on with Artie and Dorothea. They are all part of one continuous stream of thought.

**Thoughts:** This week, work each scene twice, then next week, start running the show. Focus on relationships before and after the spelling bee--two phone conversations in the first scene are very different types of relationships. What made me call Artie to tell her about the spelling bee? "I guess it's a gift." Throwaway line? doubting her sanity? Actual use of "guess" as in "this is what I'm guessing"? Could it be negative? A parasite? Does her "worthy" comment off-put me? What we have in common is intelligence--can be used as harm or good? Phone conversation: we both need reassurance. At "nyctitropic," I realize that she needs reassurance and try to help her. At "orbit," I'm calling her out. The abortion scene: it's not mine; I'm not in it. But how does it

affect me? How does her decision affect my life and her future as a mother? How does her decision to abort rather than give it up for adoption affect me in the future?

Tuesday, September 20, 2011 7pm

**Thoughts:** In tonight's rehearsal, we are working monologues individually and working phone conversations. We're also doing scene five.

**Personal Goals:** My goal for the monologue and phone conversation portions is to apply my research and timeline to a really focused and useful rehearsal. I'd also like to continue to get the stakes up at the beginning of rehearsals so we don't have to work so hard so long to get into it.

**Director's Notes from first scene's monologue work:** Don't be so presentational, think about it as friends you're confiding in--they are my confidantes. Really feel the words. Did all the non-phone lines together and they really seemed like a continuous monologue. That can inform why I'm saying them and when I'm saying them.

Notes from the Whitney/Beth monologue: Not so detached--relive it as you're saying. Convince the audience I'm not supposed to be there. I am supposed to be with Artie.

Scene five: Tug on grandma's skirt for the final "yah-yah-mouú"

Wednesday, September 21, 2011 6pm

**Thoughts:** Tonight I have a superbad headache, so I'm not looking forward to trying to work like that. My goal is to run the show without using my script and not let this headache defeat me.

**Director's Notes after the run:** Better for me than other runs I've felt like. Pacing was weird. Stay in the center box for scene one, don't inch SL. Dorothea will get up as I'm crossing to center, so it will be a smoother transition. For "oppugn" conversation, stay in the box until "I was going to get Mom to the National Spelling Bee," then cross to center. Spelling Bee scene--take more time, let it really sink in. After "yes and no," exit with wings, drop them off, then bring them on for the very end. Addressed "I still have the film my grandmother made." Research stroke victim exercises:

- passive movement to keep joints lubricated and muscles flexible
- back and forth movements, coordination exercises
- yoga-like exercises: cat/cow, moving the back, strengthening the core
- resistance training to strengthen muscles

Thursday, September 22, 2011 6pm

**Director's Notes:** For scenes six and seven, get into it before; does well in individual rehearsals but not in runs -- really get ready beforehand so you don't have to jump in head first. Phone conversations stop the action -- how do we prevent this? Ran scene one just before first phone conversation starts and to end of second phone conversation. We took the air out of the lines and it greatly improved. Don't eliminate pauses and beats that we've worked in, but make sure it moves along swiftly. Tonight: work scene one, three, four, and six

**Personal Goals:** don't call for line because tomorrow we can't. Take stakes way up for scene six. Incorporate physical life -- stable, bound, direct, charged (pick a few and play

with) especially in scene six. Scene three -- exit UC so you can be offstage for your off line

Friday, September 23, 2011 9pm

**Thoughts:** Run for Monica! I felt good about it, but better at the end. Scene four, Artie will wait until "I will" for her exit. Scene five Dorothea will wait until after my "read it seventeen times" -- Putting down book is okay where I'm doing it. Scene six is not where it should be. Need higher stakes. Monica liked the Whitney/Beth scene and says we need to work the spelling bee. Look for denim skirt for DeAnnah.

Sunday, September 25, 2011 12pm

**Thoughts:** Tech 1-5pm then run for Lou with dress rehearsal

**Director's Notes Overall:** Really nice run, Lou impressed and happy.

- Scene one wait for Artie to raise her wings before "Spelling words becomes easy."
- Scene seven don't cross to center for very end, stay in the box
- Scene three come on sooner for "I think you can get stuck on pleasure" on time
- Scene six stakes were there, still work on tidbits later
- Scene seven cross downstage a little so I'll be in the light for big speech
- Scene six mix public and private (more to follow tomorrow); mix desire to win with desire to impress Dorothea and Artie more (note from Lou)

- Overall make sure eye contact keeps over all audience; keep listening
- Tomorrow work and run maybe same Tuesday and Wednesday.
- Wednesday bring a couple of non-theatre friends. Show at 7:30 Thursday and Friday, call tomorrow at six pm

Monday, September 26, 2011 6pm

**Thoughts:** Normally for a season show, Monday night after tech week would be off, and we were originally going to have tonight off, but we agreed that we could use the work and so we are working tonight. I felt good about tech and dress yesterday, but I will feel more prepared after we have some small audiences this week before opening.

Lou's notes from last night:

- Overarticulate first speech because the audience is still getting used to what the show is at this point
- "You? Why you? I love you." Stay in the box because the light is confined to that space and I will not be lit outside it.
- Working big scenes to cement what we found last night.

**Goal for tonight:** sequencing and getting used to lights. We are working scene one, the book fair scene, the abortion scene, and scene seven. Tonight we will run the show with lights and costumes.

Notes after run for a small audience (Robin and Drew watched)

- Don't be afraid to explore, but also don't play for laughs
- Scene four, look at Artie on the line "see my mother," maybe look at her and then look back, perhaps keep looking at her; we will play with it tomorrow.

- Monologue at the top of scene seven was good; it helps coming straight off scene six.
- For the fight scene, come further downstage
- At the end of scene seven, the tears came later, but that was good because it was honest; great job on monologue!
- Good work overall

Questions I want to ask Alicia

- Can you hear my backstage lines? Answer: yes
- Can you see the blue light since I am slightly peeking out from behind the curtain?  
Answer: no
- Is the upstage curtain going to be fixed? Answer: Yes, Carlos will fix the curtain so we can just walk out like we do at the UR curtain and we don't have to page through.

Tuesday, September 27, 2011 6pm

**Thoughts:** I am beginning to feel the toll of working many days in a row (even though we had Saturday off), but I know that it is necessary to get everything done, and I have a feeling that tonight's rehearsal will energize me.

- Tonight we ran scenes six, seven, and two with light cues
- Kira came and watched the show; it was great to have a bit of a new audience
- If Melissa ends up being on crew, she will give us calls for places and go

#### **Director's Notes after run**

- In scene two, still freeze on "lambda" line, although we may work this tomorrow

- In scene four, good job on playfulness with the “no” line; Dorothea knows me very well and it shows through this
- In the “yah yah mou” scene, look at Artie on the final “Echo” line
- For the book fair scene, watch Artie run off before I cross to the book
- For the third lullaby, sing “Hush little baby, don’t say a word, mama’s gonna buy you a mockingbird...” and end it there
- In scene seven we were a little off with the pacing; maybe find more humor
- At the very end of the play, look at Dorothea for her last line
- Tomorrow morning at 9am we will meet to paint the floor

Wednesday, September 28, 2011 6pm

**Thoughts:** Final dress tonight! We had four guests, which is always nice to be able to perform for someone new.

**Director’s Notes:** Alicia felt good about the run. DeAnnah and I were less confident but we know it will be okay tomorrow. Check on props (particularly books) before the show to make sure the right ones are present. Keep volume and articulation up, especially for the first scene. On the “boop” moment in scene five, giggle more. In the Whitney and Beth speech, don’t be so angry--give it an honest try. On the “you need work” line, don’t be fast, but also don’t be testing the waters as much. Melissa will cue our entrances at

the top of the show. Katherine will arrive at 6:15pm to unlock the theatre so we can warm up before house opens.

Thursday, September 29, 2011 7:30pm

**Thoughts:** Opening night! I'm really excited about performing tonight, but I'm also really nervous. I feel like there's a greater pressure on us to do well because it is a smaller project than the season shows. I also feel like since we only have two performances they both have to be really good to make up for the fact that we only have two. That may not make sense logically, but it's just a feeling I have. I'm going to try not to write too much these last few entries so that I can just experience what's going on firsthand and then later recall the memories and experiences of these nights with hindsight.

Friday, September 30, 2011 7:30pm

**Thoughts:** Second and last show tonight, and I am stressed to the max. Never before have I so fully appreciated the importance of having ample time to do a good warm-up. I have had a stressful day, but I am just excited at the prospect of letting it all go through my warm-up and appreciating the opportunity I have in this second and final show.



#### IV. Script Analysis

Perhaps the most important component of research and analysis to my process is script analysis. The script is the first place an actor usually goes to begin to understand their part, and it is in the actor's hands through the whole process, even long after they are off book. At least, this is the case with me. Some actors are of the school of thought that improvisation is just as important as the text, but my personal opinion is that everything the playwright wrote is there for a reason and should be respected as such. This is why I continue to return to the script even after I have memorized my lines: if there is something more I can glean from the script, I will try to do so.

It is also important in this particular play to do heavy script analysis because of the non-linear structure. In order to understand what my character is doing in each part of the play, I must read and re-read my lines and other people's lines and finding their context and how they affect my characterization.

I have scanned each page of the script to input in this document as a record of how many lines I have, what they are, what my intentions and tactics are, and all the other elements of script analysis. Although my script tends to be messy in appearance, I can understand what each element means, and I have tried to color-code as much as possible also. The type of script analysis I use was taught to me first in my Fundamentals of Acting class: it is Stanislavski's system in which you divide the play into scenes, units, and beats. Each scene is delineated by who is onstage and changes when they enter or exit. Units are selections of the scene which concern a particular topic or subject and shift when that subject shifts. Beat changes are smaller topic

changes within those large topic changes. Intentions are to-be verbs that are assigned to each beat, and there are often tactic shifts within each beat, which means the character is attempting to get across the same intention but a different way--hence, using a different tactic.

The unit shifts are marked here in my script by a heavy pencil line, while the beat changes are marked by a single pencil line. Tactic changes are marked by slashes, and intentions are written out to the side of the beats in all capital letters. I have labelled each unit with a number written out in letters (One, Two, etc.) next to the beginning of the unit. I have also divided my scenes into letters and numbers based on the scene breakdown given by the script (numbers) and the time delineations I have made (letters). Since the play is written in a non-linear fashion, I have separated each part of each scene into different sections of time based on when they take place. About half of the scenes take place in what I consider to be the present or “narrative” space, or when Echo is narrating to the audience. In the other half of the scenes, Echo is actively participating in whatever time she is in. These are divided by letters within each scene.

Within the script I also have some blocking notes from when our director Alicia would tell us where to stand or we would work it out ourselves and then I would record the notes. I also have some notes in the script from when Alicia gave us acting notes, such as “Stakes higher here” or similar.

## Script Analysis Key

Scene 1 ..... Lee Blessing's scene divisions

1A ..... Shifts in time within each scene division

ONE ..... Numbered units, starting over with each scene

This is my grandmother. .... The lines I speak aloud

DOROTHEA. Artie! Remember! Inner conviction! (*Artie enters, sans wings. She speaks on the phone.*)

---

ARTIE. How are you coming on N, O, and P? Is this a good time to call you? ..... Unit shifts

DOROTHEA. (*As before.*) You're not concentrating!

ECHO. I still have the film my grandmother made. .... Beat shifts

ECHO. Spelling the words becomes easy, really -- almost a nuisance N-U-I-S-A-N-C-E nuisance. / What I really concentrate on is the meaning of the word -- or more than that, the *feel* of it. .... Tactic shifts

TO MUSE, TO CONCEDE, TO COMBAT, TO TEASE ..... Objectives and tactics

EN SL, X UC to Dorothea, X to R platform ..... My notes on stage directions

Metamorphosis syllepsis ..... Spelling bee study words

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ELEEMOSYNARY was given its professional premiere at the Philadelphia Festival Theatre For New Plays, from April 29 to May 10, 1986. It was directed by Gloria Muzio; scenery was designed by Eric Schaeffer; costumes were designed by Vickie Esposito; lighting was designed by Curt Senie; sound design was by Jeff Chestek. The cast was as follows:

ECHO ..... Julie Boyd  
DOROTHEA ..... Lenka Peterson  
ARTIE ..... Cynthia Mace

ELEEMOSYNARY was originally commissioned by Park Square Theatre of St. Paul, Minnesota and produced by them in August, 1985. It was directed by Jeanne Blake. Rick Polenek designed the set. The cast was as follows:

ECHO ..... Michele Conlin  
DOROTHEA ..... Mez Van Oppen  
ARTIE ..... Lynn Musgrave

The author would like to gratefully acknowledge the National Endowment For the Arts, the Jerome Foundation, and the McKnight Foundation, without whose generous support this play could not have been written.

To my wife Jeanne

**CHARACTERS**

DOROTHEA ..... A woman of some means  
ARTIE ..... her daughter  
ECHO ..... her granddaughter

**TIME**

1985, and before

**AUTHOR'S NOTES**

Dorothea should be played by an actress in her 50's

Artie should be played by an actress in her 30's

Echo should be played by an actress in her teens

The preferred convention for performance of this play would have all books—and a pair of homemade wings—actually present. All other props (including phones) would be mimed or simply suggested by the context. Perhaps Dorothea could have a real pair of scissors in Scene 5.

**THE SET**

This play works best when the setting is minimal. It should exist primarily in ever-shifting areas of light and darkness, with as few platforms, chairs, stools or whatever as possible. Artie's wings, which are much used and referred to, might profitably be incorporated into the set design, so as to remain a visual presence throughout.

- audience is <sup>4th</sup> character  
slow it down - feel the visits  
- not so presentational, audience vicariously lives words

**ELEEMOSYNARY**

**Scene 1**

A girl of sixteen appears. It is Echo. She wears jeans and a white sweater.

**ECHO.** [Eleemosynary] E-L... E-E... M-O-S... Y... N-A-R... Y Eleemosynary. It's my favorite word. Not just because I won with it, either. It was always my favorite. Eleemosynary. "Of or pertaining to alms; charitable." It's from the Latin, of course, but it's our word now. We're responsible for it, Eleemosynary. Like a small song. (D., lights slowly come up on Dorothea, lying motionless on a low platform. Echo slowly approaches her, studies her for a moment, then speaks to the audience.) This is my grandmother. She had a stroke.

**DOROTHEA.** (Unmoving, her eyes still closed.) Could you open the drapes, dear?

**ECHO.** (Miming opening the drapes.) She can't really talk. I can hear her, though. At least I think I can. (Sunlight catches Dorothea's face. She smiles, eyes still closed.)

**DOROTHEA.** Oh, that's nice. That's warm.

**ECHO.** She's seventy-five years old. I know she doesn't look it. That's not how I see her.

**DOROTHEA.** I feel fifty today.

**ECHO.** I know. (U. Artie enters. On her arms she wears a pair of large wings, made of lightweight wood and fabric. Each is perhaps two or three feet long. As Echo continues to speak, Artie stands still U. with the wings at her side, looking very unhappy. Dorothea rises and walks U. next to Artie.) My grandmother believed she could fly using only a pair of homemade wings and the proper classical training. In 1958 she made a ten-minute movie—fully professional—of herself and her daughter, my mother, trying it out.

EN UP  
ONE  
WA  
XUL  
near Dorothea  
step DL  
to audience  
MUT  
top C  
MB: to help audience by slowing my story  
come together - has to share  
TO DRAW IN  
RELISH  
ENJOY  
PRESENT  
take time  
CONNEX  
ESTABLISH  
RELATIONSHIP  
TRANSITION  
ANNOUNCE  
see Artie page

*if you feel the impulse to move, move*  
**DOROTHEA.** (Speaking with force and assurance, as though to a film camera.) Hello. I am Dorothea Wesbrook. Today I am going to prove that man—or, in this case, woman—can fly without the aid of any motor of any kind, using only the simple pair of wings you see my daughter, Artemis, wearing here. (Artie, looking very self-conscious, begins to edge off camera. Dorothea stops her gently without interrupting her speech.) We have an excellent day for the attempt. A bright, golden sky, a brisk wind and air temperatures in the high forties. We will try two experiments today. First, the very steep hill, and second, the wooden tower.

**ECHO.** Sometimes I think all my troubles began in 1958.

**DOROTHEA.** I wish I could be flying myself, but arthritis has made that impossible. Is the camera going? Splendid. Artie...

**ARTIE.** Mom...

**DOROTHEA.** Remember all I've taught you. (A beat. Then suddenly Artie raises the wings up dramatically. She and Dorothea freeze in tableau.)

**ECHO.** Spelling the words becomes easy, really—almost a nuisance N-U-I-S-A-N-C-E nuisance. What I really concentrate on is the meaning of the word—or more than that, the feel of it.

**DOROTHEA.** (Annunciatory, to the "camera" as Artie flaps at first slowly, then faster and faster.) The world is filled with an inner conviction. A cord of truth and power which needs only to be unsnarled and drawn taut between its center and our own! (Dorothea's tone grows more and more dramatic. Artie gives a low, crescendoing wail and runs flapping across the stage at top speed. She exits. Dorothea freezes as before.)

**ECHO.** Lots of words have a special feel. Words like prink and zenana. Words like dysphemism and autochthonous. Spelling them is nothing compared to just feeling them.

**DOROTHEA.** (Suddenly shouting.) Flap! For God's sake, you call that flapping?! You're being filmed! (She freezes again.)

**ECHO.** Beautiful words for ugly things. Limicolous L-I-M-I-C-O-L-O-U-S. Limicolous. Means, "dwelling in mud." Or this one: Esurient. Just mean hungry. But the way it feels. I used to stop right

turning look @ A & D  
turn out to audience  
DL  
turn to D & H  
step C  
MA  
par  
MUSE  
CLEAR UP  
DISTRACT  
MAGINE  
SUPPORT  
left sink  
mean of

in the middle of spelling it. Esurient. E-S-U-R-I... There are words I'd give my life for.

**DOROTHEA.** (As before.) You're not concentrating!

**ECHO.** I still have the film my grandmother made.

**ARTIE.** (Reentering, running, flapping.) It's not working!

**DOROTHEA.** Keep trying! Concentrate!

**ARTIE.** I'm not flying!

**DOROTHEA.** You will! (Artie gives another wail and exits flapping, as before.)

**ECHO.** Mom was only fifteen then. This wasn't the first strange thing Grandma made her do.

**ARTIE.** (Flapping and running back onstage, suddenly dropping the wings to her side, and speaking for the first time like a woman in her thirties, to the audience.) Never have a daughter. Never have a child, for that matter, but never have a daughter. She won't like you.

**DOROTHEA.** Keep flapping! (Artie wails again, and runs off flapping.)

**ECHO.** My mom's a very intense person. I think it was her upbringing.

**DOROTHEA.** Artie! Remember! Inner conviction! (Artie enters, sans wings. She speaks on the phone.)

**ARTIE.** How are you coming on N, O and P? Is this a good time to call you?

**ECHO.** (Doing the same.) Fine. Mom, we don't have to do this if you don't want. Grandma can always help.

**ARTIE.** No, no, no—I've got the time. Honest. (Picks up a dictionary.) I've got my dictionary right here.

**ECHO.** Ok.

**ARTIE.** Good. Um... peripetry.

**ECHO.** We could just talk, if you'd rather.

**ARTIE.** Come on, peripetry. "Region of air surrounding a moving body."

**ECHO.** (Peripetry) P-E-R-I-P-T-E-R-Y. Peripetry.

**ARTIE.** Good. Um... nycitropic.

**ECHO.** What?

**ARTIE.** Nycitropic.

ROMANTICIZE  
RE-ROUTE  
WAIT ON ARTIE'S EXIT  
CONNECT THE DOTS  
JUSTIFY  
REASSURE  
CONCEDE  
SUGGEST  
ALLOW  
UNDERSTAND  
resource  
suggesting  
beginning  
reflecting  
conceding

on imb every with! she's so lame - lighthearted she's trying to teach but I really know

ECHO. That's a word?  
 ARTIE. Of course it's a word. I see it in my work all the time.  
 ECHO. What's it mean?  
 ARTIE. "Tending to assume at nightfall positions unlike those during the day." Like the leaves of certain plants.  
 ECHO. That's a scientific word. They don't ask those much.  
 ARTIE. Oh, they don't? I'm sorry. Well, then ... um...  
 ECHO. I'll do it anyway.  
 ARTIE. Can you? Do you know it?  
 ECHO. I can guess. Um ... nyctitropic, N-Y-C-T-I-T-R-O-P-I-C.  
 Nyctitropic.  
 ARTIE. That's right! That's amazing! How do you do that?  
 (Quickly paging through the book again.) Now, let's see ... um ...  
 ECHO. Mom? Mom?  
 ARTIE. What?  
 ECHO. Let's just talk.  
 ARTIE. We are talking.  
 ECHO. Why don't you come over here and help me?  
 ARTIE. Well, um ... I'm very busy these days. You've got Dorothea, and...  
 ECHO. I want you too.  
 ARTIE. You've got me. You do. I'm right here. On the phone. Let's do another word. How about ... oh, I don't know ... um ... anything really. How about orbit?  
 ECHO. Orbit? You mean, like planets?  
 ARTIE. That's right.  
 ECHO. You think I can't spell orbit?  
 ARTIE. Just spell it and we'll go on, all right?  
 ECHO. Could you just please come over?  
 ARTIE. No. Orbit.  
 ECHO. Mom...  
 ARTIE. Orbit or I'm hanging up.  
 ECHO. (After a beat.) O-R-B-I-T. Orbit.  
 ARTIE. (Quietly.) Thank you. (Lights fade on Artie. She exits.)

AD  
 ALLOW BOOST  
 CONNECT  
 FIND  
 GET THROUGH!  
 JUDGE  
 DISREGARD  
 LOVE  
 ADMIT DEFEAT

10

THREE

ECHO. There's something about the Westbrook women. We have this expectation about ourselves. To be extraordinary. It's a little like having a disease in the family. (Artie returns during the above speech, with the wings again. She stands beside Dorothea. Artie looks exhausted once more, and once more is fifteen.)  
 DOROTHEA. (To camera.) Well, the very steep hill seems not to have done the trick. We are moving on, therefore, to the wooden tower. (Artie gives Dorothea an "Are you serious?" look. They freeze.)  
 ECHO. When I was still in my crib, my grandmother was constantly shoving words and numbers in front of me. The first thing I ever said was the ancient Greek word for grandma.  
 DOROTHEA. (To audience.) My granddaughter is a born genius.  
 ECHO. Dorothea raised me from the time I was two. I could do calculus when I was nine.  
 ARTIE. I am *not* jumping off that tower.  
 DOROTHEA. Of course you are, dear.  
 ARTIE. You said this would be safe.  
 DOROTHEA. It is safe. Look at the tower's base. We've piled up dry leaves.  
 ARTIE. Dry leaves?!

DISCERN  
 ALARM  
 THROW OFF  
 IMPRESS  
 ELICIT HOPE  
 SET UP

DOROTHEA. (To camera, with impressive control.) There will be a slight delay. (They freeze.)  
 ECHO. My grandmother made me love words. My mom helped, too. A little.  
 DOROTHEA. (To Artie.) Are you my daughter or not?  
 ECHO. At twelve, I decided to be the greatest speller in history. For life. I didn't realize only kids had spelling bees. I thought there was an adult division. (Artie moves into position on the "tower.")  
 DOROTHEA. (To the camera, as Artie returns to fifteen.) My daughter is now, oh, about twelve feet above the ground, and ... Let go of the railing, dear.  
 ARTIE. (Eyes closed.) No!  
 DOROTHEA. Don't be stubborn.  
 ECHO. Dorothea was one of the notable eccentrics of her time.

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you can't say because she's doing a play what else can I do?

DOROTHEA. You want to fly, don't you?  
 ARTIE. No!  
 ECHO. I do.  
 DOROTHEA. Well, then you must let go.  
 ECHO. I fly with words. Oh, I know it sounds stupid to say, but it's true. Certain words literally lift me up to a ... private altitude. Sortilege, charivari, ungulate, favonian. And the word that means "playing with words" — logodaedaly. Isn't that a great one? Logodaedaly. It's a one-word yodel.  
 DOROTHEA. Why are you so afraid to make history?  
 ARTIE. (Still holding onto the "railing.") No daughter of mine will ever ... no daughter of mine...  
 DOROTHEA. Artie?  
 ECHO. (Suddenly distraught, thirteen on the phone.) Mom? Mom? Are you there?  
 ARTIE. What, honey?  
 ECHO. Could you come over?  
 ARTIE. Oh, I ... can't right now. What's wrong?  
 ECHO. (Glumly.) I'm the National Spelling Bee Champion.  
 ARTIE. (Putting aside the wings.) I know. You can be very proud of a year's work.  
 ECHO. What'll I do next year?  
 ARTIE. What do you mean?  
 ECHO. There's nothing left to spell. I spelled everything. I spelled zeugma and withershins and graupe and fogdog. I spelled revenant and arataxy. I even spelled phthisis. P-H-T-H-I-S-I-S. Phthisis. (The last word is pronounced "tis-is." A beat.) Could you please come over?  
 ARTIE. Echo, no.  
 ECHO. I even spelled eleemosynary. Just like it was cat or dog. I took a beautiful, amazing mechanism and spelled it.  
 DOROTHEA. (Still looking up at the "tower.") Artie?  
 ARTIE. (Quietly.) Don't take a negative attitude.  
 DOROTHEA. (As before.) Don't take a negative attitude.  
 ECHO. Why not? I turned those words into something lugatory and ugsome.

CALL ATTENTION  
 RELISH  
 PLAY  
 INCHIE CONCEPT  
 LAY DOWN  
 SPUR ON  
 WALLON  
 YEARN  
 GIVE IN  
 COMBAT

12

go further and on both of are in both conversations what are shifts near when she does it get what she wants

ARTIE. Into what?  
 ECHO. I made them derendipitous and marmoreal.  
 ARTIE. Damn it, speak English.  
 ECHO. I am. Those are good English words.  
 ARTIE. Some words are meant to be spelled, not used.  
 ECHO. I think spelling bees are the quiddity of hebetude. (She exits. Artie dons the wings, stands beside Dorothea.)  
 DOROTHEA. (Into the camera, embarrassed.) Well, um ... it appears we will not be able to complete our experiment today.  
 ARTIE. (Eyes closed, holding on.) Damn right.  
 DOROTHEA. What a pity. Hopefully, perhaps tomorrow...  
 ARTIE. Forget it.  
 DOROTHEA. You came so close on the hill...  
 ARTIE. Never! You are nuts! And now you're nuts on film! (They freeze. Echo enters from another direction.)  
 ECHO. Mom apologized for that later. Grandma never mentioned it again. She went right on to other projects: communication with the dead, spontaneous combustion, astral projection — but she never filmed those.  
 ARTIE. I'm sorry.  
 DOROTHEA. (Moving toward the D. platform.) That's all right. I forgive you. (Artie exits as Dorothea lies down.)  
 ECHO. I can feel my grandmother in me. My mother, too — a little. Something flies straight through us, straight from Dorothea to me. It's a gift.  
 DOROTHEA. The secret of flight lies in the assurance that we are worthy of flying.  
 ECHO. I guess it's a gift. (Lights fade slowly to black.)

FIVE  
 DL  
 IE  
 EN DL  
 GO TO DL  
 XCS  
 MAKE AHEAD  
 REMINISCE  
 JOLT  
 PRESS  
 QUESTION

Scene 2

Artie is alone onstage. She sits, smoking a cigarette.

13

ARTIE. You don't have to smoke, but it makes you more forceful. Whoever's with you knows that while you do need oral gratification, you don't necessarily need it from them. (A beat.) I have trouble touching my daughter. I have trouble touching most people, but I don't worry about that. It's my daughter that worries me.

(Lights rise on the D. platform. Echo lies on it looking straight up. She has the blankly expectant look of an infant in her crib - which she is. Dorothea sits nearby her, smiling beautifully.)

DOROTHEA. Are we all waked up from our nap? Are we, little Miss? (She pokes Echo as she speaks, and Echo responds with laughter.) We're all waked up and we're three months old, and we're ready to go to school.

ARTIE. Dorothea could touch her all day long. DOROTHEA. (Tickling Echo.) Do we like school? Do we? Of course we do. Listen, Artie - how much she likes the thought of school. She's laughing.

ARTIE. She's laughing because you're tickling her. DOROTHEA. Well, I'm sure that's part of it. (To Echo, playing with an invisible baby's toy alphabet, hung over the "crib.") Do we know this letter? That's "A." Can you say "A?" (Echo gurgles happily.) All right, how about this one? "B." That's right, that's "B." Can you say that?

ARTIE. Mom, She's three months old. She can't talk yet. DOROTHEA. How do you know?

ARTIE. It's physiologically impossible. DOROTHEA. That's just the truth of the body. Not the truth of the spirit. Echo, how about this one? "C."

ARTIE. Her name's not Echo. DOROTHEA. Of course it is. I named her.

ARTIE. I named her. Months ago, I named her Barbara. DOROTHEA. (Smiling pleasantly.) That was before I got here. Echo? Do you want to try these? (Dandling another string of "letters.") This is "Alpha." Can you say that? And this is "Beta." Can you say...? (Dorothea and Echo freeze.)

ARTIE. Those baby alphabets she's playing with are the same ones she had over my crib. Pink for Latin, blue for Greek. DOROTHEA. Unfreezing, though Echo doesn't. "Lambda." Can

2A

LOVE

LOOK

QUESTI

UNDERSTAND

FREEZE

you say "lambda?" Think of a little lamb.

ARTIE. Mom, she can't talk!

DOROTHEA. You certainly sound cross this morning. You should take a good long walk. That's what I do, when I'm feeling needlessly aggressive. Go on. Maybe you'll meet someone important or famous. I always do.

ARTIE. Who do you meet that's famous?

DOROTHEA. Last week I met President James Monroe.

ARTIE. You did?

DOROTHEA. Yes. It was really very fortunate, too. I had been meaning to ask President Monroe about the Era of Good Feelings. That's what they called his Presidency, you know - the Era of Good Feelings. It was from 1817 to 1825, and I picture it as one of the happiest times: The Era of Good Feelings. So I asked him - "Was it as good as all that?"

ARTIE. What did he say?

DOROTHEA. He said it was fair. I think he was just being modest. He was a good-looking man. The last president to wear short pants. Did you know that? He looked a little funny in this neighborhood, but all in all it was a very nice visit. So - have a walk, why don't you? Good for the post-partum nonsense.

ARTIE. (Responding to a dismissive gesture from Dorothea.) Thank you.

DOROTHEA. Don't mention it. (Lights fade on Dorothea and Echo. They exit.)

ARTIE. I have trouble with my memory. It can't forget. Anything. My social security number; poems I learned twenty years ago; the list of ingredients in Raisin Bran; what I weighed when I was twelve; what my mother said about what I weighed. Every word I've ever read. Everything I've seen, or heard, or was part of. (Taps her forehead.) It's all up here. Total recall. There are people who'd be grateful for it, I suppose. To me, it's like I'm some sort of ... memorial, with all the names of the dead etched in. No way to erase. (A beat.) I try not to read much anymore. Don't want to make the memorial any bigger. (A beat.) My daughter - Echo - sometimes thinks I'm against education. I'm not against education. I'm

EXIT UR

just against remembering what you learn.

ECHO. Cathexis, C-A-T-H-E-X-I-S. Cathexis.

ARTIE. (Softly, registering it for all time.) Cathexis.

ECHO. (Off.) Plein-air, P-L-E-I-N hyphen A-I-R. Plein-air.

ARTIE. Plein-air.

ECHO. (Off.) Deodand, D-E-O-D-A-N-D. Deodand.

ARTIE. Deodand - these aren't words, they're fragments.

Greek, Latin, Old French, Old German - they're parts of something we used to speak. They're sediment, they're...

ECHO. (Off.) Detritus, D-E-T-R-I-T-U-S. Detritus.

ARTIE. Echo, I have to hang up now.

ECHO. (Off.) Can't we do a few more?

ARTIE. I have to hang up.

ECHO. (Off.) Are you all right?

ARTIE. I'm fine.

ECHO. (Off.) Really?

ARTIE. Really. (A beat.)

ECHO. (Off.) Goodbye.

ARTIE. Goodbye. (To audience.) My mother made sure I had tutors from the age of four. I remembered everything they ever said, of course - which excited them tremendously. Meanwhile my father worried that too much learning would hurt my hopes for marriage. But Dorothea told him a smart girl can hide what she knows, so there's still a chance for happiness. (Lights up on Dorothea, seated a little way off. She breaks in, addressing the audience.)

DOROTHEA. Well, that's true in a way...

ARTIE. I'm telling this. (Turning again to audience.) When I was eighteen, I got pregnant.

DOROTHEA. It was an accident...

ARTIE. Mother. (Dorothea falls silent.) In fourteen years of tutoring, no one - including my mother - ever brought up the facts of life. I knew the whole succession of Midianite kings, but I didn't know anything about the men who cut our lawn. 'Til I went out with one of them.

DOROTHEA. (Rising suddenly into the scene, playing to an eighteen-year-old Artie.) You can't be pregnant! You can't! You're eighteen.

2B

off stage WR

TO CONNECT

PLACATE

POKE FUN

TO GUILT-TRIP

ARTIE. Mother, I am.

DOROTHEA. You're about to go to college.

ARTIE. I can't help that.

DOROTHEA. Of course you can. Your college career...

ARTIE. What college career? I'm going to be a mother.

DOROTHEA. No, No, you're not. You don't have to be.

ARTIE. Of course I have to...

DOROTHEA. No. You don't. Think about it. (A beat.)

ARTIE. What - you mean give it up for adoption?

DOROTHEA. No. That would mean your father finding out. If he knew about this, he'd have you married to someone in five minutes - and no college, either. You have to do something else.

ARTIE. What? (A beat, as it comes to her.) That's illegal!

DOROTHEA. In this state. But if you go...

ARTIE. No!

DOROTHEA. Artie...

ARTIE. I won't do that.

DOROTHEA. Why not?

ARTIE. It's a life. (A beat.)

DOROTHEA. (Quiet, steadfast.) It's that life or yours.

ARTIE. How can you say that?

DOROTHEA. Think a minute. If you keep it, none of our plans, none of your potential - do you see? You'll spend the next twenty years of your life trying to catch up with yourself. You won't be you anymore. You'll just be something a child needs.

ARTIE. What's wrong with that?

DOROTHEA. You could be more. Something else.

ARTIE. I don't want to be anything more.

DOROTHEA. You are. (A beat.) We can't help what God made us. If you hadn't been born the way you are, I could've waggled letters over you crib forever and nothing would have come of it. (A beat.) If you have a baby now, your father will think, "Fine. She's just a woman, like I said all along. I'll find her a husband." He will, too. And we won't be able to stop him. (A beat.) When a soldier in battle suddenly has to kill someone, we say that's all right. It's his

life or someone else's — that's the choice, no matter how regrettable. Well, you have a choice, too. Between living your life or someone else's. You only get to make that choice once. And you have to choose now. (Lights fade on Dorothea. Artie addresses the audience.)

ARTIE. I waited. A little while, anyway. But finally we crossed the state line, and ... (A beat.) I ran away right after that. Across three state lines. I lied about my age and got a job teaching at a private school. I think they were surprised at my interview. They asked what I taught, and I said, "What have you got?" Chemistry and ancient history, they said. I said I could do both. And I did. I taught kids who were ... my age. And they called me Miss. I spent my free time being delighted not to be around my mother, and wondering how she was.

DOROTHEA. (Coming into the light.) I was fine, that's how I was. I was speaking daily with Mr. Norman Sweet, of the Sweet Detective Agency. He was making excellent progress.

ARTIE. One afternoon, I came home from teaching, and my mother was sitting in my room.

DOROTHEA. It's small, isn't it?

ARTIE. No, it's large.

DOROTHEA. I like the view. You can see a steel plant.

ARTIE. It's nice out the other window.

DOROTHEA. Where would you like to eat this afternoon? (A beat.) Where do you normally eat? (A beat.) Remember the meals back home? Now those are...

ARTIE. Those are over with. We already ate those meals.

DOROTHEA. (With sudden enthusiasm.) Guess what I've been working on! I just started it. Go on — guess!

ARTIE. Mom...

DOROTHEA. A way to see through the Earth! You can, you know. It has to do with the mind bending light. There's nothing the mind can't bend. What's it like to teach here? Challenging?

ARTIE. It's a nice school...

DOROTHEA. A minnow is a nice fish.

ARTIE. You don't have to like it, ok!? I don't care if you like it.

DOROTHEA. It doesn't matter whether I like it or not. You're coming home. (Suddenly fishing in her bag.) Oh! Guess what I bought the other day. Guess. It's for you.

ARTIE. What?

DOROTHEA. This. It's a book.

ARTIE. I can see that. (A beat. Dorothea holds it out temptingly, waggles it slightly. Artie fights her natural urge to examine any book.)

DOROTHEA. It's in Latin. An 1857 edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Published in Rome. It's in very good shape. (Artie takes the book.)

ARTIE. It's beautiful.

DOROTHEA. Well, it was expensive enough. But then I know how much you love Ovid, with all those young girls of his running away from the gods, turning into cows and constellations and things.

ARTIE. (Grudgingly.) Thank you.

DOROTHEA. (Taking the book back, paging through it.) Don't thank me. You have the right to an intellectual life. I wonder if these girls were glad. After they'd been transformed into trees and reeds and whatever. There's something so stationary about a tree. Oh well, too late for them. (She freezes. Artie speaks to audience.)

ARTIE. I ran away again. On the way home. I crawled out the bathroom window of Matt's Hygienic Cafe. (She takes the book out of Dorothea's hand.) With the book. (Artie moves a little way off, as lights fade on the exiting Dorothea.) This time I moved very far away. And I stayed hidden. For a long time. (All lights fade to black. In the darkness, without a pause, we hear Echo softly singing a lullaby, "The Night Will Never Stay," which begins Scene 3.) Lights slowly rise on Echo and Dorothea D. Dorothea sits on the platform. Echo methodically raises and lowers Dorothea's outstretched arm. Therapy for the stroke victim. Dorothea, eyes closed, speaks as Echo's song ends.)

\*See Special Note on copyright page.

34 tryth in stakes for 15-year old C plot Scene 3

DOROTHEA. (To audience.) People wonder about me. I realize that. (Opening her eyes.) They don't say anything, of course — because of the money. My husband was very comfortable. He owned most of the state, by the time he died. He always treated me ... civilly. He didn't really know what to make of me, except a wife. Not long after Artie ran away the second time, he died. Cerebral hemorrhage — very sudden. I'm told he didn't feel it much. I know I didn't. That worried me for a time, not feeling anything about the death of my husband. But then I asked a few of my women friends whose husbands had died, and they said the same thing. So I decided it was common enough, and I shouldn't worry.

ECHO. Euphrasy. E-U-P-H-R-A-S-Y. Euphrasy. A plant. Also known as eyebright. (She begins to raise and lower Dorothea's other arm.) Bijouterie. B-I-J-O-U-T-E-R-I-E. Bijouterie. A jewel collection. (To the audience.) Words are my collection. They're like jewels no one takes out of the case. (Rataplan.)

DOROTHEA. (Eyes closed, smiling, enjoying the word.) Rataplan.

ECHO and DOROTHEA. (Together.) R-A-T-A-P-L-A-N.

ECHO. Rataplan. The sound or beating of a drum. My grandmother loved helping me with words.

DOROTHEA. You spell them wonderfully.

ECHO. I've lived with my grandmother almost all my life. She raised me. (She kneels in front of Dorothea, exercises the arms in crossing patterns.)

DOROTHEA. Life is a swift ascent, followed by an endless, dreamy, downward nutation.

ECHO. That means, "a nodding off."

DOROTHEA. One can only hope one has risen high enough, so that the sights on the way down will be worth the looking.

ECHO. This is what I imagine she thinks. (Echo rises, stares at her a moment, then gives her a kiss on the forehead. Dorothea smiles. Echo exits into the darkness. Dorothea, eyes still closed, turns her head in the direction Echo left. She suddenly rises, moves in that direction.)

EXUC CALM

DOROTHEA. I've found out how to talk to stones! (Off.) You have, haven't you? (Artie enters, lies down on the platform, eyes closed. Dorothea watches as she does so.)

DOROTHEA. Isn't she pretty? I'm not blind to good looks, you know. Beauty and intelligence. I thought I was a very lucky mother. (Artie gives a low groan.) She's dreaming. I'm in her dream. Do you want to know what I'm like in her dream? (Dorothea makes a horrible face, clowning.) She can't help it. It's not her fault, and it's not mine. It wasn't my mother's fault either, I suppose. We all try to be just right, just what the next one needs. And we never come close. (She kisses Artie sweetly on the forehead. Artie grimaces in her sleep.) I was an only child. After me, my mother couldn't have any more. As for my father — well, the only sentence of genuine interest he ever uttered about me was, "Is it a boy?" I became my mother's daughter, by default. It gave me such a feeling of worthlessness. It was like an asthma of the soul. I could never take a deep breath of who I was.

ARTIE. (Staring at Dorothea.) For years I had the same dream.

DOROTHEA. Mother didn't know what to say. Father only glowered.

ARTIE. I dreamed my mother found out where I'd moved.

DOROTHEA. Girls really weren't worth much then.

ARTIE. I'd find her in my room, like the first time.

DOROTHEA. Mother told me not to think about it.

ARTIE. I dreamed she burned my books. That somehow there was a little, self-contained fire.

DOROTHEA. But thinking was the only thing I felt confident doing.

ARTIE. She burned the pillows and chairs — just tossed them in.

DOROTHEA. I read every book I could find.

ARTIE. The curtains, my papers, my clothes...

DOROTHEA. I read for escape.

ARTIE. Stop throwing things! Stop it! They're mine!

DOROTHEA. I felt guilty. In those days a girl did.

let words software feel

exercising arm X of Dorothea Exercising Raimel

X in front kneel

kiss forehead X in front X in hand

EX VC

ENJOY

SHARE

RE-LIVE

EXPLAIN

DRAW IN

ENJOY to what stand up at parking exercise disarm



ARTIE. Then she asked me to get in. The fire.  
DOROTHEA. But I couldn't help myself. I felt like an addict.

ARTIE. No! No! Get out of my room! *Get out!*  
DOROTHEA. *(After a beat.)* Can you imagine it? Feeling guilty for learning?

ARTIE. *(Quietly.)* And then she would disappear. Just ... disappear. And the room would be like it was, and I'd be alone again. Only I'd be awake. *(Lights fade out on Artie, who slowly exits in the darkness.)*

DOROTHEA. The day I graduated high school, my father smiled at me, and said he had a wonderful surprise — which turned out to be an arranged marriage between me and John Westbrook. John was, I admit, a sort of boyfriend — and I had thought of marrying him, perhaps, in four years. But what I thought didn't concern my father. I said, "What about college?" And he said, "John's going directly into his father's business." "No, no — what about college for me," I said. My father just laughed. He laughed at the idea that I might prefer college to marriage. He laughed and laughed. *(Lights up on Echo.)*

ECHO. I think you can get stuck on pleasure, don't you? You can get so involved with something you like, that you don't move on to the next thing. Something you might like even more.

DOROTHEA. My father — and John too — made vague promises I could go to college sometime if only I'd get married now. On June 2nd I graduated high school; three weeks later I was married; two weeks later I was pregnant. John and I had three boys and a baby girl. I liked the girl.

ECHO. *(Rising.)* For example, I love my grandmother. But since her stroke...

DOROTHEA. After our third son was born, I asked John if I could go to college. He said no. I reminded him of his vague promises. He said that's what vague promises were for.

ECHO. Now there's only Mom. And face to face with Mom, it's... harder.

DOROTHEA. Then I met a very strange person.

3B  
EN  
UR  
sit in  
Rechair

stand  
step  
forward

WORK  
OUT

MAKE A  
DECISION

SOFTEN

ECHO. So I come here, and talk to Dorothea, even though she can't hear me. LIGHTEEN

DOROTHEA. A very strange person indeed. LAY  
DOWN

ECHO. I move her arms, do words, and ... pretend she's still here.

DOROTHEA. *(As lights fade on Echo.)* He was a guest at a summer party. This was in the forties. Normally our guests were financial types. But he was the friend of a friend, and he was a spiritualist. I'd always thought such people were weird, funeral sorts, but this was the happiest man I'd ever met. He talked to me for a long time about his investigations into the supernatural. He didn't make these eccentric journeys for any dark, compelling reasons. He simply enjoyed the possibility of an entirely different world within our reach. I asked if that didn't seem like escapism. He said he couldn't think of a better world to escape from. "Look around you," he said, "Don't you just itch to escape?" But what would my husband think, I wondered. And this man — as though he'd been reading my thoughts — said, "The best thing about it is, no one holds an eccentric responsible." And suddenly a great breath of happiness went down into my lungs. "Eccentricity," I thought — "What a relief!". From that day on, I never felt the need to listen to a thing my husband said — or anyone else. *(Lights up on Artie.)*

ARTIE. My mother chose to be an eccentric. Like choosing to be a Lutheran, she said.

DOROTHEA. *(Starting to lie back on the platform.)* Eccentricity solved so many problems. I could stay a wife and mother, and still converse with the souls of animals. UNDER-  
STAND

ECHO. *(Off.)* My grandmother's girlhood diary is amazing. She knew everything, and she loved so many people. When she married, it stopped. Like she died or something.

DOROTHEA. *(Eyes closed.)* Eccentricity saved my life. It became my life. I thank God for it. For all the good — and the harm — that it has caused. *(The action carries directly into Scene 4, with Dorothea on the platform, Echo just above her and Artie standing.)*

insult added to injury — she's gone and this is what I'm left with?

4A Echo always wants Mom  
move chair out this is opposite why?  
at way why different?  
Scene 4

ARTIE. She can't hear you.  
ECHO. Maybe she can.

ARTIE. I don't think so.  
ECHO. She talks sometimes.

ARTIE. She does not.  
ECHO. Kind of talking.

ARTIE. She grunts. Like an animal. *(A beat.)* I don't know why you keep coming here.

ECHO. She's my grandmother.

ARTIE. Does she recognize you? She doesn't recognize me. So then whose grandmother is she, I ask myself. Whose mother is she? *(A beat.)* If you can't remember who you're related to...

ECHO. She's yours and she's mine, so just stop talking. *(A beat.)*

ARTIE. If there was a God, he'd kill us outright.

ECHO. There is, so shut up. You didn't have to come here.

ARTIE. I wanted to see what you two did together.

ECHO. We just sit here! I open the drapes, I close the drapes! *(A beat.)*

ARTIE. The nurses will hear you.

ECHO. The nurses hear me all the time.

ARTIE. You yell a lot in here?

ECHO. I used to. You tend to quiet down in this place after awhile.

ARTIE. It's a very good hospital. They do a better job than we could. *(A beat.)* Why do you keep coming here?

ECHO. To see my mother. *(This visibly affects Artie. She starts to leave, stops.)*

ARTIE. Be home in time for dinner.

ECHO. I will. *(Artie exits. Lights go down on Dorothea as Echo addresses the audience.)* My mother left me when I was little. For a long time, I wasn't sure if she'd left, or just suddenly got a lot older. Or I wondered if there'd ever been a mother at all. Maybe it'd

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to each other

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stage

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L plot  
outside

MEDIATE

DEFEND

COMBAT

REFOCUS

4B

SOFT  
OUT

always been my grandmother, and I was just confused. I really thought that. I used to ask Dorothea where my mother was, and she'd always say...

DOROTHEA. *(In the darkness.)* She just stepped out.

ECHO. She what?

DOROTHEA. She just stepped out, dear.

ECHO. When's she going to step back in? Grandma? Grandma? *(Lights crossfade to Artie.)* Later, when I was old enough, Grandma told me that Mom had gone into research, whatever that is.

DOROTHEA. *(As before.)* Research is a place where you can study for the rest of your life.

ECHO. Once, Mom called on the phone. *(On the phone, a seven-year-old.)* Hello?

ARTIE. *(Off.)* Oh — hello. Is your ... Is Dorothea there? *(A beat.)*

ECHO. Who's this?

ARTIE. *(Off.)* Let me talk with your mother.

ECHO. *(Hesitating, then.)* No. *(Lights up on Dorothea, sitting.)*

DOROTHEA. Who called, dear?

ECHO. Nobody.

DOROTHEA. I heard a phone ring.

ECHO. It was nobody. It was a dead person.

DOROTHEA. A dead person?

ECHO. Nearly dead. *(A beat.)*

DOROTHEA. Why don't you come and sit next to me? Hm? Come on. Come on, come on, come on, come on. *(Slowly, Echo does so.)* There. That's nice, isn't it?

ECHO. No.

DOROTHEA. *(Laughing good-naturedly.)* Yes, it is. Now let me ask you a question. Do you know why I named you Echo?

ECHO. So kids would laugh at me.

DOROTHEA. No, so you could give back to others what you find beautiful about them. So you could reflect what's lovely in others.

ECHO. Then you should've named me mirror.

DOROTHEA. Not just living people. People from the past. Peo-

ROWS  
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X RC

BEA  
EVEN

YEAR  
2D

X R  
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4C  
GET TO  
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REDIRECT

HIDE

TEASE

POKE

ple we only know from what they wrote, or said. I want you to hear what people say — to sort out what's helpful and forgiving, and ... return that to them. Do you understand?

ECHO. No.

DOROTHEA. We're all talking, all the time — saying our thoughts, writing them down, sending them out like messages in a bottle. And we're never sure which messages have been found and which haven't. If you could ... reassure some people...

ECHO. Like my mother? — agitation w/ wisdom

DOROTHEA. Not only her. — I know the answer

ECHO. But mostly.

DOROTHEA. Me too.

ECHO. You? Why you?

DOROTHEA. Everyone needs...

ECHO. Why you? I love you.

DOROTHEA. Of course you do, but...

ECHO. But what? (A beat.)

DOROTHEA. We all need forgiveness. (Lights on them start to dim as Artie enters. They exit during her speech.)

ARTIE. When I ran away the second time, I kept moving. I lived in eight different cities. I used four different names. Once, after about three years, I called. Mom?

DOROTHEA. (Off.) Yes?

ARTIE. It's me.

DOROTHEA. I know.

ARTIE. I'm all right. Are you still looking for me?

DOROTHEA. No.

ARTIE. And I hung up. I moved again the next day, just in case. But I knew she was telling the truth. Finally I went back to school on my own. Paid my own way selling suitcases — which I thought was ironic. We had one suitcase I used to hit with a hammer, to show how rugged it was. I used to hit the crap out of that suitcase, but it never broke. The hammer broke. After a few more years I called again. Mom?

DOROTHEA. (Off.) Yes.

ARTIE. I'm still all right.

run away  
behind seat upon for next entrance

DISREGARD  
UNDERSTAND  
CONNECT  
FERRET OUT

DOROTHEA. That's nice, dear.

ARTIE. I'm going to have a baby.

DOROTHEA. Is this your way of telling me you're married?

ARTIE. Yes ... um, his name is Richard, and he's a professor of biochemistry. I'm assisting him.

DOROTHEA. I should say you are. How long have you been married?

ARTIE. A few months. I've finished grad school.

DOROTHEA. You have? That's wonderful. What in?

ARTIE. Biochem.

DOROTHEA. That's lovely. Will you do research then?

ARTIE. Yes.

DOROTHEA. Interesting research, I hope?

ARTIE. Oh, yes. Of course.

DOROTHEA. When's the baby due?

ARTIE. Six months.

DOROTHEA. I'll come and stay with you. Where do you live now?

ARTIE. Oh — you don't have to do that.

DOROTHEA. I want to.

ARTIE. I know, but...

DOROTHEA. What state do you live in? Just tell me that.

ARTIE. I don't think...

DOROTHEA. You'll need your mother if you're going to have a baby. What state?

ARTIE. (After a beat.) California.

DOROTHEA. Out there, eh? Well, I have to make some arrangements, but...

ARTIE. Mom, don't come. I don't want you to.

DOROTHEA. Nonsense. I'll be there in a week.

ARTIE. Mom...

DOROTHEA. What (Artie bows her head and sighs.)

ARTIE. Don't you want to know what city I'm in?

DOROTHEA. No — I like the challenge.

ARTIE. A week later, there she was.

DOROTHEA. (To audience.) Hi!

ARTIE. She bought a house on our block. She came over every night. My husband actually liked her.

DOROTHEA. Richard had taste.

ARTIE. He had more than that. When I was with my husband, I had no memory at all — of where I came from, what I'd been like, or what I was afraid of. We worked together, loved each other. Every day was independent of other days. Each day was experienced and then put away — simply put away, as though it had been a whole life in itself. And every night was a ... quiet, lovely step ... from one life into another. (A beat.) When my mother arrived, my memory came back. Forever.

DOROTHEA. I like my new neighborhood. I saw King Solomon on the street yesterday, but he couldn't stop.

ARTIE. Richard didn't understand why I couldn't function with her around. I couldn't, though. She'd come over with some theory for making roads fly, and...

DOROTHEA. Don't get upset, dear. I'll be down the street when you need me.

ARTIE. When I had my baby, she took me to the hospital. My husband was at work. (Dorothea mimes holding a baby in her arms. Her eyes shine.)

DOROTHEA. A girl. (Dorothea suddenly lifts the "baby" high above her.)

ARTIE. Mom!

DOROTHEA. Oh, this one will fly. She'll fly. I can feel it.

ARTIE. Exactly one month after Echo was born, my husband died. In a car accident. As Dorothea put it...

DOROTHEA. (Cradling the "baby.") One death, one life — the world is always working like that.

ECHO. (Entering.) When my father died, Mom didn't talk for days. That's what Grandma said, anyway. Not even to ask for food or anything. I think she really loved him.

DOROTHEA. But...

ARTIE. As Dorothea put it...

DOROTHEA. I always say, the dead are the dead, and the living are the living.

write wings for plot

signs  
mom's  
appt  
ONE  
wings  
for appt  
Dorothea

ARTIE. That's not what you always say.

DOROTHEA. It's what I say at the moment. Now, how are we going to raise this child?

ARTIE. We?

DOROTHEA. You can't do it alone. You have a career to think of, you're aggrieved...

ARTIE. I know I'm aggrieved.

DOROTHEA. You see? I'll get my things and move in. We have work to do. (Lights crossfade from these two to Echo. Beside her are the wings Artie wore in Scene 1. As she enters, she sings a short lullaby, "Rock Me To Sleep.")

ECHO. Grandma always sang lullabies to me. She sang them to my mother, too. I never heard my mother sing a word.

Scene 5

Lights grow brighter as Echo puts on the wings.

ECHO. Like 'em? I do. Grandma never threw anything away, even things she was sorry for. I wish they'd worked. I wish Artie had flown. It's hard for Grandma — dedicating her life to theories that are ... difficult to prove. (Moving D. with the wings, sitting.)

When I was a year old, the three of us moved back East, back into Grandma's house. We didn't fly, we drove. All the way across the country. I don't really remember that. (Lights up on Dorothea.)

DOROTHEA. I do. I wanted Echo to see a few things. We made all sorts of educational stops: a secret Indian burial ground, a convention of faith healers in Laramie, Wyoming, Edgar Cayce's birthplace, Edgar Cayce's grave, Edgar Cayce's wife's grave ... (Lights up on Artie.)

ARTIE. A voodoo cult in Louisiana, a "landing strip" for UFO's, and the home of a man who'd been to the moon and back — in

\*See Special Note on copyright page.

1956. Our trip across the county took five weeks.  
 DOROTHEA. Echo saw things it took me years to see.  
 ARTIE. Echo saw things that weren't there.  
 ECHO. It must've been a nice trip. When we got back to Grandma's house, they put me in Mom's old room — though I wasn't aware of that at the time. *(Echo begins playing with the wings as though she were two years old. Artie and Dorothea sit U. watching her.)*  
 SIT ON C PLATFORM  
 DOROTHEA. She's bright, isn't she?  
 ARTIE. You call chewing on a wing bright?  
 DOROTHEA. She already speaks Greek, a little.  
 ARTIE. She doesn't know what she's saying.  
 DOROTHEA. Yes, she does. Other people don't, but she does. Do you like your work these days?  
 ARTIE. Sure.  
 DOROTHEA. I know it's only teaching. But you'll get back to research someday. At least the college is close. That's the best thing about the East. There's always a college right down the street.  
 ARTIE. *(After a beat.)* I have a job offer.  
 DOROTHEA. Oh? In research?  
 ARTIE. Yes, Echo, stop chewing on those. *(Echo throws the wing down.)* Yes, I do.  
 DOROTHEA. Where is it? *(Echo unties her shoe, then tries to tie it again — unsuccessfully.)*  
 ARTIE. Europe.  
 DOROTHEA. Oh? *(A beat.)* For how long?  
 ARTIE. No limit.  
 DOROTHEA. Permanently?  
 ARTIE. If I want. Isn't that good news?  
 DOROTHEA. Well ... are you planning to take Echo with you? *(A beat.)* She'll grow up speaking a foreign language.  
 ARTIE. She already does. *(Echo raises the foot with the untied shoe and utters a foreign word.)*  
 ECHO. *Yah-yah mou.*  
 DOROTHEA. *(To audience.)* The Greek word for "Grandma." *(Going to tie Echo's shoe.)* It's all right, I'm here. *(To Artie.)* She likes

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THREE

PLAY

turn SL  
 so Dth can do it

me. She's used to having me around. Almost more than you, I sometimes think.  
 ARTIE. What does that mean?  
 DOROTHEA. Nothing. I'm just ... observing. *(A beat.)* Echo.  
 ARTIE. *(Almost on top of Dorothea's line.)* Echo.  
 ECHO. *(Having untied her other shoe, waving her foot.)* *Yah-yah mou.* *(Dorothea goes to tie it.)*  
 DOROTHEA. I was just observing. Are you sure you have to take this position?  
 ARTIE. It's the logical next step. *(A beat.)*  
 DOROTHEA. I'll come visit, then. What country is it in?  
 ARTIE. I don't want you to visit.  
 DOROTHEA. I have to come visit, I have to see Echo for one...  
 ARTIE. You can see her here. Every day. I want you to keep her.  
 DOROTHEA. Keep her? For how long?  
 ARTIE. For good. Echo. *(Echo raises her shoe, untied again.)*  
 ECHO. *Yah-yah mou.*  
 ARTIE. I want you to keep her for good. *(Artie exits as light fades out on the area. Echo remains in a spot.)*  
 ECHO. Dorothea and I never talked about Artie much. Sometimes she'd bring out photographs though, and we'd have to...  
 DOROTHEA. *(Lights up on Dorothea, with an album.)*  
 DOROTHEA. Echo, pictures! *(Echo moves beside her, sits. She is about six.)* I found a whole new album in the attic. It's got your mother in it.  
 ECHO. *(Unenthused.)* Ok.  
 DOROTHEA. This is Artie and I when we had those sessions with Mrs. Loreau. Here's a picture of Artie hypnotized.  
 ECHO. Hypnotized?  
 THEA. Oh yes. We used to get hypnotized quite regularly. We'd leave our bodies sometimes. At least, I would. It would be fun to do that with you, but I promised your mother we wouldn't.  
 ECHO. Why not?

confused, they're  
 both calling me

TAUNT

5C  
 TEASE

SHIFT

5D

FIGURE  
 OUT

DOROTHEA. Oh, here's a shot I like. It's Artie and I on a trip. I took her to one of those vortexes. You know, those houses where the balls roll up instead of down?  
 ECHO. No.  
 DOROTHEA. Well, they have them. And we went to see one. And the little ball rolled uphill, just like it was supposed to. I personally found a lot of strength in that, but Artie didn't like it at all. Your mother never found much pleasure in seeing the rules of the world broken. I knew they weren't being broken. There were just more rules than she thought there were.  
 ECHO. How many rules are there?  
 DOROTHEA. In the whole world?  
 ECHO. Yeah.  
 DOROTHEA. How many do you want? Because that's how many there'll be. *(She tweaks Echo's nose. Echo squeals. They freeze. Lights up slowly on Artie.)*  
 ARTIE. *(To audience.)* I still remember — I still remember everything but in particular I still remember being waked up by my mother, when I was seven. We sneaked out of the house late at night, just the two of us. It was late spring. The air was warm. My mother looked all excited. She pulled out...  
 DOROTHEA. *(Suddenly unfreezing, holding aloft the object she names.)* A pair of scissors.  
 ARTIE. *(As lights start to fade on the others.)* And she cut off a piece of my hair...  
 DOROTHEA. A lock of your hair...  
 ARTIE. *(As the others fade into darkness.)* A lock of my hair, and she said, "I will take this lock of hair, cut off in secret at the full moon, and I will save it as long as you are my daughter — whether we love each other or not, whether you remember me or forget me, whether I help you or harm you. I will always have it, till the day I die." *(Throughout the preceding speech, Dorothea's voice has gradually come up to join Artie's word for word. By the end of it, only Dorothea is speaking.)* And then we went home, and went back to bed. I asked her later where she kept my hair, but she wouldn't tell me.  
 DOROTHEA. *(In the dark.)* It's a secret. Even from you.  
 ARTIE. I just wanted to know. But no matter how much I begged

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 sitting  
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FIND OUT  
 ABOUT ARTIE

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her, she wouldn't tell me.  
 DOROTHEA. *(As before.)* It's a terrible desire to want to know everything.  
 ARTIE. So one day, when she was gone, I looked. For five hours. I opened every drawer. I looked under every piece of furniture, in every pillow, under every rug, all through her jewelry collection, in the bathroom cabinets, above the bathroom cabinets. I checked the bottoms of drawers, the backs of drawers, the backs of furniture, behind mirrors, pictures...  
 DOROTHEA. *(As before.)* It's a terrible desire to want to know everything.  
 ARTIE. I stripped the sheets off her bed. I looked under the mattress, I looked through every book, every magazine, I felt in all her shoes, I looked behind the toilet, I felt on top of the doorframe...  
 DOROTHEA. *(As before.)* It's a terrible desire...  
 ARTIE. It wasn't anywhere! It wasn't anywhere in the whole damn house! *(A long beat. More quietly.)* When my mother got home, she found me sitting in a huge pile of her things on her bedroom floor. She didn't have to ask what I was doing. She went immediately to her dresser drawer, took out a small screwdriver, went to the light switch, unscrewed the plastic safety plate, and took out my lock of hair. And gave it to me.  
 DOROTHEA. *(As before.)* Here...  
 ARTIE. She said.  
 DOROTHEA. *(As before.)* You may keep it yourself. I don't want it anymore.  
 ARTIE. I was seven years old. *(A beat.)* I called up my mother once — from Europe — when Echo was seven. I had some news. *(Dorothea enters the light, stands right next to Artie. They speak to each other, but look directly at the audience.)*  
 DOROTHEA. Really? What is it?  
 ARTIE. I'm coming back. I have a job opportunity in the states. Close to you.  
 DOROTHEA. How close?  
 ARTIE. Fifty miles.  
 DOROTHEA. Well. That is close. Are you going to take it?  
 ARTIE. Yes.

DOROTHEA. When?  
ARTIE. Soon. (A beat.)  
DOROTHEA. Well. You know you're always welcome to visit. (A beat.)  
ARTIE. I won't come visit.  
DOROTHEA. Call then. You can call us anytime.  
ARTIE. All right. (A beat.)  
DOROTHEA. Do you want Echo back, or anything like that? (A long beat.)  
ARTIE. No. (Lights fade on Dorothea as Artie steps into a new area of light.) My new job was a good one. It had a direct link-up with clinical research. We saved lives. Once I got settled in, I started to call my mother and Echo now and then. I'd ask Echo about school...

ECHO. (Off.) Probability Theory's interesting. I'll be able to do more with it when I'm nine.  
ARTIE. And I'd ask Dorothea about her ... life.  
DOROTHEA. (Off.) Last night I was assumed bodily into heaven.  
ARTIE. Things went on this way for ... six years, actually. And in that whole time, I never saw Echo. (A low spot comes up on Echo.)  
ECHO. Once you did.  
ARTIE. (Picking up a book.) Well, once — yes. By accident. I was at a bookfair. I didn't go to buy books, really. I just went to ... hold them. I was running my hand over the spine of an eighteenth century early edition, wishing I could smell the book more than read it, and ... (Seeing Echo across the stage.) I saw her. She was a long way away, but I knew it was her — Dorothea'd sent me pictures. But pictures don't move. She was beautiful. (Echo looks in Artie's direction.) Just then she saw me. I immediately dropped the book and ran. I ran and ran, all the way to my car. I don't even remember driving home. (Artie exits, leaving the book.)  
ECHO. (Moving to pick the book up.) I bought it. Robinson Crusoe, The Life And Strange, Surprising Adventures. I read it seventeen times. (Lights crossfade to Artie, in another area.)

SE  
PIQUE INTEREST  
BE A PART OF  
TRAVEL  
UNDERSTAND  
CROSS TO R platform IN DARK  
pick up book

ARTIE. (To audience.) I think a woman has a right to be irrational about her children. Once she has them, she has them. They're hers. She thinks so, her husband thinks so, everyone thinks so. They came out of her body — they are her body. And anytime they want love, they can demand it. As long as she can open an eye, she'll see them. As long as she can hear a sound, it'll be them. Forever, from the moment they're born. The same is true for the one I didn't have. Only that one comes to me in my sleep, and asks for her love then. Echo calls me a bad mother. But if she could see me at night — how good I am then, how much care I take. (Lights crossfade to Dorothea, who lies on the platform.)  
DOROTHEA. (Raising one arm, running her hand over it.) It really is an amazing thing, old age. Look at my skin. It's like the last layer of tissue paper, before you open a gift. (Lights down on Dorothea.)

Scene 6

Lights up on Echo.

ECHO. Not long after that Mom suggested spelling bees. It was probably her way to apologize for running away from me that time. It got pretty important, though. She ended up calling me a lot more. (Artie appears. She mimes cooking as she speaks on the phone. She carries a dictionary.)  
ARTIE. I'll find one, I'll find one. Just a minute. (Paging through the dictionary.) ("Metamorphosis.") You know that one, huh? Ok, how about ... "syllepsis?" You know that? Well, no, all right. Um ... ["paronymous."] (Listening, nodding.) Um-hm, um-hm, good. That's right. Now, let's — oh, damn! What? No, I just dropped the damn book, that's all. I'm trying to get dinner ready, and ... No, no, don't call back. Really. Don't. Stay on. I'm fine.

DISSOCIATE  
GET TO THE BOTTOM OF  
R plot  
not on phone  
D

ECHO. I think she liked helping me. She spent a lot of time on it.  
ARTIE. What do you mean that's not a hard one? "Oppugn" is a hard one. Spell it.  
ECHO. (Dutifully.) Oppugn. O-P-P-U-G-N. Oppugn.  
ARTIE. Fine.  
ECHO. It was strange suddenly talking to her so much.  
ARTIE. How was school today?  
ECHO. Fine. They want me to take some college courses.  
ARTIE. You're only thirteen.  
ECHO. Gotta start sometime. How's work?  
ARTIE. Fine. We're seeing some nice results with that new anticoagulant drug.  
ECHO. You're seeing?  
ARTIE. Well, we hear back. Oh, damn!  
ECHO. What?  
ARTIE. Dropped the peas.  
ECHO. I should call back.  
ARTIE. No, they're frozen — stay on the line.  
ECHO. What are you working on now?  
ARTIE. The potatoes.  
ECHO. No, at work.  
ARTIE. Oh — something with a carrot extract. Looks pretty positive. You want another word?

ECHO. Once, right in the middle of a conversation, I asked her why she left me. No warning. I just asked her. All she could say was...  
ARTIE. You want another word? (Lights fade on Artie.)  
ECHO. I decided I was going to get Mom to the National Spelling Bee finals. She'd said about a million times that she wasn't going, but I didn't care, I knew I was going to be there, 'cause no one could beat me, and I knew Dorothea was coming. I wanted them both in the audience when I won it. I didn't care if they were on opposite sides of the room. I just wanted them both to see that I was the very best in the whole country, that no matter what they'd done — no matter how they'd done it — they'd produced in the

OPINE  
DRAW IN  
BOB  
DISTRACT  
SKEET  
DETERMINE  
SECURE  
PROVE  
stakes  
same decision  
assess

end someone that was completely ... all right. Someone with perspective. P-E-R-S-P-E-C-T-I-V-E. Perspective.  
ARTIE. (From the dark.) I don't think I really can, honey...  
ECHO. Why not?  
ARTIE. Things at the lab...  
ECHO. Screw the lab.  
ARTIE. Watch your language.  
ECHO. Put little covers on your petri dishes and come.  
ARTIE. No. I mean, I don't think I can.  
ECHO. You don't want to.  
ARTIE. It's not that...  
ECHO. What is it?  
ARTIE. Honey...  
ECHO. Mom, if you aren't there, and if you don't come up and congratulate me after I win, and say hello to Grandma, and kiss her ... you can forget about ever calling me again. (A beat.) And I hung up. (Echo smiles.) She came. (She exits as lights crossfade to Dorothea.)  
DOROTHEA. They held it in a big room, with lots and lots of lights and cameras and reporters. Reporters from all over — each one following a child from their own region. Lots of children, too. All of whom looked nervous. All except Echo. (Lights back up on Artie.)  
ARTIE. Echo looked ... wonderful.  
DOROTHEA. She had no trouble at all in the early going — spelling words that were, I take it, English.  
ARTIE. All the kids were good, but only Echo had no fear at all. I couldn't see my mother. I knew she was somewhere in the room, but ... (Lights suddenly up on Echo, her eyes closed in intense concentration.)  
ECHO. (Glunch.) G-L-U-N-C-H. Glunch. (She opens her eyes, looks anxious, then smiles. She speaks quickly.) I knew I was right. Glunch is such an easy word — spelled like it sounds. But you always have that little moment of doubt that maybe you thought the right letter, but you said the ... (Interrupting herself.) What's he get-

BOOST  
CORNER  
ATTACK  
ULTIMATUM  
REVEAL THE TRUTH  
STICK IT TO HER  
DELIVER  
A  
GLOAT  
CONSPIRE  
slow down

desperate, calling him out  
big divide in public opinion

ting? What's his word?  
DOROTHEA. At last it came down to only Echo and a little boy.

ECHO. *Donzel!* That's so easy! Why didn't I get that? I know it — *donzel*, unknighthed gentleman.

ARTIE. The boy looked very nervous.

ECHO. I should've had donzel. It's not fair. *(Suddenly outraged.)* He guessed! He guessed and he got it! That dumb shit! He didn't know it and he guessed. I could kill him! *(Suddenly her public self.)* Yes, Ma'am, I'm ready. *(Listens for the word she must spell.)* Palinode? *(A huge grin on her face, as once again we hear her thoughts.)* Palinode — great! I love that word. That's the easiest word there is. Thank God! Thank God — I deserve it. I've had too many hard words, and he's guessed on too many. Palinode — a poem in which a poet takes back something he said in another poem. *(Public again.)* Palinode. P-A-L-I-N-O-D-E. Palinode. *(Again she looks anxious until she receives confirmation that she is right. Her grin is almost totally malicious.)* This can't go on forever, buddy. I'm going to crack you like an egg.

ARTIE. Echo was a little different than I thought she'd be. I mean, she was terrific and everything, but she seemed so ... desperate.

DOROTHEA. She was frightening, is what she was. More frightening than anyone I can remember. Oh, Hitler and Mussolini were worse, certainly, but from them you expected it.

ECHO. What's his word? What's his word? I bet I know his word — what is it? *(Ovoviviparousness?)* know that! I know it. It's the quality of being ovoviviparous. Why'd he get it?!

DOROTHEA. I knew Artie might come. I wondered what she would think.

ECHO. He's guessing! I know he's guessing! Dear God, please let me win! Please! I want five minutes. Just five minutes when all the lights are on me, and all the pictures are being taken of me, and for five minutes I'm the most famous child in America, and Mom and Dorothea see it! After that you can wash me back into the ocean with everybody else. I don't care. I'll just be one of the rab-

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where is he? to my left

ble, *(hoi polloi)*, the clamjamfry the ... *(Her public self again.)* What? Excuse me, could you repeat the word? *Clamjamfry?* *(Overjoyed.)* I don't believe it! She asked the exact word I was thinking of! *(With machine-gun precision.)* Clamjamfry. C-L-A-M-J-A-M-F-R-Y. Clamjamfry. *(Awe'd by her own abilities.)* I know everything in the world!!!

ARTIE. I didn't know why she was behaving that way, so competitive. I mean, that's good to be, but ... not too much.

ECHO. *(With total disdain.)* Zonule. Look, at him — he's so proud he knew a word. Zonule. Everybody knows that.

DOROTHEA. I remembered when Artie had first suggested the Spelling Bee. I didn't like the idea. "Why do that?" I said, "If you already know the word, why beat someone to death with the fact? I mean, is that what I raised her for?"

ECHO. *(With great intensity.)* Come on, miss it! You don't know it. You know you don't. I do. I know how to spell it, I know what it means, I know its derivation, I know its earliest use in literature, I know its ... *(Her eyes widen. Her voice is a whisper of awe.)* He missed it!

DOROTHEA. When the boy missed the word, his little head collapsed — just collapsed down on his chest. As though it were on hinges. Echo didn't notice. She was looking at the woman who gave the words. Echo's eyes were as wide as an owl's. Not the "wise old owl" — not that at all. No, more like the real one. The one that hunts.

ECHO. Eleemosynary. E-L-E-E-M-O-S-Y-N-A-R- *(To the boy, with killer instinct.)* Y. *(Echo's reaction is that of the winner. Her arms start to rise in a triumphant gesture. Her face radiates joy. She freezes.)*

DOROTHEA. I could only watch the little boy. He just stood there. Cameras were going off, people were cheering and shaking Echo's hand — but the boy never moved. And his head stayed on his chest. His neck — figuratively at least — was broken.

ARTIE. I slowly made my way to the front of the room. Echo was being mobbed, but all I could look at was the boy she'd beaten. He looked like a dead mouse.

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ECHO. The kid's mom made him congratulate me — he seemed almost like an old person. I don't think he ever thought he could lose. Now he was looking at sixty more years in his life he didn't know what to do with. *(A beat.)* Mom and Grandma got to the stage at the same time. But by then I'd been shoved over to the side for an interview. I couldn't hear what they said.

ARTIE. *(By now next to Dorothea, raising her voice due to the "crowd.")* Hello. Congratulations.

DOROTHEA. For what?

ARTIE. For Echo. For her doing so well.

DOROTHEA. Doing what?

ARTIE. Spelling.

DOROTHEA. Oh, I see. Artie, I must tell you, I grew very tired of the Spelling Bee, so I transformed it into a ballroom dance.

ARTIE. A what?

DOROTHEA. A ballroom dance. In my mind. I'm using telerotation. Right now you're dancing with an admiral.

ARTIE. Mother...

DOROTHEA. As soon as things settle down, I'll change it all back again, and we'll go home.

ARTIE. Mother, I have to do something...

DOROTHEA. What?

ARTIE. I have to kiss you.

DOROTHEA. What?!

ARTIE. I have to kiss you, so Echo can see. Hi, Echo!

ECHO. *(From a distance.)* Hi!

DOROTHEA. It'll look odd, two women kissing at a ballroom dance ... *(Artie quickly kisses her, waves again at Echo.)*

ARTIE. Congratulations, honey! I'll call soon! *(She starts to make her way out.)*

ECHO. Mom! Wait!

ARTIE. I'll call.

ECHO. Grandma, make her stay! Mom!

ARTIE. Goodbye!

ECHO. Mom! Mom! *(But she is gone.)* Grandma!

DOROTHEA. *(Shrugging, calling to Echo.)* She left with the

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admiral! *(Lights fade to black.)*

Scene 7

In the darkness, we hear Echo singing a lullaby, "The Telephone Book Lullaby." *Light rises slowly.*

ECHO. *(Suddenly stopping.)* Eleemosynary. That's the one I won with. Means "charitable." I used it like a weapon, though, I thought having both of them there would be a good thing. But it wasn't. It made me realize that I was just like them. No better. I wasn't any end-product. I wasn't any ... less cruel. I was just a very intelligent, vicious person. *(A beat.)* I called Mom a few times after the Spelling Bee. She was always civil, but ... she was different. I stopped calling after awhile. For two years we hardly talked at all. Then one morning, Dorothea had a stroke. So Mom came home. *(Lights up on Artie as Echo begins emptying a drawer — mimed. Artie moves toward her.)*

ARTIE. I don't have to take your room.

ECHO. It's your room. At least, it used to be.

ARTIE. What about the other rooms? There's Dorothea's room.

ECHO. No one sleeps in there. That's hers. She might come back.

ARTIE. She won't come back.

ECHO. She might. Or don't you believe in miracles?

ARTIE. Do you?

ECHO. No one sleeps in there!

ARTIE. All right. But why do you want me in this room?

ECHO. 'Cause I can't be in it anymore. There's too many good memories of Grandma and me. I never want to come in here again. I want to freeze it in my mind, just like it was.

\*See Special Note on copyright page.

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ARTIE. And that's why you want me in it? So you never have to come in the room I'm in?

ECHO. *(Finishing with the drawer.)* I'll be right down the hall. *(Echo starts to exit.)*

ARTIE. I don't expect you to like me. *(A beat.)* I'm going to stay.

ECHO. You don't know what you're going to do. *(She exits. Lights crossfade from Artie to Dorothea, who is doing some simple exercises.)*

DOROTHEA. I exercised every day of my life — right up until the stroke. That was all right, though. I'd lived a good while already. And I was planning to do a lot of research once I was dead. Life was interesting, from what I saw of it. I once asked Artie what she thought life was. You know what she said? "A long apology." Can you imagine? I said, "No, no, Artie — not your life. Life in general." She hung up. Of course. Poor Artie could never answer me back. Or anyone else, for that matter. *(A beat, as she sits on the platform.)* I thought Echo would be the one to preoccupy my thoughts in the last year or two of life. But it wasn't her. It was Artie. *(With fascination, lying back.)* Imagine. It was Artie. *(By now she is lying down, eyes closed. Artie and Echo appear. They sit.)*

ECHO. We were both asleep in chairs when she died. The nurse came in and found us like that. Must've looked like mass suicide. She woke up Artie first, and told her.

ARTIE. *(In a dim light, slowly "waking," listening.)* Thank you. *(Light fades out on Dorothea.)*

ECHO. *(With a smile.)* The next day, Mom and I had our first real fight.

ARTIE. *(Rising, in the rising light.)* It started over the wings.

ECHO. She wanted to burn them.

ARTIE. I didn't think that was so unreasonable.

ECHO. I found out she'd been burning things all morning. Anything that was evidence of Dorothea's eccentricity. Like she'd been a witch or something.

ARTIE. *(Into the argument by now.)* I'm not saying she was a witch...

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ECHO. Then what are you saying?

ARTIE. Will you just give me the wings?

ECHO. I can't believe you burned all those things. You even burned her books.

ARTIE. For God's sake, they were books on levitation.

ECHO. They were hers!

ARTIE. *(They aren't anymore!)* *(A beat. She takes the wings from Echo.)* I just don't want her to be ... ridiculed, that's all. Her memory. People will be coming. Relatives. For the funeral.

ECHO. Just put these things away, then. They won't be looking all through the house.

ARTIE. Of course they will. It's her estate. They inherit things too. My brothers are all coming.

ECHO. When?

ARTIE. Tomorrow, some of them. They're looking forward to seeing you.

ECHO. I don't even remember them.

ARTIE. They remember you.

ECHO. We could put Grandma's things in the garage. We could put them under something...

ARTIE. Your Uncle Bill is bringing his whole family — his wife and two girls.

ECHO. What if we did that? What if we put things in the garage?

ARTIE. The girls are just a little older than you.

ECHO. What are we going to do with Grandma's things?!

ARTIE. *(I don't care!)* *(A beat.)* I think you'll like your Uncle Bill. He was always my favorite brother. They have a very nice family. *(A beat.)* They'd ... they'd like you to live with them.

ECHO. What?

ARTIE. They say they'd be very pleased if you went to live with them.

ECHO. Whose idea was that?

ARTIE. Mine. *(A beat.)* They're a very normal family.

ECHO. I don't want a normal family.

ARTIE. I'd be bad for you. I've always been bad for you.

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ECHO. You have not.

ARTIE. You could try it for just awhile...

ECHO. No. You said you were staying.

ARTIE. I was wrong. I thought I could, but...

ECHO. What's wrong with me?

ARTIE. Nothing.

ECHO. Then why do you keep leaving me?!

ARTIE. Echo...

ECHO. *(Why!?)* *(A beat. Artie sits tiredly.)*

ARTIE. I used to teach you wrong things. Do you know that?

ECHO. What do you mean? When?

ARTIE. When you were little. When Dorothea was with you every day, wagging those ... goddamn letters and cooing. You loved it, of course. You with your superhuman attention span. The two of you got along great. *(Sighs.)* So I taught you wrong things.

ECHO. Wrong things?

ARTIE. I taught you wrong names for things. When you were starting to talk. I'd point at the floor and say, "ceiling." I'd point at the door and say, "window." And you'd smile and say ceiling and window, and I began to hope if I could just ... retard you a little...

ECHO. Retard me...?!

ARTIE. Just a little — just to be normal. I thought if you didn't seem so bright, she might get disinterested and leave us alone. But she didn't. She noticed you were "mixed up" on one or two concepts. So she sneaked around until she heard me telling you your hands were your feet. She accused me of "intellectual child abuse." That sounds ridiculous, but it was true. I actually was angry at you. For picking her. For wanting her more.

ECHO. I wanted you both.

ARTIE. You couldn't have both. You got her. She was better for you than I could've been.

ECHO. Do you really believe that? *(A beat.)* Do you?

ARTIE. Yes. *(A beat.)*

ECHO. How long do you want me to live with Uncle Bill and ... the girls? *(A silence. Echo picks up the wings.)* I'm taking these. I'm

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taking everything of Grandma's that ... I'm taking everything.

ARTIE. *(Quietly.)* All right. *(Echo starts out, stops.)*

ECHO. Did you love me? When you left me with her?

ARTIE. Echo...

ECHO. Did you?

ARTIE. Whether I loved you then or now...

ECHO. *(Did you love me? Do you?)*

ARTIE. Yes. And no. It's always yes and no. *(They regard each other. Echo exits. Lights fade on Artie, rise on Echo in another area.)*

ECHO. My cousin's names were Whitney and Beth. I sat between them in the car the whole way home. It was obvious they'd been told to be nice to me. They asked about my clothes. They said they loved them, and wanted to know where I got them. I said I didn't know. Then it was quiet for awhile. Then Beth asked, "Where did you buy those wings?" — but Uncle Bill broke right in and said, "Your mother is very well thought of in her field. You should be proud of her." Then it was quiet for about a hundred miles. Then Whitney said, "If you want, you can wear my clothes." Then we were home. *(Lights crossfade to Artie.)*

ARTIE. I moved out of my old room and into Dorothea's room. The next day, I moved from Dorothea's room to a guest room. A couple days later, I moved down to a sleeping porch. That was a little better. I planned to go back home after a week or two of ... tying things up. But the day before I left I turned around and ... *(Lights up on Echo a few feet away. She is without the wings.)*

ECHO. Hello.

ARTIE. What are you doing here?

ECHO. All my stuff's in the hall. Where do you want me to put it?

ARTIE. Where's your Uncle Bill? Where's...?

ECHO. I left them.

ARTIE. Why?

ECHO. I don't know. We were all at one of Whitney and Beth's lacrosse games and I just ... left.

ARTIE. I'll go call them.

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hopeful, waiting for response...

ECHO. Tell them I'm staying here.  
ARTIE. You are not staying here. (A beat. They stare at each other.)  
You are not.

ECHO. You said you loved me.

ARTIE. I said yes and no.

ECHO. But that means sometimes you love me. Sometimes you do, don't you?

ARTIE. Echo...

ECHO. Sometimes you do. And if I work on it enough, I can get you to love me more of the time. Most of the time.

ARTIE. (Turning to go.) I'm calling your Uncle Bill.

ECHO. Uncle Bill hardly remembers you, you know that? I asked him what you were like as a little girl, and he couldn't even say. He remembers Grandma even less. He didn't have one interesting story about her — about Grandma. They don't have a single picture of her, either. Not even in their minds. To them, she's just a woman who lived a big, embarrassing life. They all think they've saved me just in time. Not just from Grandma — from you, too.

ARTIE. They never said that.

ECHO. They don't have to. (A beat.) So I started wondering if they weren't right. Maybe the smartest thing would be to forget you completely. And Grandma. After all, what did I ever get from the two of you, except a good education? You especially — what were you ever to me, except a voice on the phone now and then? And I looked around the new room where I was staying, and it was real nice and ... blank, the way a thing is before you put any time into it. I thought, I could live a whole new life here. I could invent a whole new me. I could be Barbara if I wanted to, not Echo. I could fit in. I don't mean I'd become like Whitney and Beth. I'm not that crazy. But I could become like Robinson Crusoe, and adapt myself to a strange and harsh environment. I could live in a kind of desert. I could even flourish. Like you have. I could live without the one thing I wanted. But I kept hearing your voice. That voice on the phone, hiding behind spelling words, making excuses — or so energetic sometimes, so ... wishing. I don't even remember what you said, just the sound of it. Just a sound that said, "I love you, and

find unexpressed  
feelings

grounded

grounded → X to M

I failed you." I hate that sound. And I will never settle for it, because no one failed me. No one ever failed me. Not Grandma and not you. I am a prize among women. I'm your daughter. That's what I choose to be. Someone who loves you. Someone who can make you love me. Nearly all the time. I'm going to stay with you. I'm going to prepare you for me. I'm going to cultivate you. I'm going to tend you.

ARTIE. (Quietly.) Do you think I'm a garden?

ECHO. Yes. And you need work. (Echo holds out her hand to Artie.)

Lights crossfade to Dorothea.

DOROTHEA. It's fascinating, being dead. Really, I find it's all in how you approach a thing. Take me — I've just begun a project searching for life after eternity. So far, it's going very well. (Lights crossfade to Artie, now alone.)

ARTIE. We kept the wings. We even kept the movie. Echo makes me watch it now and then. She tries to point out what's positive in it. I must admit, she tries very hard. She made me promise not to leave her. I'm one person who can't forget a promise. (Lights up on Echo.)

ECHO. I love to watch that movie. To see them both together, speaking and moving.

DOROTHEA. (From the darkness.) Today I am going to prove that man — or in this case, woman — can fly without the aid of any motor of any kind.

ECHO. (She was right, too. I've almost got Mom believing it.) You know what I sometimes think about the Westbrook women? That no matter what we've done — no matter how we've done it — we're all three of us, in our own way, completely ... eleemosynary. E-L-E-M-O-S-Y-N-A-R-Y "Charitable; the giving of alms." (Lights fade quickly to black.)

THE END

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## VI. Post-Show Reflection

Now that I have completed both the rehearsal and performance process for *Eleemosynary*, the final step of the process is reflection. Looking back on my experience with this show, there are some things that I would have done differently, and some things that I would have done the same. In this reflection I will discuss the goals I had at the beginning of the process and whether I accomplished them, as well as how I could have structured those goals in a more efficient way. I will also discuss the process of performance. The goals I had at the beginning of the process were many and varied, although one uniting factor was present: I wanted to improve my acting technique in the context of a structured rehearsal process. There are several ways in which I hoped to accomplish this.

First of all, I wanted to free myself from habitual patterns and enable myself to make bold choices that greatly differ from my own personal habits. Sometimes in my acting I tend to make physical and vocal choices that are similar to me as a person, which is an easy mistake for actors to make. Throughout this process I made a conscious effort to make choices that did not reflect me as a person. Then if throughout experimentation the director and I decided the choices needed to change to become more similar to me, we would make the necessary adjustments. I felt fairly successful in making choices that were to begin with different from me as a person.

For example, I chose to work with the Michael Lugering elements of bound and contacted for the scene in which Echo is at the spelling bee. In the Lugering work, there are twenty elements of movement, each part of pair describing two opposite ends of a



certain quality. For example, for the quality of “direction,” a person can be direct or indirect. For “weight,” you can choose heavy or light. “Focus” is either sharp or diffused, and “energy” is either charged or released. “Flow” is either bound or free, and so I chose bound for the spelling bee scene. I am not a very bound person in my life normally, so this was difficult at times, but I was proud to have made a choice that was so different from me. “Orientation” can be either contacted or withdrawn. Much of Echo’s characterization in other parts of the play is more withdrawn than contacted, but because the stakes were so high in that particular scene, she needed to be more contacted.

As far as vocal choices, I used much of what I have learned in my Lessac voice classes to develop a structured warm-up that would carry me into the performance with good tone and resonance and well as clear and musical speech. The space we performed in was relatively small, and my character was a modern, “normal” girl, so I did not choose to change my normal speaking voice, I just used my warm-up to make sure I was clear and intelligible. I used this “normal” voice for most of the play, but there were a few points in which I had to make different choices in order to clearly communicate the character. For example, I had to be an infant in one scene of the play, which required the specific vocal choice of a high-pitched, free sound that I do not normally have in my voice. Using what I have learned from Lessac’s technique in my voice classes, I was able to produce that free sound easily without straining my voice. As the infant Echo, I was buoyant in body energy; this is largely because this infant Echo was not written lines, more just structural vowels like a baby cooing.

Secondly, I wanted to work with using research and analysis to fuel my characterization rather than simply doing the research and analysis as an academic exercise. To this end, I attempted to have my script analysis done by the second time we came to each scene in rehearsal. Rather than waiting until I was sure of what I wanted in each scene, I went ahead and wrote down verbs I thought might have been apropos and then further explored them in the context of rehearsal. I also interacted with and took video of some family and friends that are the various ages that I played in order to better understand how to play those ages. Although “playing age” is generally considered taboo and not the best way to access a role, I found it particularly useful to begin by studying infants and children who were currently living the ages I was simply playing. Their mannerisms, physical habits, and vocal tendencies were fascinating to study and then decide how to incorporate into my character. Because of these bits of research and analysis I was able to do prior to rehearsals and within the context of rehearsals, my process developed more fully. I felt mostly successful in these endeavors, although I could have done even more research before the process even began. Although finding relevant songs and images during the process helped, I might have been even more informed had I found those songs and images before the process began at all.

The main purpose of doing research in the form of studying academic journals, searching for images, and compiling a list of inspirational music is to create a believable character. Although I was only technically responsible for saying my lines and executing my blocking onstage, good acting comes from embodying a character fully. In order to embody a character, you must know everything about them as if they were actually a

real person. You must ask yourself what their favorite color is, what their allergies are, what languages they speak, what sports they enjoy, how their mental processes operate, how different events in their life have affected who they are today, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and much more. Even though that knowledge won't explicitly express itself onstage, knowing it anyway is the mark of a careful and hardworking actor.

Specific parts of this research *can* lead to specific choices and discoveries. For example, knowing the pronunciations to all the spelling bee words enabled me to say them confidently as if I had studied them a hundred times before. Also, selecting photos of mothers and grandmothers, children at spelling bees, and other realistic pictures showed me what these characters might dress or pose like, which could inform my decisions in stage movement and costume choice to an extent.

The important thing to remember about an actor's research and analysis is that it is partially carried out so that the actor might know specifics about their character provided by the playwright, but also so that they may create parts of the character that are not provided by the playwright in the form of given circumstances. By carrying out both of these types of research, I was able to synthesize this academic research to aid in my performance of the role.

Finally, I wanted to improve my personal technical rehearsal process by memorizing my lines and blocking far in advance of when I needed to, as well as developing an extremely specific warm-up routine. I was partially successful in this endeavor: I was able to develop a pretty good warm-up, although my physical warm-up did not ever become as specific as the vocal portion. Similarly, I memorized my lines

well, but I would have been happier had I memorized them sooner. Procrastination is often my weakness as an actress, so this was an important goal of mine. Although I was able to memorize my lines fully and completely (as well as my blocking), I could and should have done so much sooner than I did. While I do not feel that I failed at this goal, I know I will have a specific part of my process which I can further develop next time. My lack of excellence in this area shows me how I can move further in my next rehearsal process. Perhaps if I had set more specific time-related goals for myself, I could have accomplished this better.

After all this heady analysis, I feel it must be said that it is quite impossible to capture in words on paper the process of performing a role in a play. While onstage, the actor has the responsibility of being totally aware of their environment and their responsibilities as far as the actions they take and words they speak. If an actor forgets lines or blocking, they are essentially failing at the performance of their role. Conversely, the actor must totally lose herself in the character by thinking, feeling, breathing, moving, and sounding like whoever they are playing. The actor must entirely inhabit the persona of whoever they are playing without discernible separation between character and actor. This opposition is often referred to as living truthfully in the moment. If one part of this complicated two-part relationship is not honored, the performance will not have been successful.

Since this is a two-part relationship of actor as the agent responsible for carrying out a part and character living and breathing onstage, it is something that can only be experienced firsthand by the actor and the audience. All this being said, reflection by way of writing on paper one's experiences onstage is a necessary part of academic

performance. It is necessary for all this to be said because this is the context through which performance analysis must be understood.

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