An Actor's Method to Building the Character of Mother Superior in AGNES OF GOD

Venita J. Matthews

University of New Orleans, venita.matthews@yahoo.com

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An Actor’s Method to Building the Character of Mother Superior
in
AGNES OF GOD

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
In
Film & Theatre
Theatre Performance: Acting

By
Venita J. Matthews
B.A. Southern University of New Orleans, 1996
May 2017
DEDICATION

To Christine Matthews, My Beautiful, Vibrant, and Loving Mother. If ever there was a model of strength, courage, and love in my life, it has been you.

To Paris Matthews, My Son. You are, and have always been, “My Sanity and My Insanity!” I am forever proud of you for getting your Degree, despite all of the challenges that you and I, both faced.

To Gino Leroi Gautreaux, My Late, and Forever Great, Father. Thank you for stepping in to be the Daddy and Grandpére, you did not have to be. They took you, and everything you left for us away, but they will never erase the memories and the love we shared!

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To Every African-American Actor who has been denied the privilege of getting an M.F.A. degree in Acting or Theater. “This One’s for You!”
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ABSTRACT

Agnes of God is the story of a nun (Agnes) who gets pregnant while living in a convent. She almost dies after giving birth to a baby, who was later found dead in a garbage can. The cast consists of three members: Agnes; Mother Miriam Ruth (Mother Superior); and Dr. Martha Livingstone, the court appointed psychiatrist. Faith is tested as Dr. Livingstone draws closer to uncovering the truth surrounding the conception, birth, and death of Agnes’ baby.

I performed the role of Mother Superior in the UNO production of Agnes of God. This thesis documents my rehearsal and performance journey. It includes a rehearsal journal and an evaluation of my performance. The play was performed in the Lab Theatre of the Performing Arts Center on November 5 and 6; November 14 and 15; and on November 19 and 20.

Agnes of God is based on a true story.

Keywords: Mother Superior, Agnes, Pielmeier, Sacrifice, nun, Maureen Murphy
INTRODUCTION

When I was first told that for my thesis assignment I would be to playing the role of Mother Superior in John Pielmeier’s play Agnes of God, I was elated. I had only recently performed the role of Sister Margaret Alexander in James Baldwin’s Amen Corner, for which I received a New Orleans Big Easy Award Nomination for Best Actress -- an accomplishment that I am very proud to include on my acting resume. I had also recently played the role of Friar Peter in Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure; and was a cast member of Louisiana History Alive -- a group of talented, well-known local actors, who dress-up as famous Louisiana characters and interact with the public while educating them on the history and culture of Louisiana and New Orleans. I portrayed the Venerable Sister Henriette Delille, Mother Superior and Founder of Sisters of the Holy Family, the first African American Catholic convent. For these reasons I felt especially driven and prepared to once again touch upon my spiritual growth and awareness as a Christian, while testing my knowledge of religion and faith, and my skills as an actor and performer. I began to wonder if this was God’s way of telling me that my destiny in life would one day include religion as well as acting. To me, Agnes of God was His way of allowing me another opportunity to showcase my ability to create, produce and present yet another religious authority figure, who remained true to her position within the church, while featuring her humanity and genuine sensitivity to the circumstances and conflicts of all those around her who she impacted, and who in turn, impacted her. Over the course of the UNO production of Agnes of God, I came to refer to my performance as, “Yet another test of my faith -- again on stage!”
MAUREEN MURPHY

The inspiration for the play *Agnes of God* was based on the true story of a thirty-seven year old nun, Maureen Murphy, who was found in a pool of blood, after giving birth to a baby on April 27, 1976, at the Our Lady of Lourdes convent, in Brighton, New York. Murphy had been a resident of the convent for more than 19 years before conceiving a baby boy who was initially reported as missing, however was later found dead in a garbage can, with Murphy’s nun’s habit stuffed down its throat. The cause of death was listed as, “Asphyxiation,” and Murphy was later evaluated for mental and emotional stability to determine if she was fit to stand trial. Based on the findings, the court indicated that she was. At her trial, the defense argued that Murphy was unable to comprehend her actions, due to the excessive amount of blood that she had lost while giving birth. Murphy was later acquitted of charges, by a Jewish judge in New York, and was found to be “Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity”. In the play *Agnes of God*, author John Pielmeier has Maureen Murphy’s character “Agnes” kill the baby by strangling it with the umbilical cord tied around its neck. She then throws the baby in a waste paper basket.
Whenever I am cast in a play or a production, one of the first things that I do is research the playwright to determine if there are any similarities in our background that could possibly provide insight as to the writer’s purpose and intentions of the play. These findings may help me to dissect and understand the text and subtext of the script, while providing clues as to why my character acts or responds a certain way to other characters, situations, and/or events in the play.

Upon researching John Pielmeier, I found that our personal backgrounds were similar in several ways: our strong familial influence on our religious upbringing; our childhood love for acting and entertaining; and, the similar challenges we both faced in pursuing our MFA degrees in theater.

In regards to our religious upbringing, the first connection that I made with Pielmeier was that we were both raised in very fervent religious environments. Our parents and families instilled in us very strong spiritual values. Pielmeier was raised Catholic, and I was raised Baptist. However, because I had attended years of Catholic schooling, and had learned many of the Catholic religious prayers and rituals, I was immediately able to identify with how and why the incident regarding Maureen Murphy would appeal to Pielmeier, inspiring him to write *Agnes of God*.

Having always revered nuns with the utmost chasteness and virtuosity, the idea of a nun having a baby was particularly disquieting to me. The fact that Pielmeier’s character “Agnes” kills the baby was especially daunting. After all, it was only upon receiving the role of Mother Superior, and researching Maureen Murphy, that I had even considered the possibility of nuns
having sex. Likewise, I imagine that Pielmeier felt the same way. Even with all of the controversy regarding Catholic priests and the sexual assault of young boys within the Catholic Church, I had somehow come to esteem nuns to a higher standard than priests. And the fact that Pielmeier’s play *Agnes of God*, was based on true life events, made me want to delve deeper into my character and learn more. The subject was as intriguing to me, as I am certain it was for Pielmeier. In an interview he revealed, "I've always been fascinated by crises of faith. And I've always been fascinated by crises with children. This is the perfect combination." (Pielmeier.)

The second way that I connected with John Pielmeier was in our childhood interests. Like Pielmeier, I too, enjoyed acting and performing as a child, and believed that I possessed a special talent for entertaining and learning things quickly. Pielmeier, however, also possessed an exceptional talent for writing, and would often showcase this by writing and performing in original plays on special occasions and whenever possible. Although his talent was apparent, Pielmeier set his sights on becoming a movie star, and in 1966 left his small town to study drama and speech at Catholic University of America, in Washington, D. His parents were very supportive of his decision to pursue an acting career.

Unlike Pielmeier, I was not encouraged to pursue my acting. I was raised in a family of educators, who encouraged me to follow a much more traditional career, such as teaching or finance. I often wonder where my acting career would be, had I been born into a family of musicians and artists, like the Marsalis family, or the Neville family, where my gifts and appreciation for the arts was nurtured. Still, I must believe that just as with Pielmeier, the gifts
that we are blessed with in our youth, will somehow manifest its way into our future if we continue to pursue that which we were created to be, act, or do.

Finally, John Pielmeier and I share in the challenges we faced in pursuing our Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) degree in acting. After completing his undergraduate degree at Catholic University, Pielmeier decided to pursue his M.F.A. degree in theater, in the acting program at Pennsylvania State University (Penn State). However, his application for the M.F.A. Theater Performance Program was rejected, despite his apparent talent for acting, as evidenced in the number of productions and roles he was requested to perform. As an alternative route to staying in theater, Pielmeier enrolled in the nearly empty M.F.A. playwriting program at Penn State -- a course that would eventually turn him from actor to writer. (Pielmeier, Bio Web. 2016.)

Like Pielmeier, I decided to return to school in 2013 to pursue my M.F.A. degree in Acting, after having received my undergraduate degree several years earlier. My challenges came after being accepted into the UNO M.F.A. Theater Program.

Unlike most of the UNO M.F.A. Theater Program participants who started with me, who had undergraduate theater degrees, my acceptance into the UNO M.F.A. Theater Program was based solely on my audition, my reputation as an actress in other local productions, and the fact that my talent had been recognized by the Big Easy Theater Award Committee, with my nomination for Best Actress. My lack of the theater etiquette and terminology would later prove to present a particular challenge to David Hoover, the UNO M.F.A. Theater Performance Program Director, who had personally accepted me into the program, knowing that I lacked a theater undergraduate degree. Mr. Hoover, who taught many of the required classes for the
program, would later tell me that I asked too many questions in class, which showed my ignorance of theater. This, I presume, was a negative reflection on him. He would also claim that I did not “fit in” with the program and its participants, for a number of unfounded reasons. In a totally unexpected and devastating conversation, Mr. Hoover informed me that he was dismissing me from the program, despite the fact that I had received A’s in most, (if not all) of his classes, that had a very high overall GPA; had just completed the second year of the UNO M.F.A. Theater Program -- a three year program; and that I was now in debt for thousands of dollars. In addition to this, Mr. Hoover fired me from my graduate assistantship job, and I also suffered the loss of my father. I mention these things to show that, like Pielmeier, my goal of getting my Master’s degree has not been easy, or drama-free. It has been a very difficult and trying journey. Having learned of the challenges that Pielmeier faced in getting his M.F.A. degree helped me to endure the theatrical, as well as personal challenges that I faced throughout this production, and my experiences with the UNO M.F.A. Theater Program. I can firmly state that it has helped me solidify my spiritual belief and commitment to God, and is a constant reminder that although our lives may not always go as planned, we can still ultimately achieve fulfillment by doing something we love. For me, that is acting.

Having learned of the similarities that I share with author John Pielmeier, also gave me valuable information that I could then use in my characterization and portrayal of Mother Superior, to connect her with the other characters in the play. Like Pielmeier and me, Mother Superior was raised in a very devout religious environment. The shock of Agnes’ pregnancy made her question her faith in God, and her belief in miracles and the impossible. Although her childhood goals were not given in the script, I was able to create a backstory for Mother
Superior, which included her once wanting to be a singer. I was able to reflect on the memories that Mother had once had as a child (both good and bad), so that every time Mother heard Agnes singing, it not only reminded her of her guardian angel, but also reminded her of the singer she had once wanted to become.

Finally, the emotions that I imagine Pielmeier to have experienced when he was denied the opportunity to pursue his M.F.A. degree in acting, were likely to be the same emotions that I had felt when I was being dismissed from the UNO M.F.A. Theater Program. As an actress, I was able to incorporate these emotions into my character, Mother Superior, by channeling the feelings of hurt, anger, regret, resentment, and failure, into Mother Miriam, as she was thinking of her unhappy marriage and with her failed relationship with her children.

In regards to John Pielmeier and his play Agnes of God, this was his second play to be produced for an audience. It won the 1979 Great American Play Contest, and a full staged production was launched at the Actors Theatre of Louisville in 1980, for the Humana Festival of New American Plays. In March 1982, the Broadway production of Agnes of God opened at the Music Box Theatre, where it ran for 599 performances. Most critics agree that neither John Pielmeier, nor any of his other plays, received as much recognition and acclaim as Agnes of God.

Following the success of Agnes of God, John Pielmeier went on to work extensively in regional theater, writing Broadway hits including, The Boys of Winter (1985), and Sleight of Hand (1987), both of which ran for 31 previews and 9 performances; and Voices in the Dark (1999) which ran for 12 previews and 64 performances. Agnes of God was later adapted as a
screenplay in 1985, where it earned him a nomination for the Writers Guild of America Award for Best Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium.

Pielmeier is currently a member of New Dramatists and the Playwrights Lab of the Actors Studio; the recipient of the Shubert Fellowship in Playwriting; the Co-winner, for the 1980 Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville (Agnes of God). He was also honored to receive a Special Mention, for the Playbill Award. His other affiliations and accomplishments include being a member of the Dramatists Guild and the Writers Guild of America East, as well as Actors’ Equity and SAG-AFTRA, and an alumnus of New Dramatists. He has been a guest lecturer at Carnegie Mellon University, Penn State, and the University of Vermont, and his keynote address at the 2008 Harriett Lake Festival of New Plays in Orlando, “Writing What Matters,” was reprinted by The Dramatists Guild magazine. (Pielmeier, Web.)

**DEVELOPING THE ROLE OF MOTHER SUPERIOR**

In developing my role as Mother Superior, I first thought that it was necessary to define who and what Mother Superior is. However, the only definition I could find was simply that, “Mother Superior is the head of a convent.” (Wikipedia, Web.) My next order of business was to research my character based on the text and subtext of the play. Upon reading the play, I discovered that Mother Superior:

- Is a former smoker who once smoked two packs of Camel cigarettes per day
- Was married for 23 years
• Has two daughters who despise her, and possibly their friends that she is dead
• Believes that she was a failure as a wife and mother
• Is Agnes’ aunt (She was Agnes’ mother’s older sister)
• Was entrusted with Agnes’ care in the event of her death
• Once had a childhood guardian Angel who she spoke with often
• Had a very unhappy marriage
• One time questioned the existence of God

In The Stanislavski System, Sonia Moore states that, “An actor achieves reincarnation when he achieves the truthful behavior of the character, when his actions are interwoven with words and thoughts, when he has searched for all the necessary traits of a given character, when he surrounds himself with its given circumstances and becomes so accustomed to them that he knows not where his own personality leaves off and that of the character begins.” (Moore, 61.) My findings in regards to Mother Superior launched a number of questions in my mind as to how I would portray her. How would I show my character’s sensitivity without undermining her authority and position within the church? How could I (as Mother) remain neutral and unbiased, especially considering my personal relationship and undisclosed ties to Agnes? What personal connections could I make between my character (Mother Superior) and myself (“Vinnie” -- the Actor)? Between Agnes and myself? And between Dr. Livingstone and myself?

MOTHER SUPERIOR AND “VINNIE” – The Actor

After receiving the role of Mother Superior, my thoughts immediately began to fill with the stereotypical images of the Mother Superiors that I had seen on television and in the
movies. These nuns seemed to always have stern faces, wear metal glasses, and never crack a smile. I imagined them, hiding a “Ruler-at-the-Ready” under their habits, to whack undisciplined school children and unruly adults if needed. Images of Meryl Streep in Doubt, Maggie Smith in Sister Act I & II, and Lilia Skala in the 1963 classic film Lilies of the Field came to mind. While these vivid images undoubtedly had some influence on how I would portray Mother Miriam in the UNO production of Agnes of God, my primary source of reference for Mother Superior came from my personal experiences with nuns.

As a child, I attended Catholic school, and knew many Sisters who were very nurturing and nice. These Sisters reminded me of the character Maria, in the musical The Sound of Music, played by the incomparable Julie Andrews. When I was with them I felt safe and comfortable. But I also knew many Sisters who seemed to be more like military drill instructors, which I later found out to be a common trait among religious authorities. In Religious Orders, Suzanne Cit-A-Malard expresses that “It sometimes used to happen that some superiors, though their motives were of the highest, would be impelled by a too-inquisitive solicitude to demand that their subjects tell them everything. Thus in an age when most young women were raised in a family atmosphere which allowed them all too little initiative, the remnants of independence which they possessed on their entrance into religion would be destroyed by a domineering and demanding superior.” (Cit-A-Malard, 74.)

For this reason, in the first few rehearsals, I initially chose to portray Mother Superior as the unflinching, bitter tyrant. However, after discussing the character of Mother Superior with Director Beau Bratcher, and studying the subtext of the script, I later changed my portrayal of her. I had discovered, that even though Mother Superior shows signs of frustration, resentment,
and even anger with Dr. Livingstone, she does not display these characteristics to Agnes. And because her objective is to try to get Dr. Livingstone to write a favorable psychiatric evaluation of Agnes -- one that would acquit her of the charges of murder, or allow her to serve her time in penance at the convent, Mother Superior must be, or appear to be, likeable and pleasant to Dr. Livingstone. At the very least, she must be tolerable to Dr. Livingstone. My depiction of Mother Superior then became more charming than challenging. To achieve this I varied my vocal intonations and deliverances to and slightly higher pitch or range. I also made subtle changes in Mother Superior’s gestures and movements, such as patting my hands on my belt or chest underneath my habit, and swaying slightly backwards on my heels on some of the more light-hearted lines, such as: “So, do you think she’s totally bananas or what?” This, I believe, made Mother more charismatic and engaging to the audience, and to Dr. Livingstone. I also believed that this helped the audience become more willing to get to know Mother Superior, before making haste judgments about who she was and her character. As an added benefit of this change of portrayal, the audience would be especially unprepared for the scenes where Mother and Dr. Livingstone went head-to-head.

Also, in my research, I was surprised to find out that Mother Superior is not always the eldest (therefore presumed most superior) nun in a convent.

THE HABIT

As with most Catholic Nun Orders, the most identifiable indication that someone has taken solemn vows, is the garment that they wear. In the UNO production of Agnes of God, Mother Superior wears the traditional nun’s habit -- black robe, tunic, and veil; with a white
collar, headband, and head covering. Agnes wears an identical costume, however because she is a postulant (one who has not taken her final vows), her costume is all white. In my quest to transform into Mother Superior, I researched the traditions and rituals of nuns, including their mannerisms, and found that this tradition varies by Order. However, I thought that it was important for me to know about the history of the garments, so that I could incorporate this into my character’s development.

The first thing I learned about a nun’s habit is that, “‘Habit’ refers to the ensemble of clothing and accessories that make up religious dress. It can also mean specifically the robe-like tunic or dress that is the main garment worn over the body. The ‘veil’ is the long cloth worn on the top of the head, extending down the back. The veil is usually attached to a cap underneath, or ‘coif,’ which is a close-fitting cloth headpiece that conforms to the shape of the skull and often ties under the chin. A ‘wimple’ or ‘guimpe’ is the fabric piece that covers the neck and chest, and sometimes extends over the chin. A ‘Bandeau’ is the piece that stretches across the forehead, often attached at the ears behind the veil. A ‘Scapular’ is a long apron-like garment that is worn over the tunic and extends down both the front and back of the tunic. A ‘cincture’ is a belt worn around the waist of the tunic, and a ‘Rosary’ is a string of prayer beads and other objects often attached to the cincture and worn at the side. A ‘cappa,’ cape, or mantle refers to a cloak worn over the tunic.” (Kuhns, 5.)

I also learned that dating back as far as 1847, with The Congregation of Sisters - Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (originally called the Sisters of Providence), the nun generally recites a prayer, specific to each garment as it is adorned. Like the nun’s habit, these prayers
varied depending on the particular Nun Order that was reciting them. Each night of rehearsal, and throughout the show, in an effort to completely transform into Mother Superior mentally, physically and spiritually, I recited these prayers. What I experienced was a relaxation and peace that I may not have otherwise achieved had I not known about the prayer / dress ritual. Throughout my studies and my experiences as an actor, I have found that most directors encourage their actors to utilize any available resource and / or technique that will help them morph into their character. For me, my transformation into the character of Mother Superior, as well as the other many characters that I have played throughout my acting career, were all aided through researching the playwright and those people, places and things that influenced the character that I was portraying. Having been introduced to Constantine Stanislavki, a pioneer in the field of acting, and Sanford Meisner, a master of acting technique and method, while in graduate school has allowed to incorporate new ways of developing my characters -- a benefit for which I am truly grateful to have learned.

**INTERVIEWS**

For my role as Mother Superior in *Agnes of God*, I conducted several interviews with nuns of different orders, to determine if there was anything unique that I could use in my interpretation and characterization of Mother Superior. The most distinguishable trait among the various them, seemed to be their sense of peace and relaxation. Each Sister that I interviewed seemed to speak with purpose and thought, not offering any more information than what was asked of them. Many of the older nuns spoke (and walked) very slowly. When I asked questions, their response was also slow and thoughtful. I could not tell whether this was simply
due to their age, or if it was because everything in their lives is scheduled, and they seemingly had no sense of immediate urgency. However, I incorporated their mannerisms in my role as Mother Superior, especially whenever I dealt with Agnes. I always tried to exemplify peace and calmness with her, and never wanted her to feel pressure.

In my interviews with the nuns, I had hoped that they would be willing to share their thoughts and insights on the 1985 film Agnes of God, and the performances of Jane Fonda as Dr. Livingstone; Meg Tilly as Agnes; and in particular, Ann Bancroft as Mother Superior. However, I was surprised to discover that many of the nuns were unfamiliar with the storyline; few recalled the controversy that it created; and no one was willing to comment on it. I was also very naive to think that the Sisters would accept my invitation to come see the UNO production of Agnes of God.

MYRA HILDAGO

By far, the most interesting interview that I conducted was with Myra Hildago, a Tulane University Professor and MSW. I came across Myra’s book, Sexual Abuse and the Culture of Catholicism – How Priests and Nuns Become Perpetrators, at the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library at Tulane University. After reading that she was an adjunct professor at Tulane University, I immediately reached out to her by email. I asked if she was familiar with Agnes of God. She said she was and agreed to speak with me. Her research and personal experience with nuns provided an interesting perspective on the abuse and misconduct that takes place behind closed doors of the Catholic Church and convent -- all of which I was certain would be helpful in
developing Mother Superior. I wanted to find out if there were any possible connections between her research, *Agnes of God*, and my character, Mother Miriam Ruth. I asked if she knew of any protocol within the Catholic Church to report pregnancy, sexual abuse or incidents of a similar nature. If there were procedures in place, this could possibly explain Mother Miriam’s somewhat dismissive attitude towards Dr. Livingstone’s position of authority. Mother Superior’s reaction to finding out that Agnes was pregnant would then be a reaction of compassion and routine, as opposed to one of shock.

In our interview, Myra explained that she had been the victim of sexual abuse by a nun named “Sister Cheryl” when she was twelve. The nun, in Myra’s words, was grooming her to become her lover. Because Myra, like me, had had an interest in becoming a nun, no one suspected anything about the extra attention and affection that she received from Sister Cheryl. It was not until one of the nuns at the convent reported seeing Myra and Sister Cheryl kissing in the car that it was brought to the attention of her Mother Superior. When asked about her Mother Superior’s reaction to her claim of sexual abuse, Myra explained that her Mother Superior was very much like Mother Superior in *Agnes of God* – she was somewhat dismissive, in that she wanted everything to be peaceful. Likewise, she felt that there was no sense in sending Sister Cheryl to jail. She did not want a scandal to disrupt her community. Myra agreed to not press charges after her Mother Superior (like Dr. Livingstone) suggested that a better solution to the problem would be to send Sister Cheryl to a psychiatric hospital where she would receive treatment. Years later, when Myra checked the records to see what was listed as the reported reason for Sister Cheryl’s release from the school, Myra was shocked to see that the reason stated was *suicidal*. Nothing was stated that gave any indication of Myra’s sexual abuse.
Myra’s story was published in the Gambit newspaper. Notes from the interview are included in the appendix of this thesis. Myra continues to be an advocate for the sexually abused.

MOTHER MIRIAM RUTH

Like Myra Hildago, when I was a child, I also wanted to become a nun. Then one day, the principal of my school, told me that I could never become a nun, because I was not Catholic. What was worse was that she offered no other alternative course of reconciliation. She was point blank, to-the-point, cold and dry. I recall going home and crying my eyes and heart out. Having acquired the role of Mother Superior in Agnes of God, I would somehow like to think that the last laugh is on her, as I have accomplished my goal of becoming a nun!

This was the most immediate way in which I connected with my character Mother Superior. Other ways included my extreme faith and belief in God, and in my wanting, like Mother Superior, to believe that miracles are still possible today, despite what science says.

In Act 2: Scene 5, Mother and Martha are having a conversation as to whether miracles are still possible. This scene occurs after Agnes has been hypnotized once, and is a precursor to her final session with Dr. Livingstone. This also occurs after Mother has revealed to Dr. Livingstone some very pertinent and private information regarding her personal life -- the fact that she is not a virgin; the fact that she has two kids who despise her; and the fact that she is Agnes’ aunt. In this scene, Mother also explains to Dr. Livingstone that a miracle is an event without an explanation. She goes on to say that, “The mind is a remarkable thing, Dr.
Livingstone. You’ll never find the answer to everything, Doctor. One and one is two, yes, but that leads to four and then to eight, and soon to infinity… For every miracle that it finally explains, ten thousand more miracles come into being.” Martha says, “I thought you didn’t believe in miracles today?” To which Mother responds, “But I want to believe. I want the opportunity to believe. I want the choice to believe.” (Script, 90.) I absolutely loved reciting these lines. Each time I recited this monologue, I felt a certain an excitement, and a sense of hope and possibility – probably because, as a Christian, I always resort to my faith and belief even when all else fails.

One of the challenges I faced with Mother Superior’s character creation, was determining how I would project her own feelings of self worth, especially since many of her past decisions were in direct conflict with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Should she show regret, remorse, or simply an attitude of resolution that comes with age and maturity? In the end, I believe I chose a balance between the three. I believe that because of her questionable past, Mother Superior is better able to accept the unfortunate circumstances of Agnes’ life. Finding peace for Agnes means finding resolution for her.
AGNES

The personal relationship between Mother Superior and Agnes is complex. On one hand, she is Mother’s niece, who has been left in her care, so Mother feels an obligation to protect Agnes at whatever costs. On the other hand, Mother Miriam has a moral commitment to the church to report what she knows about the murder of Agnes’ baby.

Because of the “disconnect” between Mother Miriam and her own children, Mother seeks comfort in her relationship with Agnes. She also believes that Agnes is her guardian angel reincarnate, who has been sent to her to reaffirm her faith in Christ and the Catholic Church. Agnes does this through her angelic singing.

In my research of nuns who possessed the ability to sing, I found out that nuns often receive much adoration, and sometimes compensation, for their special talent. Trevor Hart states in Faithful Performances – Enacting Christian Tradition, “In early modern convents, sacred music permeated all aspects of the nuns’ daily lives, and contributed to their presence and visibility in the city. Singing in the choir was an act of prayer. Musical skills and beautiful singing voices were so valuable that convents could even offer discounts on the dowries of gifted nuns, and decorous religious houses accepted girls from modest backgrounds. Convent architecture and visual settings enhanced the impact of the music, and the fact that nuns’ voices were heard while their bodies usually remained unseen emphasized their symbolic resemblance to angelic creatures.” (Hart, 44-6.)
It was also interesting to learn that singing and playing some instruments was once banned by the Catholic Church for fear that it would cause inappropriate sexual behaviors in those who listened. In Hart and Lugt’s *Theatrical Theology – Explorations in Performing the Faith*, they state that, “Even when hidden in their choir or behind the curtains of their parlor, singing nuns might be heard by outsiders, triggering fantasies about their forbidden bodies...Music could become a source of corruption, and although some conceded that nuns were entitled to ‘honest and virtuous recreations,’ music was suspected to be spiritually disruptive and therefore unacceptable. [Therefore] Several laws discouraged musical learning and banned nuns from playing instruments, in particular wind instruments, and singing for outsiders.” (Hart & Lugt, 49.)

In regards to Mother believing that Agnes was sent to her by God, one of the most beautiful monologues in *Agnes of God* is when Mother recalls her conversations with her guardian angel. It is slow, thoughtful, and insightful. Each night, when I delivered this speech, I wondered if I was taking too long to recite it. I would often get caught up in my own thoughts, enjoying the peace and tranquility of the moment. I could feel the audience’s eyes on me. It felt as if they were hanging on to my every word. It felt wonderful to have their undivided, full attention. I would like to think that they too experienced the same peace that I felt.

But was Agnes simply a victim of naivete to actually think that the man who raped her is God or his representative? Myra Hidalgo believes that it is reasonable to think that Agnes believed this, as do many children who look to religious figures for guidance. Once again, in her book *Sexual Abuse and the Culture of Catholicism – How Priests and Nuns Become*
Perpetrators, Myra states that the victims of sexual abuse in a religious setting, “are young children, adolescents, and vulnerable adults all who looked to the Church for spiritual guidance and emotional support in various situations and for many different reasons. The religious authority figures of the Church represented the highest images of God on Earth to these victims, higher even than their own parents. Attention and special treatment from such figures were experienced by these individuals as much more than simple flattery, as a manifestation of God’s unconditional love and grace bestowed on them by His specially chosen servants. To then have this experience of love and grace turned into a manipulative instrument of sexual gratification, a human impulse that they had been taught to disdain was not only psychologically traumatizing but spiritually devastating.” (Hidalgo, 41).

Each night when I looked into Natalie’s (Agnes’) eyes I (Mother Miriam) felt as if I was responsible for all of her pain. I felt as if I had let her down, just as I had let my children down. And although it was very exhausting each night to see each of us - Agnes, Dr. Livingstone and myself tired, broken, and worn out from crying, I also believe there was a certain satisfaction that we each experienced, as we had done our best as performers.

DR. LIVINGSTONE

In exploring the relationship between Dr. Livingstone and myself as Mother Superior, I quickly identified with Dr. Livingstone being Agnes’ psychiatrist. Having studied psychology as an undergraduate, I believe that acting and psychology co-exist perfectly. Acting is, after all, creating and fully emerging one’s self in a character. Stanislavski calls this “Psycho-technique” and defines it as: “When an actor is completely absorbed by some profoundly moving objective,
so that he throws his whole being passionately into its execution, he reaches a state that we call inspiration. In it almost everything he does is subconscious and he has no conscious realization of how he accomplishes his purpose.” (Stanislavski, An Actor’s Handbook, 114.)

I received my Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology from Southern University at New Orleans in 1996. And like Dr. Livingstone, I too, have always been interested in what makes human beings react a certain way, or do certain things. As I read the play Agnes of God, I became more, and more intrigued with each of the characters in the play, and wanted to anxiously know how the play ended.

Thus psychology, in general terms, is exploring all of the aspects that go into creating and developing a person. It involves researching an individual’s past to try to explain how and why a person may act, think, or respond to certain stimuli and outside factors or conditions. It attempts to make predictions based on a person’s current circumstances and their personal history and background. Since actors often delve into all of these areas when creating or developing a character, I believe that most actors possess an interest in psychology on some level. At the very least, most actors want to know how they can make their character reach a level of depth, truth, and consciousness that they may have otherwise left unexplored.

The conflict in Agnes of God between Mother Miriam and Dr. Livingstone exists in that they each believe that they know what is best for Agnes -- Mother believes that Agnes should remain at the convent and serve her time in penance there, while Martha (Dr. Livingstone) believes that Agnes should either serve her time in jail or a mental facility. In either case, the
inner demons of their own personal lives play a significant role in their rationing. But there could have also been outside factors affecting the superficial conflict between the two of them. In Cheryl Reed’s *Unveiled – The Hidden Lives of Nuns*, she states that “The first reviewers of AOG did not consider that the adversarial relationship between Mother Miriam and Dr. Martha Livingston might be a displacement of the post conciliar encounter between the traditional Church and reforming feminism. Yet the actions of the two women suggest a wider conflict of interests between ruling prelates, sister loyalists, and outspoken or dissenting nuns.” (Reed, 232-3.)

The ladies are at odds throughout most of the play, and for a while it seems that the only thing that they can agree upon is how good Mother Miriam would feel if she took a nice, long drag on one of Martha’s cigarettes, and the brands of cigarettes Jesus and His disciples would smoke, had they still been living today. Personally, this scene is a welcomed element of surprise and comic relief to an otherwise heavy drama. And, while some critics may not have liked these scenes in the play, I enjoyed the light banter, and applaud Pielmeier for its inclusion. In *Sacred Desires*, Maureen Sabine states, “Film critics were also puzzled by the uneven relationship between these two strong, intelligent women, which vacillates between point-scoring animosity and sudden flashes of solidarity, but never leads to the school of friendship noteworthy in *Brede.*” (Sabine, 239.)

But Mother’s conflict with Martha is also due to the fact that she sees Martha as a direct threat to taking away the guardian angel that she (Mother) once communicated with as a child. Mother believes that this guardian angel has now reincarnated itself in Agnes. She recalls
hearing Agnes sing, and recognizes her guardian angel’s voice as she begs Dr. Livingstone, “Don’t take it away from me again, Dr. Livingstone. Those years after six were very bleak.” (Script, 69.)

Another conflict that Mother Miriam and Dr. Livingstone struggle with is the fact that Mother believes that Agnes is a divine instrument of God, whose conception was divinely ordered. She wants Agnes to be “an exception” because on some level this would mean that she (Mother Superior) has an opportunity to reconnect to her spirituality, and re-ignite her passion for being a faithful servant.

In regards to Agnes’ stigmata, Mother wants to believe that she has been divinely privileged to witness this. Martha adamantly denies that any of this could be possible, and insists that Mother is crazy. At the end of the play, when it is revealed that Agnes was consciously aware of the circumstances surrounding her pregnancy, as well as the conception and ultimate murder of her baby, Mother is devastated and admits defeat, saying, “You were right. She remembered. And all this time I thought she was some unconscious innocent. Thank you, Dr. Livingstone. We need people like you to destroy all those lies that ignorant fold like myself pretend to believe… But I will never forgive you for what you’ve taken away. You should have died. Not your sister. You.” (Script, 108)

Reciting this line every night of the show brought tears to my eyes (and still does), because as a Christian, for Mother Superior to wish death upon another human being, after years of teaching forgiveness and faith to others, shows total defeat. Like Mother, I want to believe
that miracles are still possible, and whenever I feel that I have abandoned my faith, I feel ultimate sadness and defeat.
REHEARSAL LOG

The rehearsal period for *Agnes of God* was scheduled for approximately six weeks, with the first four weeks in October, and the last two weeks in November. No rehearsals were scheduled on Fridays and Saturdays. Monday and Wednesday weekday rehearsals began at approximately 7:30 and ended at 10:30; while Tuesday and Thursday rehearsals began at 6:30 and ended at 10:30. The following journal chronicles what I experienced as an actress in my performance as Mother Superior in the UNO production of *Agnes of God*.

Monday, September 28, 2015

Today we received an email from Director Beau Bratcher, who informed us that he would not be directing *Agnes of God*. He said that he had “Had a wonderful time at the first read the other night,” and that he truly believed that “we have the ability to create a magical moment in that little theater with this production.” He did not give any details about the reason, or explanation about his sudden departure, but this definitely added to my stress level. It seems that anything can change, at any minute – another director; a different play; changing of roles; who knows? We had to wait longer than the other graduate students to find out what our thesis assignment would be, and now we are uncertain if *Agnes of God* will still be the chosen play. We are also concerned with having lost precious time for memorizing lines. We both feel that this delay gives us an unfair disadvantage, in comparison to some of the other students and their productions, where some of the graduate students had almost a whole semester to prepare. Rehearsal was cancelled -- as expected.
Tuesday, September 29, 2015

Today I received an email from David Hoover, the UNO Film & Theater Chair, who informed us that tonight’s rehearsal was cancelled, and that rehearsal would resume on Sunday October 4, 2015.

Later today, we received another email from David Hoover, who informed us that Beau would be returning, to once again direct Agnes of God and that they had worked out whatever issues, I presume had caused him to leave the production. He did not go into detail about the reasons for his leaving the production and his sudden return. I later found out that the sudden conflict of interest, was due with the fact that Beau wanted Jenny Billot to be the stage manager. Thankfully, Diane did not feel that it would be fair to have Jenny assist with this production for many reasons-- much less, have her “weigh-in” on matters concerning me. Diane was aware of the many conflicts that Jenny and I had had, while working on other UNO productions. Jenny had also had other conflicts, with UNO faculty members and students. I decided to study my lines at home.

Sunday, October 4, 2015

Today I arrived at exactly the same time that the director Beau Bratcher arrived. I mentioned to him that I had arranged to have food delivered at rehearsal, because it had not arrived after waiting for more than an hour at a restaurant where I was eating. I wanted him to know this, so that he would not think that I was just randomly answering my phone in the middle
of rehearsal. Because of certain health challenges, eating was vital. I have also already experienced how things can so quickly be blown out of proportion, at least where I am concerned. In my experience, I believe that anything and everything I say or do can potentially be used to justify my dismissal from this program.

Beau began the rehearsal by telling us how he has always wanted to direct this play. He said that he was familiar with my acting skills, as well as Meghan’s, and he thought that this would be a stellar cast. He proceeded to tell us about the research he had done on Agnes of God, and on Maureen Murphy, the inspiration for the play.

My goal for tonight’s rehearsal was to read the script with accuracy, volume and confidence, while absorbing all of the information I had anticipated that we would receive from director Beau Bratcher.

As we read the script with our newest cast member Natalie (Agnes), I recalled thinking how good it was good to finally hear all of the cast members voices, so that I could immediately begin to make connections to their characters.

I realized that based on the information that was given to us about Maureen Murphy, and the playwright John Pielmeier, that in order to give my performance the depth and realism that I desire, I will have to do much more research on the history of nuns and their ways. One thing that I am curious about is how Meghan and I will get along during this process, as we have not always seen eye to eye in the past.

Tuesday, October 6, 2015
Today I arrived at rehearsal between 8:15 – 8:30, after going to work. When we were asked to list any scheduling conflicts, I informed Beau that as a volleyball coach for a local high school, I am obligated to attend volleyball games on Tuesday and Thursday nights, and depending on the post-game roundup time, and the time it would take to travel from the game to rehearsals, I should be able to arrive at rehearsal between 8:00 - 8:30. He agreed that on these days he would rehearse the scenes with Agnes and Dr. Livingston first, and then my scenes. Nonetheless, he was irritated and released me from rehearsal. Although I did not think that Beau’s irritation or attitude were warranted, I used this opportunity to go home, review my script and memorize my lines. Later that evening, when I checked my email, I realized that I had received another email from my thesis committee chair, Diane Baas, who stated that it had been reported that I had “regular conflicts with the rehearsals on Tuesdays and Thursdays.” Her email suggested that if I could not fully commit to every rehearsal that I should remove myself from the show, so that the role can be re-cast. This upset me very much, as I had informed Beau of my conflicts, and did not feel that my actions warranted such a stern reprimand. Unnecessary tears were ultimately shed, and I could not sleep.

Wednesday, October 8, 2015

Today when I arrived at rehearsal at 6:30, after receiving that shocking email yesterday from Diane, I wanted to speak to Samantha (Stage Manager) to let her know about the conflict that the rehearsal report had caused. I also wanted to ask her why she had not mentioned to me that she was going to report my late arrival without at least asking me what my reasons were. She said that she was unaware that I had previously reported schedule conflicts, and that she would clear things up with Diane. Rehearsal went on as normal.
Today we blocked Act I, Scenes 8 – 10. At the top of scene 8, Mother Superior enters the room, and tells Dr. Livingston, “You hate us, don’t you.” She later tells her, “Catholicism is not on trial here. I want you to treat Agnes without any religious prejudices, or turn this case over...(to another psychiatrist).” My goal for this rehearsal was to portray Mother Superior as being more understanding and less angry than I had done in the initial reading. Anger somehow seems to be my “go to” emotion, especially if the character opposite of me goes against my character’s beliefs or stands in the way of my achieving my goal.

For the role of Mother Superior, I have to consciously remind myself that Mother Superior is not angry at Dr. Livingston. Rather, she is trying to educate Dr. Livingston on Catholicism and humanity. This is another opportunity for Mother Superior to gain Dr. Livingston’s trust. I believe that this is also the reason why Mother Superior tells Dr. Livingston, “I am not a virgin, Doctor. I was married for twenty-three years...” This is Mother Superior’s way of showing Dr. Livingston that, “I, too, am human. I have made mistakes in my life, that I am not proud of, because of the hand that I was dealt. Likewise, Agnes has not been dealt a ‘fair’ hand in life. Have mercy on her, or at the very least, have pity on her.”

After rehearsal, I wanted to confirm with Beau the time that I would arrive at rehearsals on Tuesday and Thursday. I asked him if there was a problem with the time that I had arrived at the other night. He said that he had understood that I would arrive after work – which is what I did. Again, I got a cold, dismissive vibe from him, which left me feeling as if it did not matter that I had already informed him of my job conflicts.
When I had spoken with Diane, she said that it was her understanding that I would arrive at rehearsal no later than 8:00. Instead of saying anything, I decided that I would ask my assistant coach to take over if it appeared like a game was going to run into overtime.

While I would like to say that my primary focus has been my performance during rehearsals and character development, I feel that the unnecessary and unanticipated conflicts due to my work schedule have distracted me. I will make every effort to conform to the rehearsal schedule, despite the agreement between Beau and me.

Monday, October 12, 2015

Today I met with Sam at 6:30 (one hour before rehearsal), to go over the blocking for Act II. Sam had listed this on the schedule as “Stumble Over the blocking for Act II.” I had missed rehearsal over the weekend, because I was out of town. (This was also listed in my schedule conflicts.)

As expected, my primary goal for this rehearsal was to remember the new blocking that I had just learned. Overall, I think I did a good job, considering the amount of blocking that I had to learn. As always, my goal for tonight’s rehearsal was to remember my lines. I believe that I also did a good job with this. For me, as an actor, once I have mastered my line memorization, I am able to easily adapt to sudden changes in the script and in blocking. Because I have no one to rehearse my lines with, I record my lines using a small voice recorder. I do this in a number of different ways. The first time I will read the entire script, using intonations and voice cues that I think my scene partner will use. I then read my lines based on my understanding of the
Then I will record only my lines, so that I can memorize my partner’s lines, so I will be prepared to respond to the next concept or idea that my partner speaks. Finally, I will record only my partner’s lines, so that I can speedily respond to their verbal cues, by fast forwarding through the recording. These methods have proven successful for me in the past, and I hope they will do the same with Agnes.

Tuesday, October 13, 2015

Tonight we began with Act 2, Scene 2. In this scene, Dr. Livingstone hypnotizes Agnes. As she is doing this, Agnes begins to scream, as she is having contractions. Mother Superior witnesses this and attempts to wake Agnes from her hypnotic state. However, Dr. Livingstone prevents her from doing so. While this is happening, we each have lines to recite, as well as movement and blocking to remember.

When the scene opens, Mother Miriam is seated on a stool, diagonal from Agnes. She watches as Dr. Livingstone puts Agnes in a trance. When Agnes begins to scream, Mother Superior is supposed to stand and approach Dr. Livingstone, who is stage center with Agnes. I am then supposed to retract, and back up to the chair that is positioned at center stage. The doctor will then kneel to get close to Agnes. I then say, “Stop her, she’ll hurt herself!” Dr. Livingstone stretches her arm while saying, “No, let her go.” Mother Superior then says, “I’m not going on with this…(anymore.)” The doctor says, “No! I said let her be.” I then break past Dr. Livingstone, and touch Agnes’ ankle. She screams, “You’re trying to take my baby! You’re trying to take my baby! Stay in! Please stay in!” I finally say, “Stop her! Help her!” In this scene, the action takes place so quickly that it is hard to get the timing right for calling out the
correct lines. I believe the only way to learn this is through repetition and practice. In the excitement of a scene like this, it is easy to just “blurt” out the lines, without them being in the proper place, which is what I did initially. I will try to rehearse this scene, as fast as possible with both Meghan and Natalie, until we get the timing right!

Thursday October 15, 2015

Tonight’s rehearsal was an “Off Book - Line Through,” so my primary goal was to remember my lines, deliver them with honest, organic emotions, and to focus on my voice.

In Act 1:8, I console Agnes by having her sing a song with me. Since I am not an avid singer, this presents a particular challenge for me. So far, no one has said anything negative about my singing, so I take that to mean, all is well. Personally I tend to seek the approval of everyone listening, to ensure that I am not off-key. However, I don’t believe that my character, Mother Superior, thinks twice about it.

I once had an experience in church where I was singing in the choir for a ladies day program. I sang my heart out loud and proud, and just knew that I sounded as good as I looked (with my fancy church hat on!) To my surprise, during the performance, one choir member made her way to me and began to sing in my ear to get me in tune. I was embarrassed to say the least. So my singing a “solo” on stage scares me to death!

Each night before rehearsal begins, I try to perform some of the warm-up exercises that I learned in my voice training classes with Aimee Hayes and James Yeargain. Both instructors refer to Kristen Linklater’s book, *Finding the Natural Voice*. The exercises listed in the book
include bending over, roll ups, facial stretches, and shaking your body so as to loosen up, as well as finding the natural “huh.” When I asked Beau, if I sounded okay, he said he finds my singing voice pleasant. Natalie, Meghan and Samantha agreed. I will continue to practice singing, and ask one of my choir members to give me instructions.

Monday, October 19, 2015

Today I arrived at rehearsal at 6:47. Rehearsal time was for 7:00, and was in the Dance Studio. When I arrived, Meghan, Natalie and Sam were running lines. Sam told us that Beau suggested that we stretch before rehearsals. So we did, individually. I did a series of stretching that included bend-overs, roll-ups, and shaking. I also did some lunges and calf stretches.

I have performed in shows where the entire cast and crew played stretching games, and other games before rehearsals. It was a way of bonding and releasing the stresses of the day. So I appreciated the reminder that exercising is important, especially for actors.

Tonight we worked on Act I. My goal for this rehearsal was to concentrate on my reaction to Agnes’ stigmata. At this point I am uncertain of my response because Agnes tells Mother Superior that she is being punished, before revealing that her palms are bleeding. Beau initially said that the blood in this scene was from Agnes’ menstrual cycle. However, I questioned why Mother Superior would tell Dr. Livingstone, “I saw it. Clean through the palm of her hand, do you think hysteria did that?” Beau said he would get back to me with an answer. My challenge tonight was to first find an appropriate response to Agnes’ stigmata - one that would feel natural and organic, as always. I ask, “Now what’s wrong?” [Agnes - I’m being punished] “For what?” [Agnes - I don’t know.] “How?” Agnes then reveals her bleeding hand
to me. I respond by saying, “What happened?” Then, “Oh dear Jesus. Oh dear Jesus.” I will try various ways of responding until I find a reaction that seems right, and supports the story we are telling. I know that it will have an element of surprise, or shock. I just don’t know yet how big it will be.

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

I arrived at 7:50. We rehearsed Act II. In scene two, when Dr. Livingstone says, “Because this is murder we’re talking about,” Mother Superior responds by saying. “Murder?” Beau had mentioned in his notes the other night, that I should speak louder and react more to this. However, I seemed to be having trouble with his request because I was going from a relatively calm state, to a sudden outburst, without knowing why. Beau later explained that the reason for my sudden outburst is that Dr. Livingston is accusing me of killing the baby, and not Agnes. This was not clear to me when I first read the script. To make my response more authentic, with every question Dr. Livingstone asks, I will build up emotions of anger and frustration inside of me, so that when it is time to deliver my line, I will let it erupt naturally.

Wednesday, October 21, 2015

Tonight was another off-book rehearsal. At the very end of the play, before Mother Superior turns to face upstage, with her back to the audience, she begs Dr. Livingston, “Don’t do this to her [Agnes].” She then says, “Don’t do this to me!” Then, when Agnes finally confesses that she had given the baby “back to God,” Mother Superior falls to her knees in despair.
One of the things that I have discovered about this role is the physicality of it. There are many times when Mother Superior must fall to her knees, and then rise again. While I have never had any physical problems doing such, because the movements happen so suddenly and repeatedly in _Agnes of God_, I have discovered that I must actually rehearse the movement and make adjustments for my wardrobe.

Falling to my knees doesn’t seem to be a problem, other than the fact that the wooden stage is very hard. Fortunately, we finally got some knee pads, which seems to have resolved the problem. I think that sometimes people forget that although I may look and act younger than I am, unlike most of the actors around here I am not a “spring chicken” any more.

Let’s just say, one of the things that I have learned about acting and aging is that being in shape is essential to your craft. This production has also taught me that practicing exercises that require re-positioning in a range of motions, at every level (particularly at the joints), will help when having to make sudden, and repetitious movements. I am grateful for the classes that I took with James Yeargain. I will practice more stretches and exercises that involve quickly going from one level to another – like going from sitting on the floor to standing; then standing to kneeling, to standing again, to lying on the floor.

Thursday, October 22, 2015

I arrived at rehearsal at 7:30. Tonight we ran the play without the script through Act I, and with the script through page 98, “No she was afraid.” As expected, I’m getting better with memorizing my lines every day. I still have a ways to go, but I’m feeling much more confident and secure, and believe that I will have mastered them well before we open. However, for some
reason though, the first scene was kind of rough for me. I stumbled a lot more. But Meghan called for lines just as much as me -- so that made me feel better! I find myself comparing my progress to that of other cast members, which to me is not an accurate way to determine my progress. This is probably because I feel that every mistake I make seems to make its way into the rehearsal report. I cannot wait for this production to be over with, so I can breathe again! I remind myself that my progress does not hinge on another actor’s progress, or their setbacks. The most that I can do, is to do my very best, and let it inspire me to do even better!

I told Beau that I was aware that I was still playing Mother Superior too angry. I asked him to trust that once I got my lines down that I would adjust my character’s mood. This seems to be what always happens when I am studying a new role. Many of the directors that I have worked with, know that I will have a “light bulb” moment, as soon as I have learned my lines. But because this is the first time I have worked with Beau, he is unfamiliar with this.

I need to get more shoes. The shoes I have hurt my feet! Tonight, Mitchel, the student lighting designer, was there. He helped me go through some of my lines during a break. Meghan and I both had challenges with the blocking. Rehearsal ended at 10:30.

Sunday, October 25, 2015

Today we ran Act I, twice. I concentrated on everything, in particular my lines, blocking, and my enunciation. There were no obvious discoveries today. I just know that practicing my lines and the blocking with someone, is the best thing I can do.
I have to say that it perturbs me very much that Meghan has a tendency to curse a whole lot. She does this throughout the rehearsal. I, on the other hand, can make a simple gesture of frustration, and say, “Oh, shoot!” which will probably end up in the rehearsal report as, “Vinnie was unprofessional and unruly.”

Once again, I cannot wait for this production to be over with!

Monday, October 26, 2015

Tonight we received notes from yesterday, so my goal for this rehearsal was to make corrections and adjustments to my actions. Some of the notes were:

- On “I am not the patient,” I should try to appease Dr. Livingston. I will do this as if I am reminding my son to do something he has already agreed to do.
- On “I’m not avoiding you,” I will try to do this as if I am speaking to a loved one.
- I should move towards Agnes on, “She said she was commanded by God.” I will adjust accordingly.
- I don’t pronounce the ends of my words, like Psychiatrists and Pregnancy. I will make a more conscious effort to enunciate more clearly.
- I should turn more upstage, at the Top of Act II, during the hypnosis scene. I will adhere.
- I have a tendency to tighten my jaw a lot. I don’t know if this is because of my frustration in learning the lines; the tension and anxiety of making a mistake, and
knowing that it will be reported in the rehearsal log; or not having completely identified
with my character. I believe that the best way to circumvent this is to perform some of
the exercises that I learned in Voice Training Class. I also think that if I were more
relaxed before, during, and after rehearsal, I would see an improvement.

- I slap my leg a lot. I had no idea that I was doing this! But I guess if it was mentioned, I
  must have been doing it! I don’t know if holding on to the side of my clothes would help
  or just create another bad habit, but I will consider other options, or think of other ways
to “occupy” my hands.

- I tend to sway when I am supposed to be standing still. Once again, I had no idea that I
  was doing this! I need to practice grounding myself and being still, so that it doesn’t
  distract from what I am saying, or from another actor who may be in the same scene. I
  will practice in front of the mirror and ask the cast member to let me know when I do
  this, so that I can quickly adjust and identify if there is anything specific that triggers this.

Tuesday, October 27, 2015

Today I was not feeling well. I had been sick all day with Virus-type symptoms, so I
knew that going into rehearsal would be a challenge. I also had not eaten. Jenny Billot attended
the rehearsal. This did not help my anxiety, as I believe that her primary objective is to be a
“plant” to Mr. Hoover to report any mistake or error that I make.

I was very hot in my rehearsal costume. I was also a little nervous because Diane was in
the lighting booth. Earlier today, I was once again called in to meet with Diane and Kevin
because of something in the rehearsal report. Whatever it was, it gave them the impression that I was not performing at the level I was supposed to. Considering the fact that we had two weeks left, I thought that this was a harsh assessment. Anyway, during our ten minute break during rehearsal, I went into the break room to eat my food. When I saw Diane and Kevin, they each gave me encouragement, and told me that from their observations of my rehearsals, that I was performing at an expected level. They also said that it was apparent that I had had put those into practice their previous suggestions and advice. To me, this was affirmation once again, that whatever had been reported, was exaggerated, and should not be considered as truth.

When rehearsal was over, I had to run off the stage to go to the bathroom. I asked Beau if I could get my notes tomorrow, because I was extremely ill. Once again, he gave me a look as if saying to himself, “Vinnie, you are so much trouble.” I’m sure it will be in the report, and that it will get to Mr. Hoover. When I left, Beau didn’t even say, “Take care of yourself, Vinnie.”

To me, the lack of concern for an ill cast member by a director shows unprofessionalism and disrespect. In turn, my confidence in this production has diminished greatly. I hate feeling this way (both physically and mentally.)

Wednesday, October 28, 2015

Today rehearsal went okay. I had to work, so I was exhausted by the time I got there. I had to eat in between scenes. I asked Sam about the shoes from Tony. She said that she wasn’t aware that I still needed them. I reminded her that I had showed her my left foot where the shoe was cutting into my skin, and how I told her my right toe kept sliding to the front of the other
shoe. She said that Tony said that he had given me three different pair already. I told her that the ones I had were only the second pair. I believe that this will show up in the rehearsal report as, “Vinnie is creating a problem.” Am I supposed to work in shoes that cut my feet? Beau came in at the end of the conversation and said that I need to make an appointment with Tony because my habit didn’t fit right also.

I still had challenges with some lines. As with most actors who are learning a script, it always seems like when you finally learn one part, you somehow forget the part you already knew!

I feel like I’m walking on eggshells around here. I am so tired of having to defend myself for every little thing. I feel as if I will never get a “fair shake,” as long as I am here at UNO. Still, I must believe that this will only make me stronger for the world of acting.

Thursday, October 29, 2015

Today we ran the complete show, with tech. Rehearsal began with notes from Beau. My notes included:

- On “I was hoping that whatever her sentence is...” – I should try to negotiate with Dr. Livingstone. I will attempt to bargain with her.

- On “Bullshit” I should pull away and turn towards stage left. I will do.

- On “What the Hell does the Catholic Church have to do with you?” I should deliver this line with more intensity. I will make this more direct and in a lower tone, so as to show more intensity.
• On “Trailing Clouds of Glory” I should get “lost” in the thought. I will use this opportunity to think of how good God has been to me.

Friday, October 30, 2015

Today I met with Tony at 10:00am about costume issues. I told him how my habit keeps falling off because it pinches at the top. I also mentioned that I still needed shoes. He told me that my personal shoes that I was wearing, were fine for the show. He then made slight adjustments to the habit, and told me to see if it worked.

Meghan and I rehearsed at 11:00. We started with Act II and went over the scenes several times. We finished up around 1:15 or 1:30m, and then made plans to meet up tomorrow (Saturday) at 2:00.

I spoke with Diane today. I told her that I still did not feel comfortable asking Beau any questions, because his reactions always seem negative. Once again she reminded me that from her observations, and Kevin’s, it was evident that many things were exaggerated in the reports, and that I should continue doing my best.

Meghan said that she heard me in the bathroom throwing up the other day. I am sure she probably mentioned this to Beau or Sam. I still did not get any well-wishes or encouragement.

Saturday, October 31, 2015
Today Meghan and I met at 2:30 to go over lines again. I decided that the only thing I would concentrate on all day, were my lines. I also recorded my scenes on a tape recorder, with me reading the lines of the other actors. As mentioned, I have done this before -- especially for parts that I was asked to do at the last minute. I find it very helpful. I even listen to the recordings, as I go to sleep. Somehow it seeps into my memory. There was no rehearsal today.

Sunday, November 1, 2015

Tonight I concentrated on working out the kinks with some of the notes that Beau gave me. From this point on, my journal will probably sound the same: Notes from the director, and how I will address the issues.

This time, my notes included:

- On “I’m not a virgin, Doctor,” -- I said this too harsh. I will remember that I am educating her. I will try associating Mother Miriam to Julia Roberts in Pretty Woman, on this line. That way, I will deliver the line with humor.

- On “It might please you to know that I was a failure as a wife and mother,” – I need to punish myself more; I say this too easy. I will think of how painful it is to lose a husband, and how it hurts me that my children won’t acknowledge me.

Today we also worked with the blood packets for the first time. The blood was too thick and sticky. We will have to rehearse more with the packets in order to get it right.

Monday, November 2, 2015
Tonight was a dress rehearsal. We were to be ready and in costume by 8:00. I arrived at 6:10, so I could be especially relaxed and prepared. I wanted to get dressed early, so I could take some pictures of myself, to put on invitations. Overall I think I did a pretty good job with my lines, except for one part, where Meghan and I had a silent moment on stage. It was where I say the line, “Then why are you so obsessed with her?” This seems to be one of hardest lines for me to remember. Why? I don’t know. Eventually we moved on and finished the play. I nailed it on the second run.

I was a little late on one of the entrances during the first run because I couldn’t find the opening to the curtains backstage in the dark. I asked Kevin and Diane to put some glow-in-dark tape on the curtain so we could see. They ended up using a clamp to hold the curtain open. That worked out much better during the second run.

Once again, we worked with the blood packets that Sister Agnes has to burst during the final scene. Diane and Kevin were there to work out any problems with the packets. The blood was still too thick, and very sticky.

Earlier today I had stopped by the Sisters of the Holy Family to speak with Mother Superior General, Greta Jupiter. I had hoped that she would give me some useful information on the lifestyle of nuns to help build my character. Unfortunately, she was not there.

Tuesday, November 3, 2015
Today I stayed on campus after my classes to make sure I would be on time for rehearsal. I ate in the campus dining room and was in the dressing room before the 6:30 call time.

Before rehearsal Beau gave me a note that in Scene II I sat down too long. I wasn’t sure of exactly where in the scene he was speaking of so I asked him to tell me. First he said it was at the end of Scene II. But when I asked if it was in the final scene, he said ”No.” Then he gave Jenny a look as if to say, “See what I have to go through?” Again, I guess I was asking too many questions. I feel like I have to watch everything I do, and now I can’t ask any questions! Beau also has a very bad habit of sighing really heavily while we are running the play. It’s very rude and offensive. It gives me, and I’m sure the other actors, the impression that either we are doing something wrong, or that he doesn’t have any confidence in our skills. Maybe he doesn’t want to be here.

Today I discovered that on the line, “Then she’s a Goddamned Lie!” in Act 2, the best reaction for Mother Superior was one of shock, amazement, and sheer panic, after realizing that she actually said that. In other words, her reactions would be, “Huh? ! Did I just say that?!?” Then, “Oh, My God!” And finally, “What did I do?! I took the name of the Lord in vain!” To me, this scene is one of the most powerful scenes in the play. As I thought about it, I thought that this line reflects all of Mother Superior’s humanity, her frustration, her sensitivity, her concern for Agnes, her regrets, and her doubts about God and herself. I believe that this line is meant to be delivered as a total knee-jerk, gut reaction.

Wednesday, November 4, 2015
Tonight I almost lost my cool when Sam asked me if I was listening to headphones while I was on stage rehearsing. Her actual words were, “Maybe the reason why you are having problems with your habit is because of your headphones. Are you listening to headphones during rehearsal? Because Jenny said…” I cut her off before she could finish that statement. I told her, “No, I am not listening to the headphones during my scenes. I listen to them when the other scenes were going on. I have no intention of performing with them! Also, Jenny is not the director!” At that point, I had to take a few deep, deep breaths, and step out for a minute. I couldn’t believe that she had asked me that. And then to say that Jenny told her! Not only that, it seemed so contrived. It was almost as if Sam was just waiting for the opportunity to say something about my headphones, in front of Beau. My “few deep, deep breaths” turned into a bathroom break.

What can I learn from this? As an actor, it is always good to have a few “Steam-Stoppers” in your pocket. These are tricks that you can use to deflate a situation, or calm yourself, when you really want to go “off” on someone. Deep breathing exercises are always good. But removing yourself from the situation and reciting a positive affirmation is sometimes required.

When I returned to rehearsal, I asked Beau if I could say the line with “tiny bits of light” that he had removed from the script when I was having trouble remembering it. But now I know it and want to say it! He didn’t say anything. I plan on saying it. He did say that he liked the way I delivered the line, “What the hell does the Catholic church have to do with you?” He happened to arrive when Meghan and I were rehearsing that particular scene. He gave me a
note to watch Agnes as she leaves in the scene where we are singing. That way, I will show my concern for her.

Thursday, November 5, 2015

SHOW # 1

Today I stopped by the Sisters of the Holy Family Convent again. Mother Superior General, Sister Greta, was not there again. I was able to contact her by phone. I asked if she, and the other sisters, would be interested in coming to the play. I had to remind her of the plot. She said that she had remembered the controversy it caused when the movie first came out. She said that they would not be interested in attending. They do not encourage a life, other than the life of chastity, that they had vowed to live by. I don’t know why I thought the Sisters would come! As I think about it, they probably would get a lot of questions from other audience members.

Tonight was the opening of the play. Overall, I think we did okay. There were a few missed or “re-arranged” lines, but we got through it. The ice has been broken! I am thankful that Meghan was able to cover for any mistakes that I had made. I hope I was able to do the same for her. I never talk about Natalie remembering her lines because she seemed to know them backwards and forwards when she was given the role. Meghan and I were once reprimanded by Beau because we were not up to speed with her. Going over our lines as we dressed helped. We were all able to “rescue” each other, if needed --which is what a good cast does. I am sure that we will just get better with time.

Friday, November 6, 2015

SHOW # 2
Tonight was our second and final show for this weekend. To an actor, there is always something that he or she can work on in the quest towards perfection. For me, it is knowing my lines without thinking about them. I am still thinking before I speak. I guess the only way to stop this is to rehearse them over and over again until I know them backwards and forwards.

I think we all were a little nervous tonight, because The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KC ACTF) reviewing committee was in the audience, evaluating the play. This is an organization that promotes college productions, and makes recommendations for qualifying shows to attend the Regional Festival.

Anyway, everything went fine. I remembered all of my entrances and sound cues. I had no problems with wardrobe. My singing was great. Even the blood packets worked; however, I find myself having to physically attempt to remove the packets from the stage if they fall off during the final scene. Because I am already on the floor with Agnes, I simply make my way over to the packet then go to stage left to toss them off. The blood still is really sticky, but knowing that it is okay with Beau and Tony (the costume designer) that it is okay if we smear it on our collars, relieves some of the anxiety. I’m happy to know that, because I think the more blood the audience sees, the more real the effect.

Thursday, November 12, 2015

Tonight we had a line-through rehearsal, to refresh our memories of our lines, before our next show on Saturday. It went really well. We zipped through the lines like true professionals. Even Samantha the stage manager said that it was the best line-through that we
had ever had. Rehearsal lasted for approximately one hour. I will utilize my time to study my lines.

Saturday, November 14, 2015

Tonight’s show went okay. For some reason it felt like I had peanut butter in my mouth, and a few of my lines came out somewhat distorted – at least that’s what I thought. My actions and movements also did not seem true to me. Maybe it was because they came so naturally, that I didn’t actually think about them as I did them. The audience didn’t seem to mind or notice, so maybe it wasn’t as bad as I thought.

I still don’t think that I’m getting enough blood on me at the end of the show. In my opinion, this would read much better to the audience. I had to pick up blood packets again. I can count on at least one coming off each night. Once again, I inconspicuously put my hand over it and tossed it off to the side of the stage.

At the end of the show, Agnes, Dr. Livingston and myself were really, really crying. I know that this went over well with the audience. I notice that I tend to cry the most after Agnes sings the last stanza of her song where she is singing about Charlie, the man who raped her. She says he, “Gets his girl some candy...” To me, it’s the realization that Agnes was duped into thinking that Charlie was, or could have been, God. That really gets to me.

We had a fewer people in the audience than I would have expected for a Saturday show. This makes me wonder about how much advertising and promotion was done for this production. I know that I personally did not like the poster. It was a cross with wings on it and a snake -- like the kind you see on a medical logo. The poster was in dark blue hues. I think that
the poster would have been more effective if it showed the three cast members in one of the final scenes of the play.

Sunday, November 15, 2015

SHOW # 4

Today’s show went great! Some of my family members came to see the show – my son Paris, and my uncles Eddie and Ernest came. After the show Ernest mentioned to me that he had recalled an incident in New Orleans where some nuns were accused of getting pregnant and burying their babies! I was shocked! I intend to research this further.

Before the show I requested an iron so that I could iron my bib. To me, Mother Superior should always be impeccable and should definitely not have wrinkles. The stage manager Samantha, and the assistant stage manager Julia, questioned why I needed an iron. They made me feel as if it was an unnecessary request. Eventually they got one for me.

As an actor, I believe that it is important to do anything and everything that is true to your character. From the time you wake up in the morning until the time you go to bed, there should be some evidence of your character. Whether it is the way your character walks, talks, or combs her hair, there should be some proof that you are constantly developing your character.

For the final shows, I will do my best to devote at least two hours before the show to transform mentally, spiritually, and physically into Mother Miriam Ruth - Mother Superior. I will meditate on what Mother Superior has been through in her life to make her become the woman and leader that she is today. I will think of how Agnes’ pregnancy affects me, and I will
remind myself that I need Dr. Livingston on my side -- for Agnes’ sake, as well as for mine. I will become Mother Miriam Ruth, Mother Superior.

Thursday, November 19, 2015  SHOW # 5

This is our final week for the show! I wasn’t sure what kind of crowd we would have, but it turned out to be pretty good. Earlier today I had to film a scene in John’s Acting for the Camera class, so it caused a momentary distraction.

Once again, the show went well. I remembered my lines and my actions felt even more true and real to me (the actor), and to me the character, Mother Superior. The hard work of researching my character and finding discoveries during the rehearsal process proved successful and worthwhile.

Friday, November 20, 2015  The Final Show!!!  SHOW # 6

Tonight’s show was Great. I felt as if my lines flowed and my actions were uninhibited. I felt that I gave my character variety and movement that was organic. I really think that the entire cast gave a stellar performance. The show was filmed, so I am particularly grateful for that.

Tonight the blood packs worked well and I got blood on me, which was nice. Everyone who I have met after the shows, has been truly gracious and appreciative of our performances. As with any role, the more you rehearse and study the script, the more discoveries you will find, and the more likely you will be able to say, at the opening of your show, “I did it! I did my best! And it paid off!”
The purpose of the KCACTF is to inspire directors, producers, cast and crew members, to consider every aspect of the final production, so that future shows can be better. These minor (or major) observances could possibly affect the overall quality of the show and affect future reviews. Because the representatives have no vested interest in the production, they are able to give unbiased critiques of the overall quality of the production.

At the conclusion of the first week of the run of Agnes of God, two representatives from The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF), Pia Wyatt and Michael Boudewyns, evaluated the UNO production to determine its production value, and to decide if it would qualify to compete at a regional festival. This process included reviewing individual performances, as well as the venue, lighting, sound, and technical aspects of the show. The evaluation began as soon as the reviewers entered the UNO Performing Arts Center, and did not end until the very last audience member had left the venue.

It was very interesting to compare the KCACTF’s findings with my own notes. Just a few of the reviewer comments included:

- Sound designers (Beau Bratcher and Diane Baas) were not mentioned in the program.
- Starkness of house lights were “Unsexy.” House lights should go to half before beginning the show.
• Hoover’s comment during the introduction of the show, on the size of the audience being
  “Small but mighty” was Great!
• Website not updated.
• Poster didn’t match production.
• Program Cover should show the production.
• Liked the “Angel” (stage design).
• Convent music was great, with women’s voices
• Meagan’s light off stage should be stronger
• Meg’s costume should have looked more professional.

Michael –
• Dr.’s costume didn’t look professional.
• Too many things happening at one time -- Needs to be choreographed
• Hard time understanding
• Moving furniture too distracting; attention not on vital information Dr. is giving. Dr’s
  head is down while moving furniture.
• Smoking – Should use electronic cigarettes. Smoke is unhealthy and a distraction to
  audience.
• Cigarette jokes were not funny.
• Surprise that in Act II there was no smoking.
• The actress playing Agnes had a nose ring.
• Dr. Livingstone should put hair back so that audience could see her face.
• Silhouette on Marie (Blackout too fast).
• Stage positions - Too many side angles.
• Staging was not theatrical.
• Meg in shadow; stand in twilight.
• Need to use architecture of theater.
• Each scene with Mother and Agnes should have been lighted differently.
• Stage entrances should on the same side.
• Agnes should totally reveal hands with Stigmata.
• Blood packets – Need dripping blood.
• Tori Amos music for Act II did not match show.
• Actors needed to respond to echo on last lines of script.
• Line stumbling,
• Hypnotism – no tension; too fast; not specific enough

Pia
• Work diagonals(?)
• Tempo got slow at the end of Act I

Michael
• From storytelling point of view – No furniture needed
  Play seemed to be about sitting and switching up. Furniture is just a resting point.

Pia
• Into intermission, Meg shouldn’t have to move furniture.

Michael
• Moving furniture just a little is not enough.
• Stage focus (???)
• Rosary – Don’t let Jesus hit the floor.

Pia

• Meg didn’t need spotlight at end.
• Curtain Call - Felt we should have been ourselves, not the characters.
• Said we should all do curtain call together since our roles were equally important.
• Intermission was not clear.

I can honestly say, that I agreed with everything that the KCACTF said, and did, in regards to the UNO production of *Agnes of God*, with the exception of one thing – the timing of the evaluation.

Still, I was so impressed the forum and the thorough evaluation of *Agnes of God*, that I decided to attend the forum for the play *Two Rooms* -- a play that ran in conjunction with *Agnes of God*. 
PRODUCTION AND SELF EVALUATION

Thomas Edison once said, “I have not failed, I have only found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”

While it is every actor’s intention to put forth his or her best efforts and have an excellent run of a show, undoubtedly there will always be obstacles, both anticipated and unexpected, that will affect the overall quality and production value of a show, and one’s personal performance. In the case of Agnes of God, I wish that I could say that my experiences were always positive, and that the run of a show was always pleasant. However, from the initial line reading of Agnes of God, I knew that this was going to be by far the most difficult and challenging experience of my theatrical career. It was also going to be unlike any other production that I had ever been involved with. As mentioned, this was primarily due to the challenges I faced with David Hoover’s attempt to dismiss me from the UNO M.F.A. Theater program. As a result, I experienced extreme tension and anxiety throughout the rehearsal period and the run of the show. I did not feel the freedom to fully express myself during discussions with the cast and the director, nor with my thesis committee. I also did not feel free to experiment or try new, or learned acting techniques, for fear that my actions would be misconstrued (and ultimately reported in the nightly rehearsal reports) as unprofessional or problematic. As an actor, it is an awful feeling to feel stifled and inhibited. I definitely believe that this affected my overall ability to add even more dimension to my character of Mother Superior, by tapping into my character’s nuances and potential. Like a caged cricket, who wanted to leap upwards and outwards each night, only to be netted within inches of the cage hatch, I felt trapped and inaccessible to my discoveries.
While I felt that the final/end product of Agnes of God was very good, personally, I believe that the UNO production lacked a cohesion that could have been easily achieved, had the director, Beau Bratcher, taken the time to support the cast, through encouraging words, more creative input, and a sense of actually being present. Even when I was very ill one night, and asked to be dismissed early (after “spewing my guts out” in the ladies dressing room), Beau showed no sign of concern, but rather, gave me a look of disgust and anguish. I never received any words of encouragement throughout the entire run of Agnes of God, which would have definitely helped in learning the blocking and lines in this play.

While dealing with a difficult stage manager or director is always a possibility in the field of acting, one positive thing that resulted from the unfair disadvantage that I experienced during the UNO production of Agnes of God, was my ability to draw from the knowledge and techniques that I uncovered in my studies of Sanford Meisner, Kristin Linkleter, and other masters of theater and performance. I now know of tangible resources that can help me, if ever I reach my tolerance climax, and want to give up or give in. These skills can help me go just a little bit further, when all else fails -- an asset which will definitely prove useful in the field of acting.

In acting, as in life, there will always be people who will try to ruffle your feathers. Likewise, there will always be unfair circumstances that will challenge your ability to showcase your very best. But fortunately, there will undoubtedly, also be someone in your corner who will appreciate your talent and unique acting methods and style; Someone who will not simply rely
on the biased opinions of others, but rather, take the time to actually evaluate your circumstances or situation, before passing judgment; And someone who will help to make your experience not just tolerable, but possibly even pleasurable. I had the pleasure of working with some of these very people. These academics, which included some very good instructors and mentors, inspired me to do my very best, and never give up despite the situation, or how it could potentially turn out. These people included my thesis committee -- Diane Baas, Kevin Griffith and Erik Hansen, and former UNO M.F.A. Theater graduates John Neisler and Sam Malone. To them I say “Thank you!” And, “I appreciate you!”

In regards to playing the role of Mother Superior, I would hope to one day reprise the role, or possibly play the role of Dr. Livingston. I feel that the knowledge and understanding that I have gained through my research about Catholicism and the rituals and practices of nuns, that I would be able to bring even more essence and purity to my portrayal of either character.
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VITA

Venita “Vinnie” Matthews was born and raised in New Orleans, LA. She has performed at a number of playhouses throughout the city. She was nominated for a 2013 Big Easy Award for Best Actress for her role as Sister Margaret Alexander, in James Baldwin’s *The Amen Corner*, staged at The Anthony Bean Community Theater. Also known as “Lady Chameleon,” Vinnie attributes her ability to fully immerse herself into a character due to her background and experience in a variety of fields -- She was once known as, “The Hot Dog Lady,” while vending gourmet hot dogs out of the back of her truck; She is a certified water aerobics and swim instructor; and she served in the United States Marine Corps (USMC), where she earned a meritorious promotion for Excellence and Attention to Detail. She has also worked in the Hospitality, Medical, and Finance Industries. In 1996, she graduated Summa Cum Laude from Southern University at New Orleans with a BA degree in Psychology, which she believes, helps her to add dimension to her characters. She is the proud mother of Paris Djabril Matthews, who graduated from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 2015, in Sports Management. She is the daughter of Christine Matthews, a recipient of the Rockerfellow Foundation Fellowship Award and the Orleans Parish School Board Teacher of the Year Award. She currently resides in New Orleans with her three dogs: “Ms. Stella Mignon Faget”, “Ms. Zou-Zou Lizette Pichon,” and “Ms. Pixy LaRoux Coutille.” She also has one cat: “Ms. Nanette ‘Ninny’ Lamour Cheri.” She aspires to continue pursuing her acting career, and one day earn the lead role in a Broadway play, and in Film.
THE CHARACTERS

DOCTOR MARTHA LIVINGSTONE (pronounced "Li-ving-stun")
MOTHER MIRIAM RUTH
AGNES

The play is best served, I believe, by a stage free of all props, furniture and set pieces. The scenes flow one into another, without pause. Characters appear and disappear, and may even be present onstage when not in a particular scene. Because it is a play of the mind, and mirrors, it is a play of light and shadows.

All parentheses in the dialogue indicate lines that are cut off or overlapped before the parentheses begin.

Throughout the evening, the doctor is never without a cigarette, except in her monologues and one or two other moments indicated in the script, until the end of the first act, after which she never smokes again.

—John Prentice
"... why do you worry? What good would it do you if I told you she is indeed a saint? I cannot make saints, nor can the Pope. We can only recognize saints when the plainest evidence shows them to be saintly. If you think her a saint, she is a saint to you. What more do you ask? That is what we call the reality of the soul; you are foolish to demand the agreement of the world as well...!

"...But it is the miracles that concern me. What you say takes no account of the miracles."

"Oh, miracles! They happen everywhere. They are conditional... Miracles are things that people cannot explain... Miracles depend much on time, and place, and what we know and do not know... Life is too great a miracle for us to make so much fuss about petty little reversals of what we pompously assume to be the natural order... Who is she? That is what you must discover... and you must find your answer in psychological truth, not in objective truth... And while you are searching, get on with your own life and accept the possibility that it may be purchased at the price of him and that this may be God's plan for you and her."

ROBERTSON DAVIES
Fifth Business
ACT I
Scene 1

(Darkness. A beautiful soprano voice is heard singing.)

Christe eleison. Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.

(The lights softly rise on Doctor Martha Livingstone)

DOCTOR: I remember when I was a child I went to see Garbo's Camille, oh, at least five or six times. And each time I sincerely believed she would not die of consumption. I sat in the theater breathless with expectation and hope, and each time I was disappointed, and each time I promised to return, in search of a happy ending. Because I believed in the existence of an alternate last reel. Locked away in some forgotten vault in Hollywood, Greta Garbo survives consumption, oncoming trains, and firing squads. Every time. I still want to believe in alternate reels. I still want to believe that somewhere, somehow, there is a happy ending for every story. It all depends on how thoroughly you look for it. And how deeply you need it.

(Silence)
The baby was discovered in a wastepaper basket with the umbilical cord knotted around its neck. The mother was found unconscious by the door to her room, suffering from excessive loss of blood. She was indicted for manslaughter and...
brought to trial. Her case was assigned to me, Doctor Martha Livingstone, as court psychiatrist, to determine whether she was legally sane. I wanted to help... (this young woman, believe me.)

ACT I
Scene 2

MOTHER: Doctor Livingstone, I presume? (Mother laughs at her own joke.) I'm Mother Miriam Ruth, in charge of the convent where Sister Agnes is living.

DOCTOR: How do you do.

MOTHER: You needn't call me Mother, if you don't wish.

DOCTOR: Thank you.

MOTHER: Most people find it uncomfortable.

DOCTOR: Well...

MOTHER: I'm afraid the word brings up the most unpleasant connotations in this day and age... So everything.

DOCTOR: Yes.

MOTHER:... or it forces a familiarity that most are not willing to accept, right off the bat.

DOCTOR: I see.

MOTHER: So you may call me Sister. I've brought Sister Agnes for her appointment. They're allowing her to stay at the convent until the trial.
DOCTOR: Yes, I . . . (know.)

MOTHER: And I wanted to offer my help.

DOCTOR: Well, thank you, Sister, but I haven’t even met Sister Agnes yet. If there’s anything unclear after I speak to her, I’d . . . be happy to talk to you.

MOTHER: You must have tons of questions.

DOCTOR: I do, but I’d like to ask them of Agnes. (smile slightly)

MOTHER: She can’t help you there.

DOCTOR: What do you mean?

MOTHER: She’s blocked it out, forgotten it. I’m the only one who can answer those questions.

DOCTOR: How well do you know her?

MOTHER: Oh, I know Sister Agnes very well. You see, we’re a contemplative order, not a teaching one. Our ranks are quite small. I was chosen to be Mother Superior about four years ago, just prior to her coming to us. So I think I’m more than qualified to answer any questions you might have. Would you mind not smoking?

DOCTOR: Yes, I’m sorry. I should have asked if it bothered you. (The doctor does not put out the cigarette, but waves the smoke in another direction)

MOTHER: Never offer an ashtray; a drink, isn’t that what they say?

DOCTOR: You were a smoker?
DOCTOR: Who found the baby?

MOTHER: I did. I'd given Sister Agnes permission to retire early that night. She wasn't feeling very well. I went to her room a short while later . . .

DOCTOR: The nurses have separate rooms?

MOTHER: Yes. And I found her unconscious by the door. I tried to revive her. When I couldn't I had one of the other sisters call for an ambulance. It was then that I found . . . the wicker basket.

DOCTOR: Found?

MOTHER: It was hidden. Against the wall, under the bed.

DOCTOR: Why did you think to look there?

MOTHER: I was cleaning. There was a lot of blood.

DOCTOR: Were you alone when you found it?

MOTHER: No. Another sister, Sister Margaret, was with me. It was she who called the police.

DOCTOR: Did you find a diary, letters?

MOTHER: I don't understand.

DOCTOR: Something to clue you in on the identity of the father.

MOTHER: Oh, I see. No, I found nothing.

DOCTOR: Who could it have been?

MOTHER: I haven't a clue.

DOCTOR: What men had access to her?

MOTHER: None, as far as I know.

DOCTOR: Was there a doctor?

MOTHER: Yes.

DOCTOR: A man?

MOTHER: Yes, but I told you she never . . . (I saw him.)

DOCTOR: Was there a priest?

MOTHER: Yes, but . . . (I don't see . . .)

DOCTOR: What's his name?

MOTHER: Father Marshall. But I don't see him as a candidate. He's very dry.

DOCTOR: Could there have been anyone else?

MOTHER: Obviously there was. (They left to go to the French Quarter."

DOCTOR: Then why didn't you care to find out who?

MOTHER: Believe me, I cared very much at the time. I did everything short of asking Agnes, and still . . . (I have no idea how she got that child.)

DOCTOR: Why didn't you ask her?

MOTHER: If she doesn't even remember the birth, do you think she'd admit to the conception? Besides, I really don't see what this has to do with her.

DOCTOR: Oh, come on, Sister.
MOTHER: The important fact is that somebody gave her that baby. Doctor. That we know. But that happened twelve months ago. I fail to see how the identity of that somebody has anything to do with the trial.

DOCTOR: Why do you think that?

MOTHER: Don't ask me those questions, dear. I'm not the patient.

DOCTOR: But I'm the doctor. I'm the one who decides what is or is not important here.

MOTHER: Yes.

DOCTOR: Then why are you avoiding my question?

MOTHER: I'm not . . . (avoiding.)

DOCTOR: Who was the father?

MOTHER: I don't know.

(Silence)

DOCTOR: I'd like to see her now.

MOTHER: Doctor, I don't know how to say this politely, but I don't approve of you. Not you personally, but—

DOCTOR: The science of psychiatry.

MOTHER: Yes. I want to ask you to deal with Agnes as speedily and as easily as possible. She's a fragile person. She won't hold up under any sort of cross-examination.

DOCTOR: Sister, I'm not with the Inquisition.

MOTHER: And I'm not from the Middle Ages. I know what you are. You're a surgeon. I don't want that mind cut open.

DOCTOR: Is there something in there you don't . . . (want me to see?)

MOTHER: I want you to be careful, that's all.

DOCTOR: And quick?

MOTHER: Yes.

DOCTOR: Why?

MOTHER: Because Agnes is different.

DOCTOR: From other nun? Yes, I can see that. She's delicate, that's true.

MOTHER: From other people. She's special.

DOCTOR: In what way?

MOTHER: She's gifted. She's blessed.

DOCTOR: What do you mean? (Agnes is heard sobbing)

AGNES: Gloria in excelsis Deo . . .

MOTHER: There.

AGNES: Et in terra Pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.

MOTHER: She has the voice of an angel.

MOTHERS: Laudamus te. Benedictus es.
DOCTOR: Does she often sing when she's alone?
MOTHER: Always.
AGNES: Adoramus te.
MOTHER: She's embarrassed to sing in front of others.
AGNES: Glorificamus te.
DOCTOR: Who taught her?
MOTHER: I don't know.
AGNES: Gratias agimus tibi propter magnum gloriam tuam.
Dominum Deus.
Rea coelestis.
Deus pater omnipotens.
Domini Fili unigenitus
Jesu Christus.
MOTHER: (During above) When I first heard her sing, I was thrilled. And I couldn't connect that voice with the simple, happy child I knew. And she was happy, Doctor. But that voice belongs to someone else.
AGNES: Dominus Deus,
Agnes Dei,
Filius Parvit.
Quia tollis peccata mundi,
Misere nobis.
DOCTOR: Would you send her in, please?
MOTHER: You will be careful, won't you?
ACT I
Scene 3

(Agnes continues to sing into this scene.)

AGNES: Quis tollis peccata mundi
Suscipe deprecationem nostrum,
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
Misere nobis.
Quemiam in solo sanctus,
Tu solus Dominus,
Tu solus Altissimus,
Jesus Christe,
Coe Spei Spiritus
In gloria Dei Patris.

DOCTOR: (Speaking over Agnes) There was a lynch mob that came before a judge who accused them of hanging a man without a fair and objective trial. “Oh, your Honor,” the leader said, “we listened very fairly and objectively to every word he had to say. Then we hung the son of a bitch.”

I wanted to maintain my objectivity, but Mother Miriam wouldn’t believe that. Oh, she couldn’t have known about Marie but she must have suspected something. Marie was my younger sister, who decided she had a vocation to the convent when she was fifteen. So my mother sent her off without a second thought, and I never saw her again. I received a message late one night that Marie had died of
acute, and unattended, appendicitis because her Mother Superior wouldn't send her to a hospital. *(She laughs)*

Well, no, I guess at heart I couldn't be very fair and objective, could I? But I tried.

*(Silence)*

I remember waiting to view Marie's body in a little convent room, and staring at those spotless walls and floors and thinking, my God, what a metaphor for their minds. And that's when I realized that my religion, my Christ, is this.

The mind. Everything I do not understand in this world is contained in these few cubic inches. Within this shell of skin and bone and blood I have the secret to absolutely everything. I look at a tree and I think, isn't it wonderful that I have created something so green. God isn't out there, He's in here. God is you. Or rather you are God. Mother Miriam couldn't understand that, of course. Oh, she reminded me so much of my own mother. And as for Agnes, well... *(just hearing her voice...)* *(The doctor is interrupted by Agnes' appearance)*

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**ACT 1**  
**Scene 4**

**AGNES:** Hello.

**DOCTOR:** Hello. I'm Doctor Livingston. I've been asked to talk to you. May I?

**AGNES:** Yes.

**DOCTOR:** You have a lovely voice.

**AGNES:** No I don't.

**DOCTOR:** I just heard you.

**AGNES:** That wasn't me.

**DOCTOR:** Was it my receptionist? You saw her, didn't you? The tall woman with the purple hair who looks like an ostrich?

*(Agnes smiles)*

That's not very nice to say, but she does, doesn't she?

**AGNES:** Yes.

**DOCTOR:** She wasn't singing now, was she? I remember one day, she sang and broke a patient's eyeglasses.

*(Agnes laughs)*

You're very pretty, Agnes.
AGNES: No I'm not.
DOCTOR: Hasn't anyone ever told you that before?
AGNES: I don’t know.
DOCTOR: Then I’m telling you now. You're very pretty. And you have a lovely voice.
AGNES: Let’s talk about something else.
DOCTOR: What would you like to talk about?
AGNES: I don’t know.
DOCTOR: Anything. First thing comes to your mind.
AGNES: God. But there’s nothing to say about God.
DOCTOR: Second thing comes to your mind.
AGNES: Love.
DOCTOR: Why love?
AGNES: I don’t know.
(Silence)
DOCTOR: Have you ever loved someone, Agnes?
AGNES: God.
DOCTOR: I mean have you ever loved another human?
AGNES: Oh, yes.
DOCTOR: Who is that?
AGNES: Everyone.
DOCTOR: Who in particular?
AGNES: Right now?
DOCTOR: Yes.
AGNES: I love you.
(Silence)
DOCTOR: But have you ever loved a man? Other than Jesus Christ.
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: Who?
AGNES: Oh, there are so many.
DOCTOR: Well, do you love Father Marshall?
AGNES: Oh, yes.
DOCTOR: Do you think He loves you?
AGNES: Oh, I know he does.
DOCTOR: He told you that?
AGNES: No, but when I look into his eyes I can see.
DOCTOR: You’ve been alone together.
AGNES: Oh, yes.
DOCTOR: Often?
AGNES: At least once a week.

DOCTOR: (Sharing Agnes' joy) Did you like that?

AGNES: Oh, yes.

DOCTOR: Where do you meet?

AGNES: In the confessional.

(A beat)

DOCTOR: I see. Do you ever meet with him... (outside the confessional?)

AGNES: You want to talk about the baby, don't you?

DOCTOR: Would you like to talk about it?

AGNES: I never saw any baby. I think they made it up.

DOCTOR: Who?

AGNES: The police.

DOCTOR: Why should they?

AGNES: I don't know.

DOCTOR: Do you remember the night they said it came?

AGNES: No. I was sick.

DOCTOR: How were you sick?

AGNES: Something I ate.

DOCTOR: Did it hurt?

AGNES: Yes.

DOCTOR: Where?

AGNES: Down there.

DOCTOR: What did you do?

AGNES: I went to my room.

DOCTOR: What happened there?

AGNES: I fell asleep.

DOCTOR: In the middle of all that pain?

AGNES: Yes.

DOCTOR: But where did the baby come from?

AGNES: What baby?

DOCTOR: The baby they made up.

AGNES: From their heads.

DOCTOR: Is that where they say it came from?

AGNES: No, they say it came from the wastepaper basket.

DOCTOR: Where did it come from before that?

AGNES: From God.
AGNES OF GOD

DOCTOR: After God, before the wastepaper basket.
AGNES: I don't understand.
DOCTOR: How are babies born?
AGNES: Don't you know?
DOCTOR: Yes, I think I do, but I want you to ... (tell me.)
AGNES: I don't know what you're talking about! You want to talk about the baby, everybody wants to talk about the baby, but I never saw the baby, so I can't talk about the baby, because I don't believe in the baby!
DOCTOR: Then let's talk about something else.
AGNES: No! I'm tired of talking! I've been talking for weeks! And nobody believes me when I tell them anything! Nobody listens to me!
DOCTOR: I'll listen. That's my job.
AGNES: But I don't want to have to answer any more questions.
DOCTOR: Then how would you like to ask them?
AGNES: What do you mean?
DOCTOR: Just like that. You ask, I'll answer.
AGNES: Anything?
DOCTOR: Anything.
(A beat)

ACT V

AGNES: What's your real name?
DOCTOR: Martha Louise Lifeground.
AGNES: Are you married?
DOCTOR: No.
AGNES: Would you like to be?
DOCTOR: Not at the moment, no.
AGNES: Do you have children?
DOCTOR: No.
AGNES: Would you like some?
DOCTOR: I can't have them anymore.
AGNES: Why?
DOCTOR: Well ... I stopped menstruating.
AGNES: Why do you smoke?
DOCTOR: Does it bother you?
AGNES: No questions.
DOCTOR: Smoking is an obsession with me. I started smoking when my mother died. She was an obsession, too. I suppose I'll stop smoking when I become obsessed with something else.
(Silence)
I bet you're sorry you asked. Any more questions?
AGNES: One.
DOCTOR: What's that?

AGNES: Where do you think babies come from?

DOCTOR: From their mothers and fathers, of course. Before that, I don't know.

AGNES: Well, I think they come from when an angel kisses the mother's cheek and whispers into her ear. That makes the good babies start to grow. Bad babies come from when a father angers someone in down there, and they grow and grow until they come out down there. I don't know where good babies come out.

(Silence)

And you can't tell the difference except that bad babies cry a lot and make their fathers go away and their mothers get very ill and die sometimes. Mummy wasn't very happy when she died and I think she went to hell because everything I see her she looks like she just stepped out of a hot shower. And I'm never sure if it's her or the Lady who tells me things. They fight over me all the time. The Lady I saw when I was ten. I was lying on the grass looking at the sun and the sun became a cloud and the cloud became the Lady, and she told me she would talk to me and then her feet began to bleed and I saw there were holes in her hands and in her side and I tried to catch the blood as it fell from the sky but I couldn't see any more because my eyes hurt because there were big black spots in front of them. And she tells me things like—right now she's crying "Marie! Marie!" but I don't know what that means. And she uses me to sing. It's as if she's throwing a big book through the air and it catches me under my ribs and tries to pull me up but I can't move because Mummy is holding my feet and all I can do is sing in her voice, it's the Lady's voice, God loves you!

(Silence)

God loves you.

(Silence)
ACT I
Scene 5

MOTHER: Well, what do you think? Is she totally bananas or merely slightly off center? Or maybe she’s perfectly sane and just a very good liar. What have you decided?

DOCTOR: I haven’t yet. What about you?

MOTHER: Me? (Really? You’re asking me?)

DOCTOR: Yes. You know her better than I do. What’s your opinion?

MOTHER: Well... I believe that she’s... not crazy. Nor is she lying.

DOCTOR: But how could she have a child and know nothing of sex and birth?

MOTHER: Because she’s an innocent. She’s a state that hasn’t been touched, except by God. There’s no place for those facts in her mind.

DOCTOR: Oh, bullshit.

MOTHER: In her case it isn’t. Her mother kept her home almost all of the time. She’s had very little schooling. I don’t
MOTHER: She didn't. This is manslaughter, not murder. She did not accidentally kill that baby. I don't know what you'd call it—whatever psychologists call it, whatever medical people call it—but she was unconscious at the time. That's why she's innocent. She honestly doesn't remember. She'd lost a lot of blood, she'd passed out by the time I'd found her...
DOCTOR: This was before her pregnancy?
MOTHER: Almost two years before.
DOCTOR: How long did this go on?
MOTHER: I don't know. I think it was about two weeks before it was reported to me.
DOCTOR: Why did she do this?
MOTHER: She refused to explain at first. She was brought before me—sounds like a tribunal, doesn't it—and when we were alone she confessed.
DOCTOR: Well?
MOTHER: She said she'd been commanded by God.
(Agnes appears. Throughout the scene, one of Agnes' hands is inconspicuously hidden in the folds of her habit)
He spoke to you Himself?
AGNES: No.
MOTHER: Through someone else?
AGNES: Yes.
MOTHER: Who?
AGNES: I can't say.
MOTHER: Why?
AGNES: She'd punish me.

MOTHER: One of the sisters?
AGNES: No.
MOTHER: Who?
(Silence)

WHY would she tell you to do this?
AGNES: I don't know.
MOTHER: Why do you think?
AGNES: Because I'm getting fat.
MOTHER: Oh, for Heaven's sake.
AGNES: I am. There's too much flesh on me.
MOTHER: Agnes...
AGNES: I'm a blimp.
MOTHER: ... why does it matter whether you're fat or not?
AGNES: Because.
MOTHER: You needn't worry about being attractive here.
AGNES: I do. I have to be attractive to God.
MOTHER: He loves you as you are.
AGNES: No He doesn't. He hates fat people.
MOTHER: Who told you this?
MOTHER: Why?

AGNES: Look at all the statues. They're thin.

MOTHER: Agnes...

AGNES: That's because they're suffering. Suffering is beautiful. I want to be beautiful.

MOTHER: Who tells you these things?

AGNES: Christ said it in the Bible. He said, "Suffer the little children, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." I want to suffer like a little child.

MOTHER: That's not what... (He meant) A perfectly.

AGNES: I am a little child, but my body keeps getting bigger. I don't want it to get bigger because then I won't be able to fit in. I won't be able to squeeze into Heaven.

MOTHER: Agnes, dear, Heaven is not... (a place with bars or windows.) So inadequate.

AGNES: (Cupping her breasts) I mean look at these. I've got to lose weight.

MOTHER: (Reaching toward Agnes) Oh my dear child...

AGNES: I'm too fat! Look at this—I'm a blimp! God blew up the Hindenburg. He'll blow up me. That's what she said.

MOTHER: Who?

AGNES: Mummy! I'll get bigger and bigger every day and then I'll pop! But if I stay little it won't happen!

MOTHER: Your mother tells you that?

(Silence)

AGNES: Dear, your mother is dead.

AGNES: But she watches. She listens.

MOTHER: None of us, I'm your mother now, and I want you to be...

AGNES: I'm not hungry.

MOTHER: You have to eat something, Agnes.

AGNES: No I don't. The host is enough.

MOTHER: My dear, I don't think a communion wafer has the Recommended Daily Allowance of anything.

AGNES: Of God.

MOTHER: Oh yes, of God. Agnes! So conflict.

AGNES: What does that word mean? Begor?

MOTHER: Begor. You don't know?

AGNES: That God's my father?

MOTHER: Only spiritually. You don't know what that means? Begor?

AGNES: Begor. That's what she calls it. But I don't understand it. She says it means when God presents us to our mothers, in bundles of eight pounds six ounces.

MOTHER: Oh my dear.
Agnès: I have to be eight pounds again, Mother.

Mother: You’d even drop the six cucumbers. Come here. (Mother reaches out for an embrace. Agnès avoids the embrace, keeping the one hand concealed in her habit. Mother spins at the hidden hand!) Now what’s wrong?

Agnès: I’m being punished.

Mother: For what?

Agnès: I don’t know.

Mother: How? (Agnès presents a hand wrapped in a bloody handkerchief.) What happened?

(Agnès removes the handkerchief)

Oh dear Jesus. Oh dear Jesus.

Agnès: It started this morning, and I can’t get it to stop. Why no, Mother? Why me?

Doctor: How long did it last?

Mother: It was gone by the following morning.

Doctor: Did it ever come back?

Mother: Not that I know of, no.

Doctor: Why didn’t you send her to a doctor?

Mother: I didn’t see the need. She began eating again, and that’s... (all that seemed important at the time.)

Doctor: You thought that’s all there was to it? Get some food down her throat and she’s all better?
DOCTOR: As quickly as I see fit, not as possible. I haven't made that decision yet.

MOTHER: But the kindest thing you can do for Agnes is to make that decision and let her go.

DOCTOR: Back to court?

MOTHER: Yes.

DOCTOR: And what then? If I say she's crazy, she goes to an institution. If I say she's sane, she goes to prison.

MOTHER: Temporary insanity, then.

DOCTOR: Oh yes. In all good conscience I can say that a child who sees bleeding women at the age of ten, and eleven years later strangles a baby is temporarily insane. No, Sister, this case is a little more complicated than that.

MOTHER: But the longer you take to make a decision, the more difficult it will be for Agnes.

DOCTOR: Why?

MOTHER: Because the world is a very damaging experience for someone who hasn't seen it for twenty-one years.

DOCTOR: And you think the sooner she's in prison the better off she'll be?

MOTHER: I'm hoping that whatever her sentence, the judge will allow her to return to the convent and serve her time in penance there.

(Silence)

DOCTOR: Well, we'll see about that.

MOTHER: You wouldn't allow her to return . . . (to the convent)

DOCTOR: I wouldn't send her back to the source of her problem, no.

MOTHER: Your decision has nothing to do with where Agnes will serve . . . (her sentence.)

DOCTOR: My recommendation has everything to do with everything.

MOTHER: Then you'd send her to prison?

DOCTOR: Yes, if I felt she was guilty of a premeditated crime, I would.

MOTHER: Or an asylum?

DOCTOR: If I felt it would help her.

MOTHER: It would kill her.

DOCTOR: I doubt that.

MOTHER: I'm fighting for this woman's life, not her temporal innocence.

DOCTOR: Were you fighting for her life when you didn't even send her to a medical doctor?

MOTHER: What?

DOCTOR: She had a hole in the palm of her hand! She could have bled to death! And you wouldn't send her to a hospital! That child could have died, all because of some stupid . . . (irrational idea that she was better off at the convent.)
MOTHER: But she didn't die, did she?

(Silence)

If anyone else had seen what I had seen; well, she'd be public property. Newspapers, psychiatrists, ridicules. she doesn't deserve that.

DOCTOR: But she has it now.

MOTHER: Yes, she does.

(Agnes is heard singing. This continues into the next scene)

MOTHER: Credo in unum Deum,
Parvum omnipotentem,
luctorem coeli et terrae
visibilibus omnibus et invisibilibus.
Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum,
Filium Dei ungerantium.
Et ex Patre natum.
ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo,
Deum de lumine,
Deum verum de Deo vero.
Genitum, non factum,
consubstantialium Patris,
per quem omnia facit sanct.
Qui propter nos homines
et descendit de caelis.
Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto
ex Maria Virgine.
Et Homo Fecus Est.

ACT I
Scene 6

(Doctor singing continues through the beginning of the scene.)

DOCTOR: Oh, we would get into terrible arguments, my mother and I. Once, when I was twelve or thirteen, I told her that God was a moronic fairy tale—I think I'd spent an entire night putting those words together—and she said, "How dare you talk that way to me," as if she were the slandered party. And shortly after Marie died, I became engaged for a very short time to a very romantic Frenchman whom my mother despised, and whom consequently I adored. We screamed ourselves hoarse many a night over that man. (She laughs)

And you know, I haven't thought of him in years. I haven't seen him since I left him—no, pardons-moi. Maurice, since he left me. What finally happened was that I... well, I... I was pregnant and I didn't exactly see myself as a... well, in my mother. Maurice did, so...

(Silence)

And then once in Mama's last years when she was not altogether well, I told her in a burst of anger that God was dead, and do you know what she did? She got down on her knees and prayed for His soul. God love her. I wish we atheists had a set of words that meant as much as those three do. Oh, I was never a devout Catholic—my doubts
about the faith began when I was six—but when Marie
died I walked away from religion as fast as my mind would
take me. Mama never forgave me. And I never forgave the
Church. But I learned to live with my anger, forget it even
. . . until she walked into my office, and every time I saw
her after that first lovely moment, I became more and more
. . . entranced.
(Silence)
Marie. Marie.

DOCTOR: I will want to believe that somewhere, somehow, there is a happy
ending for every story. It all depends on how thoroughly you look for it. And
how deeply you need it.
MOTHER: Not all the saints were good. In fact, most of them were a little crazy. But their hearts were with God, left to His hands at birth. "Trailing clouds of glory." No more. We're born, we live, we die... no room for miracles. But, oh my dear, how I miss the miracles.

AGREE: I know what you want from me! You want to take God away. You should be ashamed! They should lock you up. People like you!
AGNES: Yes, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Agnes, I want you to tell me how you feel about babies.

AGNES: Oh, I don't like them. They frighten me. I'm afraid I'll drop them. They're always growing, you know. I'm afraid they'll grow too fast and wriggle right out of my arms. They have a soft spot on their heads and if you drop them so they land on their heads they become stupid. That's where I was dropped. You see, I don't understand things.

DOCTOR: Like what?

AGNES: Numbers. I don't understand where they're all headed. You could spend your whole life counting and never reach the end.

DOCTOR: I don't understand them either. Do you think I was dropped on my head?

AGNES: Oh, I hope not. It's a terrible thing, one of the great tragedies of life, to be dropped on your head. And there are other things, not just numbers.

DOCTOR: What things?
Agnès: Everything, sometimes. I wake up and I just can't get hold of the world. It won't stand still.

Doctor: So what do you do?

Agnès: I talk to God. He doesn't frighten me.

Doctor: Is that why you're a nun?

Agnès: I suppose so. I couldn't live without Him.

Doctor: But don't you think God works through other religions, and other ways of life?

Agnès: I don't know.

Doctor: Couldn't I talk to Him?

Agnès: You could try. I don't know if He'd listen to you.

Doctor: Why not?

Agnès: Because you don't listen to Him.

Doctor: Agnès, have you ever thought of leaving the convent? For something else?

Agnès: Oh no. There's nothing else. It makes me happy. Just being here helps me sleep at night.

Doctor: You have trouble sleeping?

Agnès: I get headaches. Mummy did too. She'd lie in the dark with a wet cloth over her face and tell me to go away. Oh, but she wasn't stupid. Oh no, she was very smart. She knew everything. She even knew things nobody else knew.

Doctor: What things?

Agnès: The future. She knew what was going to happen to me, and that's why she hid me away. I didn't mind that. I didn't like school very much. And I liked being with Mummy. She'd tell me all kinds of things. She told me I would enter the convent, and I did. She even knew about this.

Doctor: This?

Agnès: This.

Doctor: Me?

Agnès: This.

Doctor: How did she know . . . about this?

Agnès: Somebody told her.

Doctor: Who?

Agnès: I don't know.

Doctor: Agnès.

Agnès: You'll laugh.

Doctor: I promise I won't laugh. Who told her?

Agnès: An angel. When she was having one of her headaches. Before I was born.

Doctor: Did your mother see angels often?

Agnès: No. Only when she had her headaches. And not even then, sometimes.

Doctor: Do you see angels?
agnes: (A little too quickly) No.
doctor: Do you believe that your mother really saw them?
agnes: No. But I could never tell her that.
doctor: Why not?
agnes: She'd get angry. She'd punish me.
doctor: How would she punish you?
agnes: She'd . . . punish me.
doctor: Did you love your mother?
agnes: Oh, yes. Yes.
doctor: Did you ever want to become a mother yourself?
agnes: I could never be a mother.
doctor: Why not?
agnes: I don’t think I'm old enough. Besides, I don't want a baby.
doctor: Why not?
agnes: Because I don't want one.
doctor: But if you did want one, how would you go about getting one?
agnes: I'd adopt it.
doctor: Where would the adopted baby come from?
agnes: From an agency.
doctor: Before the agency.
agnes: From someone who didn't want a baby.
doctor: Like you?
agnes: Not. Not like me.
doctor: But how would that person get the baby if they didn't want it?
agnes: A mistake.
doctor: How did your mother get you?
agnes: A mistake! It was a mistake!
doctor: Is that what she said?
agnes: You're trying to get me to say that she was a bad woman, and that she hated me, and she didn't want me, but that is not true, because she did love me, and she was a good woman, a saint, and she did want me. You don't want to hear the nice parts about her—all you're interested in is sickness!
doctor: Agnes, I cannot imagine that you know nothing about sex . . .
agnes: I can't help it if I'm stupid.
doctor: . . . that you have no idea who the father of your child was . . .
agnes: They made it up!
AGNES OF GOD

DOCTOR: ...that you have no resemblance of your impregnation ...

AGNES: It's not my fault!

DOCTOR: ...and that you don't believe that you carried a child!

AGNES: It was a mistake!

DOCTOR: What, the child?

AGNES: Everything! Nun don't have children!

DOCTOR: Agnes...

AGNES: Don't touch me like that! Don't touch me like that! (Agnes lashes out at the doctor, who moves away) I know what you want from me! You want to take God away. You should be ashamed! They should lock you up. People like you...

ACT I
Scene II

MOTHER: You hate us, don't you?

DOCTOR: What?

MOTHER: No! You hate nun.

DOCTOR: I don't ... (understand what you're talking about.)

MOTHER: Catholicism, then.

DOCTOR: I hate ignorance and stupidity.

MOTHER: And the Catholic Church.

DOCTOR: I haven't said ... (anything about the Catholic Church.)

MOTHER: This is a human being you're dealing with, not an institution.

DOCTOR: But ... (the institution has a hell of a lot to do with the human being.)

MOTHER: Catholicism is not on trial here. I want you to treat Agnes without any religious prejudices or turn this case over... (to another psychiatrist.)
DOCTOR: (Exploding) How dare you march into my office and tell me how to run my affairs—
MOTHER: It's my affair too.

DOCTOR: (Overlapping) ... how dare you think that I'm in a position to be badgered...

MOTHER: I'm only requesting that... (you be fair).

DOCTOR: (Overlapping) ... or bullied or whatever you're trying to do. Who the hell do you think you are? You walk in here expecting applause for the way you've treated this child.

MOTHER: She's not a child.

DOCTOR: And she has a right to know! That there is a world out there filled with people who don't believe in God and who are not any worse off than you! People who go through their entire lives without bending their knees once—so anybody! And people who still fall in love, and raise babies, and occasionally are very happy. She has a right to know that. But you, and your order, and your Church, have kept her ignorant...

MOTHER: We could hardly do that... (even if we wanted)

DOCTOR: ... because ignorance is next to virginity, right? Poverty, chastity, and ignorance, that's what you live by.

MOTHER: I am not a virgin. Doctor. I was married for twenty-three years. Two daughters. I even have grand children. Surprised? I can accept this.

(Discussion)

DOCTOR: Nothing. Out of the womb and into the “big bad world.” They won't see me anymore. That's their revenge. They're both devastated. I think they told their friends I've passed on. Oh, don't tell me, Doctor Freed, I'm making up for past mistakes.

DOCTOR: You can help her.

MOTHER: I am.

DOCTOR: No, you're shielding her. Let her face the big bad world.

MOTHER: Meaning you.

DOCTOR: Yes, if that's what you think.

MOTHER: What good would it do? No matter what you decide, it's either the prison or the insane house, and the differences between them are pretty thin.

DOCTOR: There's another choice.

MOTHER: What's that?

DOCTOR: Adoption.

MOTHER: How?

DOCTOR: Incest.

MOTHER: Adoption.

DOCTOR: Incest.

MOTHER: What do you want?

DOCTOR: Answers.
MOTHER: Ask.

DOCTOR: When would Sister Agnes have conceived the child?

MOTHER: About a year ago.

DOCTOR: You don't remember anything unusual happening at the convent around that time?

MOTHER: Earthquakes?

DOCTOR: Visitors.

MOTHER: Nothing. She was singing a lot more then, but—oh, dear God.

DOCTOR: What is it?

MOTHER: The sheets.

DOCTOR: What about the sheets?

MOTHER: I should have known, dear God, I should have suspected something.

DOCTOR: What do you mean?

MOTHER: Her sheets. Her sheets had disappeared. One of the sisters complained to me about it. So I called her in.

(AGNES appears)

Sister Margaret says you've been sleeping on a bare mattress.

SISTER: Is that true?

AGNES: Yes, Mother.

MOTHER: Why?

AGNES: In medieval days nuns and monks would sleep in their coffins.
MOTHER: A few years ago one of our sisters came to me, in tears, asking for comfort. Comfort because she was too old to have children. Not that she intended to, but once a month she had been reminded of the possibility of Motherhood. So dry your eyes, Sister, and thank God that He has filled you with that possibility.

AGNES: It's not that, it's not that.

MOTHER: What do you mean?

AGNES: I don't know. It's not my time of the month.

MOTHER: Should you see a doctor?

AGNES: I don't know. I don't know what happened, Mother. I woke up and there was blood on the sheets, but I don't understand what happened. I don't know what I did wrong. I don't know why I should be punished.

MOTHER: For what?

AGNES: I don't know!

MOTHER: Sister?

AGNES: I don't know! I don't know!

MOTHER: Agnes?

AGNES: I don't know.

MOTHER: Sing something will you? What's your favorite? "Virgin Mary had one Son..."

AGNES: I don't...

MOTHER: "Oh, oh, pretty little baby. Oh, oh, oh, pretty little baby..."

AGNES: I don't know.

MOTHER: "Glory be to the newborn King."

AGNES: I don't know.

MOTHER: "Some call Him Jesus. I think I'll call Him Savior..."

MOTHER and AGNES: "Oh, oh, I think I'll call Him Savior. Oh, oh, oh, I think I'll call Him Savior, Glory be to the newborn King."

AGNES: (Continuing under the next lines)

"Virgin Mary had one Son. Oh, oh, pretty little baby, Oh, oh, oh, pretty little baby, Glory be to the newborn King."

MOTHER: I sent her to her room. She was calm by then. Said it was nothing. Wouldn't see a doctor. But I should have known.

DOCTOR: Known what?

MOTHER: That was the beginning. That was the night it happened. That is why she burned the sheets.

DOCTOR: What else do you remember about that night?
DOCTOR: A psychiatrist and a nun died and went to heaven. At the pearly gates, Saint Peter asked them to fill out an application, which they did. Upon looking at their papers, he said, "I see you both were born on the same day in the same year." "Yes," said the doctor. "And that you have the same parents." "Yes," said the nun. "And so you're sisters." The nun smiled knowingly but it was the doctor who answered, "Yes." "And you must be twins," said the saint. "Oh, no," the two of them said, "we're not twins." "Same birthday, same parents, sister, but not twins?" "Yes," they answered, and smiled.

I found this riddle, curiously and coincidentally, on page 33 of an ancient issue of a defunct magazine. By this time, I was convinced that Agnes was completely innocent. I had begun to believe that someone else had murdered her child. Who that person was, and how I was to prove it, were riddles of my own making that I alone could solve. But the only answer I could come up with was upside down on page 117. (Silence) They were two of a set of triplets.

My problem was twofold: I wanted to free Agnes—legally prove her innocence—and I wanted to make her well.

AGNES: I'm not sick!
ACT I

Scene 10

DOCTOR: But you're troubled, aren't you?

AGNES: That's because you keep reminding me. If you go away, then I'll forget.

DOCTOR: And you're unhappy.

AGNES: Everybody's unhappy! You're unhappy, aren't you?

DOCTOR: Agnes.

AGNES: Aren't you?

DOCTOR: Sometimes, yes.

AGNES: Only you think you're lucky because you didn't have a mother who said things to you and did things that maybe weren't always nice, but that's what you think, because you don't know that my mother was a wonderful person, and even if you did know that you wouldn't believe it because you think she was bad, don't you.

DOCTOR: Agnes.

AGNES: Answer me! You never answer me!

DOCTOR: Yes, I do think your mother was wrong, sometimes.
AGNES: But that was because of me! Because I was bad, not her!

DOCTOR: What did you do?

AGNES: I'm always bad.

DOCTOR: What do you do?

AGNES: (In tears) No!

DOCTOR: What do you do?

AGNES: I breathe!

DOCTOR: What did your mother do to you? (Agnes shakes her head) If you can't tell me, shake your head, yes or no. Did she hit you?

("No.")

Did she make you do something you didn't want to do?

("Yes.")

Did it make you uncomfortable to do this?

("Yes.")

Did it embarrass you?

("Yes.")

Did it hurt you?

("Yes.")

What did she make you do?

AGNES: No.

DOCTOR: You can tell me.

AGNES: I can't.

DOCTOR: She's dead, isn't she?

AGNES: Yes.
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DOCTOR: How does she know that?
AGNES: Her headaches.
DOCTOR: Oh yes.
AGNES: And then... she touches me.

DOCTOR: Where?
AGNES: Down there.
(Silence)
With her cigarette.
(Silence)
Please, Mummy. Don’t touch me like that. I’ll be good. I won’t be your bad baby anymore.
(Silence. The doctor puts out her cigarette)
DOCTOR: Agnes, dear, I want you to do something. I want you to pretend that I’m your mother. I know that your mother’s dead, and you’re grown up now, but I want you to pretend for a moment that your mother has come back and that I’m your mother. Only this time, I want you to tell me what you’re feeling. All right?
AGNES: I’m afraid.
DOCTOR: (She takes Agnes’ face in her hands) Please, I want to help you. Let me help you.
(Silence)
AGNES: All right.
DOCTOR: Agnes, you’re ugly. What do you say to that?
AGNES: I don’t know.
DOCTOR: Because there are some things that you might be able to tell me under hypnosis that you aren’t able to tell me now.

AGNES: Does Mother Miriam know about this?

DOCTOR: Mother Miriam loves you very much just as I love you very much. I’m certain that she wouldn’t object . . . (to anything that would help you.)

AGNES: Do you really love me? Or are you just saying that?

DOCTOR: I really love you.

AGNES: As much as Mother Miriam loves me?

(Silence)

DOCTOR: As much as God loves you.

(Silence)

AGNES: All right.

DOCTOR: Thank you. (Doctor embraces Agnes. Mother enters, and watches them in silence)

MOTHER: I brought the daybook.

DOCTOR: Agnes, you can go now. (Agnes rises, bows before Mother for her blessing, exits) (Lighting a cigarette) What did you find?

MOTHER: What did you find?

DOCTOR: Some facts about her mother.
DOCTOR: And Agnes' father?

MOTHER: Could have been any one of a dozen men, from what my sister told me. She was afraid that Agnes would follow in her footsteps. She did everything to prevent that.

DOCTOR: By keeping her home from school.

MOTHER: Yes.

DOCTOR: And listening to angels.

MOTHER: She drank too much. That's what killed her.

DOCTOR: Do you know what she did to Agnes?

MOTHER: I don't think I... (care to know.)

DOCTOR: She molested her.

(Silence)

MOTHER: Oh dear Jesus.

DOCTOR: There is more here than meets the eye, isn't there? Let of dirty little secrets. Pull back the sheets and what do you find? A niece.

MOTHER: I didn't tell you because I didn't think it was important.

DOCTOR: No, it just makes you doubly responsible, doesn't it? Blood runs thicker, right?

MOTHER: Had I known what Agnes was suffering...

DOCTOR: Why didn't you? My God, you knew she was keeping the child from school. You knew she was an alcoholic.

MOTHER: I knew that after... (the fact.)

DOCTOR: Why didn't you do anything to stop her?

MOTHER: I didn't know! And that's no answer, is it?

(Silence)

DOCTOR: What did you find in the daybook?

MOTHER: Agnes was sick the Sunday before she told me about the sheets. If she burned them then, they probably became stained on Saturday night. Unfortunately, on that night one of our elder nuns passed away. I have no recollection of any visitors to the convent. I was needed in the sickroom.

DOCTOR: Was Extreme Unction given on that night?

MOTHER: Yes, of course.

DOCTOR: So Father Marshall would have been present.

MOTHER: Yes, but you can't believe... (that Father Marshall could have done it.)

DOCTOR: Somebody has to be responsible for that child... If it wasn't Father Marshall, who else could it be?

(Silence)

Well, we'll find out soon enough. I've gotten Agnes' permission to hypnotize her.

MOTHER: And my permission?

DOCTOR: I don't think you have anything to say in this matter.

MOTHER: I'm her guardian.
DOCTOR: She's twenty-one years old; she doesn't need a guardian.

MOTHER: But she must come to me first and ask permission.

DOCTOR: Does this mean you'll deny it?

MOTHER: I haven't decided that yet.

DOCTOR: This woman's health is at stake.

MOTHER: Her spiritual health.

DOCTOR: I don't give a good goddamn about what you call . . . (her spiritual health.)

MOTHER: I know you don't.

DOCTOR: Sentence her and be done with it, that's what you're saying. Well, I can't . . . (do that yet.)

MOTHER: What I'm saying is that you have a beautifully simple woman . . .

DOCTOR: An unhappy woman.

MOTHER: But she was happy with us. And she could go on being happy if she were left alone.

DOCTOR: Then why did you call the police in the first place? Why didn't you throw the baby in the incinerator and be done with it?

MOTHER: Because I'm a moral person, that's why.

DOCTOR: Bullshit!

MOTHER: Bullshit yourself!
MOTHER: Stupid woman.

DOCTOR: Yeah.

MOTHER: That’s all? That’s enough. She was a beautiful little girl... (and to explain away her death like that...)

MOTHER: What has that got to do with it?

DOCTOR: I want! She was the pretty one, and she died. Why not me? I hadn’t said my morning prayers either. And I was ugly. No, not just plain. Ugly! I was fat,* I had big back teeth, ears out to here, and freckles all over my face. Sister Mary Cletus used to call me PolkaDot Livingstone. (The doctor is laughing in spite of herself)

MOTHER: So you left the Church because you had freckles?

DOCTOR: No, because... Yeah, I left the Church because I had freckles. And guess what?

MOTHER: What?

DOCTOR: (Smiling) That’s also why I hate men.

(Agnes is heard singing, then humming until indicated)

AGNES: Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus,
Dominus Deus Sabaoth,
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.

Hosanna in excelsis,
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

* or anyway

DOCTOR: Why is that so important to you, her singing?

MOTHER: When I was a child I used to speak with my guardian angel. Oh, I don’t ask you to believe that I heard loud, miraculous voices, but just as some children have invisible playmates, I had angelic conversations. Like Agnes’ mother, you might say, but I was a lot younger then, and I am not Agnes’ mother. Anyway, when I was six I stopped listening and my angel stopped speaking. But just as a sailor remembers the sea, I remembered that voice. I grew, fell in love, married, and was widowed, joined the convent, and shortly after I was chosen Mother Superior, I looked at myself one day and saw nothing but a surviving of an unhappy marriage, a mother of two angry daughters, and a nun who was certain of nothing. Not even of Heaven. Doctor Livingstone. Not even of God. And then one evening, while walking in a field beside the convent wall, I heard a voice and looking up I saw one of our new postulants standing in her window, singing. It was Agnes, and she was beautiful; and all of my doubts about God and myself vanished in that one moment. I recognized the voice. (Silence) Don’t take it away from me again, Doctor Livingstone. These years after six were very black.

DOCTOR: My sister died in a convent. And it’s her voice I hear. (Agnes stops singing. Silence) Does my smoking still bother you?

MOTHER: No, it only reminds me.

DOCTOR: Would you like one?

MOTHER: I would love one, but no thank you.

DOCTOR: Once, years ago at the beginning of “the scare,” I decided to stop. I had no idea how many cigarettes I smoked then, but I used a book of matches a day. So I...
came up with the ingenious plan of cutting back on matches. First a half book, then a quarter of a book, then
down to three or four a day. And look at what happened. I
can't even cut without a cigarette in my hand. I can't go to
weddings or funerals, plays, concerts. But some days I can
go fourteen hours on a single match. Remarkable, isn't it?
Do you think the saints would have smoked, had tobacco
been popular?

MOTHER: Undoubtedly. Not the ascetics, of course, but, well,
Saint Thomas More . . .

DOCTOR: Parliament.

MOTHER: Saint Ignatius, I think, would smoke Cames and
then wash them out on the soles of his feet. Of course all the
Apostles—

DOCTOR: Hand-rolled.

MOTHER: Yes, and even Christ would partake socially.

DOCTOR: Saint Peter, the original Marboro man.

MOTHER: Mary Magdalene?

DOCTOR: You've come a long way, baby.

MOTHER: Saint Joan would chew Mail Pouch.

DOCTOR: (Taking a toke) And what, do you suppose, are to-
day's saints smoking?

MOTHER: There are no saints today. Good people, yes. But
extraordinarily good people? I'm afraid there we are sorely
lacking.

DOCTOR: Do you believe they ever existed, those extraor-
dinarily good people?

MOTHER: Yes, I do.
DOCTOR: Do you believe Agnes is still attached to God?
MOTHER: Listen to her singing.
DOCTOR: Time to begin.
MOTHER: Begin what?
DOCTOR: The hypnotism. You still disapprove?
MOTHER: Will it stop you if I do?
DOCTOR: No.
MOTHER: May I be present?
DOCTOR: Yes. Of course.
MOTHER: Then let's begin.
(Blackout)

INTERMISSION
ACT II

Scene 1

MOTHER: (Singing) Baissez moy, ma douce ame,
    Par misericorde et priez,
    Non feray, Et pour quoi?
    So je fustie la folie,
    Ma mere en seroit morrie.
    Veld de quy, veld de quy.

DOCTOR: The hypnoids took weeks to achieve, not minutes.
    An hour a day, spaced in between a kiptomaniac and an
    exhibitionist. Between lunch and dinner. Between Phil Doh-
    ahne and Dan Reher. Between sleepless nights. Endless
    weekends. But my memories, ooh, they come too easily.
    Sometimes they won't even let me finish a sentence. They
    come galloping out, mid-thought. I know if only I could
    finish the thought, they would... (go away.)
ACT II
Scene 2

AGREE: I'm frightened!

DOCTOR: Don't be. I cannot make you say or do anything you
do not wish to say or do. Sit back and relax. Fine. Now
imagine that you are listening to a chorus of angels. Their
music is so beautiful and so real that you can touch it. It
surrounds you like a very warm and comfortable pool of
water. The water is so warm you hardly know that it's
there. All of the muscles in your body are melting into the
pool. The water is just under your chin. But you must
remember that this water is music, and if you are sub-
merged in it you can still breathe freely and deeply. Now
the water covers your chin. Your mouth, your nose, and
your eyes. Close your eyes. Again, thank you. When I
count to three, you will wake up. Can you hear me?

AGREE: Yes.

DOCTOR: Who am I?

AGREE: Doctor Livingstone.

DOCTOR: And why am I here?

AGREE: To help me.

DOCTOR: Good. Would you like to tell me why you're here?
AGNES: Because I'm in trouble.

DOCTOR: What kind of trouble?

(Silence)

AGNES: I'm frightened.

DOCTOR: Of what?

AGNES: Of telling you.

DOCTOR: But it's easy. It's only a breath with sound. Say it. What kind of trouble, Agnes?

(AGNES struggles, then says)

AGNES: I had a baby.

(Silence)

DOCTOR: How did you have a baby?

AGNES: It came out of me.

DOCTOR: Did you know it was going to come out?

AGNES: Yes.

DOCTOR: Did you want it to come out?

AGNES: No.

DOCTOR: Why?

AGNES: Because I was afraid.

DOCTOR: Why were you afraid?

AGNES: Because I wasn't worthy.

DOCTOR: To be a mother?

AGNES: Yes.

DOCTOR: Why?

(AGNES begins to cry softly)

AGNES: May I open my eyes now?

DOCTOR: Not yet. Very soon, but not yet. Do you know how the baby got into you?

AGNES: It grew.

DOCTOR: What made it grow? Do you know?

AGNES: Yes.

DOCTOR: Would you like to tell me?

AGNES: No.

DOCTOR: Did you know from the beginning that you were going to have a baby?

AGNES: Yes.

DOCTOR: How did you know?

AGNES: I just knew.

DOCTOR: What did you do about it?

AGNES: I drank lots of milk.
DOCTOR: Why?
AGNES: Because that’s good for babies.
DOCTOR: You wanted the baby to be healthy?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: Then why didn’t you go to a doctor?
AGNES: Nobody would believe me.
DOCTOR: That you were having a baby?
AGNES: No, not that.
DOCTOR: What wouldn’t they believe?
(Silence)
AGNES: Did anyone else know about the baby?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: Who?
AGNES: I don’t want to tell you.
DOCTOR: Did you tell this other person or did this other person guess?
AGNES: She guessed.
DOCTOR: One of your fellow sisters?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: Will she be angry if you tell me her name?
AGNES: She made me promise not to.

DOCTOR: All right, Agnes, I’m going to ask you to open your eyes in a moment. When you do, you will see your room at the convent. It is the night about four months ago when you were very sick. Around six o’clock in the evening.
AGNES: I’m afraid.
DOCTOR: Don’t be, I’m here. All right?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: Now tell me what you did this evening before you went to bed.
AGNES: I ate.
DOCTOR: What did you have for dinner?
AGNES: Fish, Brussels sprouts.
DOCTOR: You don’t like Brussels sprouts?
AGNES: I hate them.
DOCTOR: What else?
AGNES: A little coffee. Some sherbet for dessert. That was special.
DOCTOR: And then what?
AGNES: We get up, cleared the table, and went to chapel for vespers.
DOCTOR: Yes?
AGNES: I left early because I wasn’t feeling very well.
DOCTOR: What was wrong?
AGNES: Just tired. I had my milk... (and went to bed.)
DOCTOR: Who gave you your milk?
AGNES: Sister Margaret, I think.
DOCTOR: Was it Sister Margaret who knew about the baby?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: I want you to open your eyes, and to see your room as you saw it on that night. What do you see?
AGNES: My bed.
DOCTOR: What else is in the room?
AGNES: A chair.
DOCTOR: Where is that?
AGNES: Here.
DOCTOR: Anything else?
AGNES: A crucifix.
DOCTOR: Above the bed?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: Anything else? (Silence) Agnes? What do you see? Something different?

AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: Something that's not normally in the room?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: What is that?
AGNES: A wastepaper basket.
(Silence)
DOCTOR: Do you know who put it there?
AGNES: No.
DOCTOR: Why do you think it's there?
AGNES: For me to get sick in.
DOCTOR: Am you ill?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: What do you feel?
AGNES: A pain in my stomach. I feel as if I've eaten glass.
(She holds her stomach in a contraction)
DOCTOR: What do you do?
AGNES: I have to throw up. (She rises) I can't. (Contractions) It's glass! One of the sisters has fed me glass!
DOCTOR: Which one?
AGNES: I don't know which one. They're all jealous, that's why.
DOCTOR: Of what?

AGNES: Of me! (Contraction) Oh God. Oh my God. Water. It's all water!

DOCTOR: Why doesn't anyone come?

AGNES: They can't hear me.

DOCTOR: Why not?

AGNES: They're all in vespers.

DOCTOR: Can you get them?

AGNES: I can't. It's clear on the other side of the building. (Contraction) Oh no, please. Please. I don't want this to happen. I don't want it.

DOCTOR: Where are you?

AGNES: On the bed. (Contraction) Oh God. Oh my God. (Sharp intake of breath)

DOCTOR: What is it?

AGNES: Get away from me.

DOCTOR: Who?

AGNES: Go away! I don't want you here!

DOCTOR: Is someone in the room with you? Agnes?

AGNES: Don't touch me! Don't touch me! Please! Please don't touch me! (Contraction) No, I don't want to have the baby now. I don't want it! Why are you making me do this?

(Contraction. She begins to scream)
AGNES: Yes.

DOCTOR: Good. Do you think you're well enough to stand?

AGNES: Yes. (She does)

DOCTOR: Three.

(AGNES embraces the doctor. As she leaves, she begins to sing)

AGNES: Ave Maria,
Gratia plena,
Dominus tecum.
Benedicta tu in mulieribus,
Et benedictus fructus ventris tuæ, Jesu.

MOTHER: You've formed your opinion about her, haven't you?

DOCTOR: She's a very disturbed young woman, but . . . (I don't feel that's all there is to it.)

MOTHER: Your job is done.

DOCTOR: As far as the court is concerned, yes, but personally—

MOTHER: Personally? I don't think you were asked to become personally involved.

DOCTOR: But I am.

MOTHER: And I'm asking you to get the hell out! If we want to hire a psychiatrist for Agnes, we'll find our own, thank you.

DOCTOR: One who'll ask her the questions you want asked.

MOTHER: One who will approach this matter with some objectivity and respect.

DOCTOR: For you?

MOTHER: For Agnes.

DOCTOR: You still believe that my interference will destroy some sort of . . . (special aura about her?)

MOTHER: She's a remarkable person, Doctor.

DOCTOR: That doesn't make her a saint.

MOTHER: I never said she was.

DOCTOR: But that's what you believe, isn't it?

MOTHER: That she's been touched by God, yes.

DOCTOR: Prove that to me! She sings—is that unique? She hallucinates, stops eating, and bleeds spontaneously. Is that supposed to convince me that she shouldn't be touched? I want a miracle! Nothing less. Then I'll leave her be.

(Silence)

MOTHER: The father.

DOCTOR: Who is he?

MOTHER: Why must he be anybody? It's anybody.

DOCTOR: (Laughing) You're as crazy as the rest of your family.

MOTHER: I don't know if it's true, I . . . (only think it might be possible.)
DOCTOR: How?

MOTHER: I don't... [emphasis]

DOCTOR: Do you think a big white dove came flying through her window?

MOTHER: No, I can't believe that.

DOCTOR: That would be a little scary, wouldn't it? Second Coming Stopped by Hysterical Nun.

MOTHER: This is not the Second Coming, Doctor Livingston. Don't misunderstand me.

DOCTOR: But you just said... (there isn't any father.)

MOTHER: If this is true—and I mean it—there's nothing more than a slightly miraculous scientific event.

DOCTOR: Nothing more? Oh come on, Mother, you don't expect me to believe garbage... (like that.)

MOTHER: You can believe what you like. I only told you because... (you asked for a miracle.)

DOCTOR: If this is some miracle of science, there must be a reasonable explanation.

MOTHER: But a miracle is an event without an explanation. That's why people like you fail to believe, because you demand an explanation, and when you don't get one you create one.

DOCTOR: What the hell are you talking about?

MOTHER: Unanswered questions. Tiny discrepancies in what people like you say is the way of the world.
DOCTOR: But we can find them.

MOTHER: You can look for them. There's a difference. There was no mass at the convent on that night, and there was no way for any man to get in or out.

DOCTOR: So you're saying God did it.

MOTHER: No! That's as much as saying Father Marshall did it. I'm saying God permitted it.

DOCTOR: But how did it happen?

MOTHER: You'll never find the answer to everything, Doctor. One and one is two, yes, but that leads to four and then to eight and soon to infinity. The wonder of science is not in the answers it provides but in the questions it uncovers. For every miracle it finally explains, ten thousand more miracles come into being.

DOCTOR: I thought you didn't believe in miracles today?

MOTHER: But I want to believe. I want the opportunity to believe. I want the choice to believe.

DOCTOR: What you are choosing to believe is a lie. Because you don't want to face the fact that she was raped, or seduced, or that she did the seducing.

MOTHER: She is an innocent.

DOCTOR: But she's not an esgana. Everything that Agnes has done is explainable by modern psychiatry. She's as hysterical. She was molested as a child. She had no father, an alcoholic mother. She was locked in a house until she was seventeen and in a convent until she was twenty-one. One-two-three, right down the line.

MOTHER: Is that what you believe, that she's the sum of her psychological parts?

DOCTOR: That's what I have to believe.

MOTHER: Then why are you so obsessed with her?

(Silence)

MOTHER: You're losing sleep, thinking of her all the time, bent on saving her. Why? That's a question, no answer needed. I'm just accusing, I'm recognizing. The symptoms are very familiar. I know. I'm an expert on the disease. We're in this together, you and I.

(Silence)

DOCTOR: So you believe that God permitted her . . .

MOTHER: Possibly.

DOCTOR: Possibly permitted her to have a child . . .

MOTHER: Not divine.

DOCTOR: Not divine, just a child, without benefit of man.

MOTHER: That's what I would like to believe, yes.

DOCTOR: Without proof?

MOTHER: Definitely without proof. There's no infallible proof of salvation. Only an absence of proof against it.

DOCTOR: Then how do you explain the bloody sheets on the night of the conception?

MOTHER: I can't.
DOCTOR: And why did the baby die?

MOTHER: I don't... (know.)

DOCTOR: Do you think God made a mistake and tried to correct it?

MOTHER: Don't be... (about.)

DOCTOR: Or is this all a hoax, a cover-up, to lead me down the garden path?

MOTHER: Why would I want to do that? I've never...

DOCTOR: Because this is murder we're talking about.

MOTHER: Murder?

DOCTOR: You believe Agnes is innocent. Well, I believe she's innocent too—of this crime. Like you, I have no proof. But I'm looking, and if it's there, I'll find it.

MOTHER: Don't try to turn this into some kind of murder mystery, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Aren't you concerned about what she just told us? About that other person in the room?

MOTHER: I'm concerned about her... (health and her safety.)

DOCTOR: Who was that other person, Mother? Was it you?

MOTHER: If you persist in believing that this is a case of murder, then it is the district attorney you must consult, not me. And definitely not Agnes. (Mother turns to leave)

DOCTOR: Where are you going?

MOTHER: To the court. To have you take off this case.

DOCTOR: Why? Am I getting too close... (to the truth?)

MOTHER: Doctor, I pray that—

DOCTOR: Agnes is innocent, isn't she?

MOTHER: (Overlapping) Someday you may understand my position.

DOCTOR: Isn't she?

MOTHER: Good-bye, Doctor. Oh, and as for that miracle you wanted, it has happened. It's a very small one, but you'll notice it soon enough. (Mother leaves. Agnes enters)

AGNES: You were fighting.

DOCTOR: (Quickly and secretly) Agnes, listen. You must help me. Has Mother Miriam ever threatened you in any way?

AGNES: No.

DOCTOR: Or frightened you?

AGNES: Why are you asking that?

DOCTOR: Because I believe she... (may have something to do with—)

MOTHER: (Offstage) Sister Agnes!

AGNES: Coming, Mother!

DOCTOR: Agnes, who... (was in the room with you?)

AGNES: I won't see you again, will I?
DOCTOR: Yes, you will. I promise. Agnes, who was in the room with you?
(Silence)
Do you know?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: Who was it? For the love of God, tell me.
AGNES: It was my mother.
MOTHER: (Offstage) Good-bye. (Agnes leaves)

ACT II
Scene 3

DOCTOR: I dreamed that night that I was a midwife in a small private hospital in a faraway land. I was dressed in white and the room I was in was white, and a window was open and I could see mountains of snow all around. Below me on a table lay a woman prepared for a caesarean. She began to scream and I knew I had to cut the baby out as quickly as possible. I slipped a knife into her belly, then reached to my waist inside. Suddenly I felt a tiny hand grab hold of my finger and begin to pull, and the woman's hands pressed down on my head, and the little creature inside drew me in, to the elbows, to the shoulders, to the chin, but when I opened my mouth to scream—I woke up, to find my sheets spotted. With blood. My blood. My rather sporadic menstrual cycle had ceased altogether some three years before, but on that night it began again.
(Silence)

What would I have done with a child? Nothing. Nothing.
(Silence)
The next day I asked for and received an order from the court allowing Agnes to return to my care. You see, I was so sure I was right. As a doctor, perhaps, I should have known better, but as a person—(She begins to beat her chest with her fist)
I am not made of granite. I am made of flesh and blood. . . .

and heart. . . . and soul. . . . (She continues to beat her chest in silence for a few moments, then stops)
This is it. The unfinished thought. The last reel. No alternate in sight.
ACT II
Scene 4

MOTHER: Well, you've won, haven't you?

DOCTOR: Not at all, not yet.

MOTHER: You've decided to take... (her spurt)

DOCTOR: I've decided to hypnotize her again.

MOTHER: Hasn't she had enough?

DOCTOR: And I want to ask you a few questions that I wasn't able to ask you before...

MOTHER: I'm all ears.

DOCTOR: ...because you very cleverly steered away from... 

MOTHER: My God, but you're vindictive.

DOCTOR: You're hiding something from me and I want to know the truth.

MOTHER: They say.

DOCTOR: Did Agnes ever say anything to you about not feeling well, while she was carrying the child?
MOTHER: Yes, she did.

DOCTOR: Then why didn't you send her to a doctor?

MOTHER: She wouldn't go.

DOCTOR: Wouldn't she?

MOTHER: No, she was afraid.

DOCTOR: Of what? That he might find something out? Is that what she told you? Or did you guess that?

MOTHER: If you're going to continue to persecute me... (I'll stop this conversation immediately.)

DOCTOR: I'm not persecuting you; I'm asking you a question.

MOTHER: I'm a nun, and you hate... (nurse.)

DOCTOR: Did you know that she was pregnant?

(Silence. Mother desperately tries to fight back and hide her tears. Then she speaks.)

MOTHER: Yes.

DOCTOR: And you didn't send her to a doctor?

MOTHER: It was too late.

DOCTOR: What do you mean?

MOTHER: I didn't guess it until... (Silence. Mother fights for control.)

DOCTOR: Until when? Don't waste those tears on me, Mother. Until when?
Doctor: And the baby.

Mother: No.

Doctor: You tied the cord around its neck...

Mother: I simply wanted her to have it when no one was around. I would have taken the baby to a hospital and let it with them. But there was so much blood, I panicked.

Doctor: Before or after you killed the child?

Mother: I left it with her. I went for help.

Doctor: I doubt that’s what she’ll say.

Mother: Then she’s a goddamn liar! (Mother covers her face with her hands. Agnes is heard singing)

Agnes: Agnus Dei,
quid tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei,
quid tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis. 
Agnus Dei,
quid tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.

Mother: All right. Let’s finish this case and for all. (Mother enters. She gently takes Agnes’ face between her hands. Agnes enters, followed by Mother)

Doctor: Hello, Agnes.

Agnes: Hello.

Doctor: I have some more questions I’d like to ask you. Is that all right?

Agnes: Yes.

Doctor: And I would like to hypnotize you again. Is that all right too?

Agnes: Yes.

Doctor: Good. Sit down. Relax. You’re going to enter the pool of water again. Only this time, I want you to imagine that there are holes in your body, and the warm water is flowing into those holes, behind your eyes, warm, so warm, so clean, like prayer, your eyes are so heavy, so... sleepy. Close your eyes. When I count to three, you’ll wake up. Agnes, can you hear me?

Agnes: Yes.

Doctor: Who am I?

Agnes: Doctor Livingstone.

Doctor: And who is with me?

Agnes: Mother Miriam Ruth.

Doctor: Fine. Now Agnes, I’m going to ask you a few questions, and I’d like you to keep your eyes closed. All right?

Agnes: Yes.

Doctor: I would like you to remember, if you can, one night about a year ago, a Saturday night, when one of the nuns in the convent died.

Mother: Sister Paul. (Death scene)}
DOCTOR: The night when Sister Paul died. Do you remember?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: What's the matter?
AGNES: I liked Sister Paul.
DOCTOR: Agnes, what happened that night?
AGNES: She sent me to bed early.
DOCTOR: Who did?
AGNES: Mother.
DOCTOR: Did you go to bed?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: Imagine that you are in your room, Agnes. Tell us what happened.
AGNES: I woke up.
DOCTOR: What time is it?
AGNES: I don't know. It's still dark.
DOCTOR: Do you see anything?
AGNES: Not at first. But... .
DOCTOR: What?
AGNES: Someone is in the room.
DOCTOR: Are you frightened?
AGNES: Yes.
DOCTOR: What do you do?
(Silence)
AGNES: Who is it?
(Silence)
Who's there?
(Silence)
Is it you?
(Silence)
But I am afraid.
(Silence)
Yes.
(Silence)
Yes I do.
(Silence)
Why me?
(Silence)
Wait. I want to see you! (She gazes and opens her eyes)
DOCTOR: What do you see?
AGNES: A flower. Waxy and white. A drop of blood, sinking into the petal, flowing through the veins. A tiny halo. Millions of haloes, dividing and dividing, feathers are stars, falling, falling into the iris of God's eye. Oh my God, he sees me. Oh, it's so lovely, so blue, yellow, green leaves brown blood, no, red. His Blood, my God, my God, I'm bleeding. I'M BLEEDING! (She is bleeding from the palms of her hands)
MOTHER: Oh my God. (In panic)
AGNES: I have to wash this off, it's on my hands, my legs, my God, it's on the sheets, help me clean the sheets, help me, help me, it won't come out, the blood won't come out!
MOTHER: (Grabbing her) Agnes... 

AGNES: Let go of me!

MOTHER: Agnes, please... So big.

AGNES: You wanted this to happen, didn't you? You prayed for this to happen, didn't you?

MOTHER: No, I didn't.

AGNES: Get away from me! I don't want you anymore! I wish you were dead!

DOCTOR: Agnes...

AGNES: I wish you were all dead!

DOCTOR: ... we had nothing to do with that man in your room.

AGNES: Let me alone!

DOCTOR: Do you understand? He did a very bad thing to you.

AGNES: Don't touch me!

DOCTOR: He frightened you, and he hurt you.

AGNES: Don't!

DOCTOR: It's not your fault...

AGNES: Mummy!

DOCTOR: ... it's his fault.

AGNES: Mummy's fault!

DOCTOR: Tell us who he is so we can find him...

AGNES: (To Mother) Your fault!

DOCTOR: ... and stop him from doing this to other women.

AGNES: (To Mother) It's all your fault!

DOCTOR: Agnes, who did you see in the room?

AGNES: I hate him.

DOCTOR: Of course you do. Who was he?

AGNES: I hate him for what he did to me.

DOCTOR: Yes.

AGNES: For what he made me go through.

DOCTOR: Who?

AGNES: I hate him!

DOCTOR: Who did this to you?

AGNES: God! God did it to me! It was God! And now I'll burn in hell because I hate Him!

DOCTOR: Agnes, you won't burn in hell. It's all right to hate him.

MOTHER: That's enough for today, wake her up.

DOCTOR: Not yet.

MOTHER: She's tired and she's not well, and I'm taking her home.

DOCTOR: Wake her up.

MOTHER: She needs rest and she needs care.

DOCTOR: She needs rest and she needs care.
DOCTOR: She doesn't belong to you anymore.

MOTHER: She belongs to God.

DOCTOR: She belongs to me, and she's staying here!

MOTHER: You can't . . . (keep her here.)

DOCTOR: Agnes, what happened to the baby?

MOTHER: She can't remember.

DOCTOR: Yes she can! Agnes . . .

MOTHER: She doesn't remember.

DOCTOR: (Grabbing Agnes) . . . what happened to the baby?!

AGNES: They threw it away.

DOCTOR: No, after the birth.

AGNES: It was dead.

MOTHER: Don't do this to her!

DOCTOR: It was alive, wasn't it?

AGNES: I don't remember.

MOTHER: Please!

DOCTOR: It was alive, wasn't it?

MOTHER: Don't do this to me!

DOCTOR: Want it?

AGNES: Yes.

DOCTOR: Mother Miriam was with you, wasn't she?

AGNES: Yes.

DOCTOR: She took the baby in her arms . . .

AGNES: Yes.

DOCTOR: You saw it all, didn't you?

AGNES: Yes.

DOCTOR: And then . . . what did she do?

(Silence)

AGNES: What did she do?

(Simply and quietly) She left me alone with that little . . . thing. I looked at it and thought, this is a mistake. But it's my mistake, not Mummy's. God's mistake. I thought, I can save her. I can give her back to God.

(Silence)

DOCTOR: What did you do?

AGNES: I put her to sleep.
DOCTOR: How?

AGNES: I tied the cord around her neck, wrapped her in the bloody sheets, and stuffed her in the trash can.

MOTHER: No. (Mother turns away, Silence)

DOCTOR: One, Two, Three.

Agnes slowly rises and walks away, humming “Charlie’s Nest” idly to herself.

Mother?

(Silence)

Mother, please . . .

(Mother turns to face the doctor)

MOTHER: You were right. She remembered. And all this time I thought she was some unconscious innocent. Thank you. Doctor Livingstone. We need people like you to destroy all those lies that ignorant folk like myself pretend to believe.

DOCTOR: Mother . . .

MOTHER: But I’ll never forgive you for what you’ve taken away.

(Silence)

You should have died. Not your sister. You.

AGNES: (Speaking to an unseen friend) Why are you crying?

(The doctor and the Mother turn to her. Silence)

But I believe. I do.

(Silence)

Please, don’t you leave me too. Oh no. Oh my God. O sweet Lady, don’t leave me. Please, please don’t leave me. I’ll be good. I won’t be your bad baby anymore.

(She sees someone else)

John Peilmeier

No, Mummy, I don’t want to go with you. Stop pulling me. Your hands are hot. Don’t touch me like that! Oh my God, Mummy, don’t burn me! DON’T BURN ME!

(Silence. She turns to Mother and the doctor and stretches out her hands like a statue of the Lady, showing her bleeding palms. She smiles, and speaks simply and calmly)

I stood in the window of my room every night for a week. And one night I heard the most beautiful voice imaginable.

It came from the middle of the wheat field beyond my room, and when I looked I saw the moon shining down on Him. For six nights He sang to me. Songs I’d never heard. And on the seventh night He came to my room and opened His wings and lay on top of me. And all the while He sang.

(Smiling and crying, she sings)

“Charlie’s nest and Charlie’s sweet,
And Charlie he’s a dandy,
Every time he goes to town,
He gets his girl some candy,
Over the river and through the trees,
Over the river to Charlie’s,
Over the river and through the trees,
To bake a cake for Charlie.

(Mother begins to take Agnes off)

“Charlie’s nest and Charlie’s sweet,
And Charlie he’s a dandy,
Every time he goes to town,
He gets his girl some candy.
Oh, he gets his girl some candy.”
Production Program
Theatre UNO
2015-2016

The Misanthrope
by Molière
Directed by David W. Hoover
Sept. 17-19, 24-27
Robert E. Nims Theatre

Agnes of God
by John Pielmeier
Directed by Beau Bratcher
Nov. 5, 6, 14, 15, 19, 20
Lab Theatre

Two Rooms
by Lee Blessing
Directed by Erick Wolfe
Nov. 7, 8, 12, 13, 21, 22
Lab Theatre

894
World Premiere
by Kate Bailey
April 21-23,
April 28-May 1
Robert E. Nims Theatre

BOX OFFICE: 280-SHOW (7469)
Agnes of God
Cast

Dr. Martha Livingstone......................... Meghan Rose Shea*
Agnes ........................................ Natalie Marie Collins
Mother Miriam Ruth ............................. Venita Matthews*
Ensemble ........................................ Camille Collins

*In partial fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts degree

Beau Bratcher (Director) is grateful for the opportunity to return to Theatre UNO to direct a play that he has thought about for over a decade. He is a proud member of The NOLA Project and a graduate of the University of New Orleans. Beau holds degrees from Grayson College, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Texas Woman's University, and the University of Texas at El Paso. Beau recently won a Big Easy Award for his direction of The NOLA Project's A Truckload of Ink. Other directing credits include Le Petit's Peter and the Starcatcher, The NOLA Project's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Robin Hood: Thief/Brigand, She Remembers, and Is He Dead?, Theatre UNO's The Night of the Iguana, Weird, and Much Ado About Nothing; and The Elm Theatre's The Ginghams Dog. By day, Beau is a theatre teacher at Lusher Charter School.

Jenny L. Billot (Assistant Director) recently graduated from UNO with a M.F.A. in Performance. She is known as a stage manager throughout New Orleans and has worked with various companies including The NOLA Project, Southern Rep, Rivertown, Broken Habit Productions, JPAS, The Elm Theatre, The Bayou Playhouse, See 'Em On Stage Productions, and InSideOut Productions. She is excited to continue working with Theatre UNO, especially on such an amazing show, and she thanks Beau for this opportunity.

Mitchel Courville (Lighting Designer) is currently a senior at UNO, graduating this fall with a B.A. in Film and Theatre. This is his first lighting design, but he was most recently seen on stage as Acaste in Theatre UNO's production of The Misanthrope. Some of his favorite credits include Bernstein (Dogfight), Sparky (Forever Plaid), Pony (Suburbia), and roles in Gypsy, Reefer Madness, and Lysistrata. He would like to thank his family, as always, for their unending support.

Diane K. Baas (Lighting Designer) is a freelance lighting designer and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Film and Theatre at the University of New Orleans, where she is also the Technical Director. She holds a B.F.A. in Lighting and Scenic Design, and a B.A. in Art History and Painting, both from Tulane University in New Orleans. She also holds an M.F.A. in Lighting Design from the School of Drama at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Kevin Griffith (Scenic Design) is an Associate Professor of Design and Resident Scenic Designer for the Department of Film and Theatre at the University of New Orleans. He is also in good standing as a member of The International Alliance Of Theatrical Stage Employees, Local 478.
Tony French (Costume Design) is the New Orleans Theatre Association Endowed Professor and costume designer at the University of New Orleans. He has designed numerous productions at UNO, including many original plays. He has worked with Southern Rep, The Shakespeare Festival at Tulane, Actor’s Theatre of Louisville, The Old Globe Theatre, and The Cincinnati Playhouse.

Samantha Eroche (Stage Manager) is a sophomore studying Theatre at UNO and has worked on-and-off-stage for multiple entities, including the Thibodeaux Playhouse, South Louisiana Casting & Production Company, South Louisiana Center for the Arts, Aria Relic Cinema, and Loyola University. Favorite roles include Luisa (The Fantasticks) and Christine Daaé (Phantom), both of which won her Viewers’ Choice Awards, as well as the Caterpillar (Alice in Wonderland), Gwendolen Fairfax (The Importance of Being Earnest), and Woman 2 (Beckett’s PLAY). Nothing gives her greater joy than freelance writing; reading weird, obscure, or new plays; and teaching kids theatre.

Julia Anne Harris (Assistant Stage Manager) is a twenty-year-old New Orleans native. She is in her third year studying Theatre at the University of New Orleans, and her focus is on theatrical design and production. When she’s not around the theatre, she can be found in the forest or making jewelry with bones. She’d like to thank her parents and professors for their support, and she hopes to continue working on shows.

Meghan Rose Shea (Doctor Martha Livingstone) is both thrilled and terrified to be tackling Dr. Livingstone for her thesis project. She recently directed Blackbird and played in The Misanthrope, Hamlet, and Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo. You can see her next as the character woman in Southern Rep’s A Christmas Carol. Meghan would like to thank her friends and family for their patience and support as she reaches for the finish line of grad school. She would also like to thank David Hoover for this wonderful opportunity and Beau Bratcher for making a miracle happen.

Natalie Marie Collins (Agnes) feels very blessed to be making her Theatre UNO debut in this fantastic production! She is studying Theatre, and this is her first semester at the University of New Orleans. She transferred from Howard Community College in her hometown, Columbia, Maryland. Her favorite and most recent roles include Lauren from Rep Stage’s production of Annie Baker’s Circle Mirror Transformation and Catherine Donohue from Arts Collective’s production of These Shining Lives by Melanie Marnich. She’s spent the majority of her performance career in ballet productions, dance competitions, and playing piano in small restaurants in her hometown. Recently, she excitedly released her first demo on iTunes, “My Mean Reds.” She would like to thank her wonderful cast, director, stage manager, and crew and sincerely hopes everyone enjoys the show.

Venita Matthews (Mother Miriam Ruth) was last seen on Theatre UNO’s stage searching for underwear, in the production of RX. She is a graduate student who believes she easily identifies with each of the characters in Agnes of God—as a Psychology major, she identifies with the doctor; having attended Catholic school and at one time desiring to become a nun, she identifies with Agnes; and because of her strong faith in God and belief that miracles are possible, even today, she identifies with Mother Superior. She dedicates this performance to her mother, Christine; her son, Paris Matthews; and her deceased father, Gino Leroi Gautreaux.

Camille Collins (Ensemble) is a Theatre freshman at UNO and is excited to be a part of her first Theatre UNO production. She is originally from Oklahoma where she worked
on productions such as *The Little Mermaid* (Carlotta and ensemble) with Theatre Tulsa, *Romeo and Juliet* (various roles), and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Olive Ostrovsky) with Eastern Oklahoma State College’s Theatre troupe. She would like to thank her director, cast, and crew for such a great opportunity.

**Inspired by a True Story**

In the winter of 1977, a tragedy was painfully and painstakingly unfurled in the Monroe County, New York courtroom of Judge Hyman Maas. Eleven months earlier, on April 27, 1976, a Roman Catholic nun and school teacher, Sister Maureen Murphy, gave birth to a baby boy at the Our Lady of Lourdes parish convent in Brighton, just outside Rochester. It was alleged that she then shoved a pair of panties into the infant’s mouth, asphyxiating him, and left his remains in a wastebasket.

After the body was found, the 36-year-old member of the Sisters of St. Joseph was questioned, but she denied ever being pregnant. Medical examiners at a nearby hospital concluded that she had, in fact, recently delivered a baby, and had apparently managed to conceal the pregnancy under a traditional nun’s habit, but the Sister claimed she did not remember it. She was charged with first- and second-degree manslaughter along with criminally negligent homicide. It was a high profile case. *Ms.* magazine even covered the trial, which lasted ten days. The fact that Sister Maureen had waived her right to a jury trial only served to heighten the courtroom drama. On March 5, newspapers around the country carried news of the judge’s verdict. The defense had conceded that Sister Maureen committed the act, but had also argued that blood loss during childbirth along with the overall trauma of the experience had impaired her judgment, that she may not even have been fully conscious during the episode, and that she had not actually meant to kill the baby. Judge Maas agreed and found her not guilty on all counts.

The plotline was apparently too good to allow it to remain simply a work of journalism. It also inspired a novel titled *Unholy Child* (1979). Additionally it inspired playwright John Pielmeier to write a play *Agnes of God* (1980), that would be adapted into a movie of the same name (1985).

In the hands of playwright and screenwriter John Pielmeier, who received his undergraduate degree at the Catholic University of America, Sister Maureen became Sister Agnes.

Pielmeier obviously knew what he was doing by choosing this name. In Latin, “Lamb of God” is *Agnes Dei*, a phrase that the title *Agnes of God* is obviously designed to evoke. In Pielmeier’s adaptation of the story, Sister Agnes is the lamb who pays for the sins of others, without, however, actually taking them away. At best, the guilt and the stains of the sins committed against her are left unresolved. At the core of the movie is not the sin of someone who sins against the church and her own baby, but the innocence of a victim. Additionally, Agnes is derived from the Greek word hagne, which means “chaste, pure and sacred.” The name also likely refers to St. Agnes of Rome, who is symbolized by a lamb and is considered a patron saint of both virgins and rape victims. The fictional story of Sister Agnes and the real story of Sister Maureen are very different. Pielmeier has been asked about these differences numerous times throughout his career. To set the record straight, he wrote: “For a good while I had been looking for an idea upon which to hang a play about questions of faith — looking, essentially, for a plot clothesline. About a year before I sat down to write the play I had seen a headline in the Post or the News shouting ‘Nun Kills Baby!’ I didn’t read the actual story, but the headline stuck with me.”

The original Broadway production opened at the Music Box Theater in March of 1982 and ran for 599 performances. The play has been produced numerous times and, as referenced above, was adapted into a film of the same name. John Pielmeier has seen several major stars step into the dynamic roles he created. Actresses such as Dianne Wiest, Elisabeth Ashley, Jane Fonda, Anne Bancroft (for which she earned an Oscar Nomination), Meg Tilly (for which she won a Golden Globe and was nominated for an Oscar) and Amanda Plummer (for which she won a Tony Award).
Theatre UNO proudly presents

Two Rooms

By Lee Blessing

Directed by Erick Wolfe*

November 7-8, 12-13, and 21-22, 2015
Lab Theatre | UNO Performing Arts Center

There will be one 10-minute intermission.

Scenic Design       Costume Design
Kevin Griffith      Tony French

Lighting Design     Stage Manager
Diane Baas          Milan Holman

Special Thanks
Jamie Lloyd and Emily Pouliard

Cast
Michael ......................... Zachary Olinger
Lainie ......................... Arielle B. Brown*
Walker ......................... Nathan Anderson
Ellen ......................... Tiffany Anderson*

*In partial fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts degree

Erick Wolfe (Director) - Erick Wolfe has been training and directing professional actors and performers for over 15 years. He has worked internationally, including work in New York, London, and Wales. His credits include Opera, Ballet, Theatre, Commercials, Television, and Film. Erick is a Certified Teacher with the British Academy of Dramatic Combat and the Academy of Performance Combat, he is also the National Representative of Stage Combat for the Association of Theatrical Movement Educators. Erick is currently pursuing his MFA in Directing at UNO.
The University of New Orleans Department of Film & Theatre is proud to be an accredited member of the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST).

NAST, founded in 1965, is an organization of higher education institutions (colleges, universities and conservatories). There are approximately 150 accredited institutional members. It establishes national standards for undergraduate and graduate degrees nationally.

UNO was first accredited by NAST in 2000. We continue to be the only NAST accredited program in the New Orleans metropolitan area.
Zachary Olinger (Michael) - Originally from Eufaula, Oklahoma, Zachary Olinger is a senior theatre major at UNO. Two Rooms is Zachary's second appearance on the UNO stage after his role in last season's Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo. He would like to thank his parents for their continued love and support as well as Erick Wolfe, the cast and crew for their tireless effort to help bring this story to life.

Arielle B. Brown (Lainie) - Arielle is a 26 year old, 3rd year MFA-Performance Graduate Student. She received her Bachelor's Degree in Theatre from Jackson State University. She graduated with honors receiving the 2012 student director of the year award as well as two nominations for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for both, directing and scenic design. Arielle is a television, film, and stage actress as well a Talented Theatre teacher at Riverdale High. One of her most notable accomplishments was her appearance in a National Pepsi commercial with Drew Brees receiving sag-eligibility credits. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and Alpha Psi Omega Theatre Honors Society. She is grateful for the opportunity to work with such an Amazing cast and crew. Arielle sends a special thanks to her friends, family, and most importantly her son Ja'Corey for the continuing support, encouragement, and love.

Nathan Anderson (Walker) - Nathan Anderson is a first year MFA performance student at UNO. He is a recent graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi where he received a BA in Theatre. He has been active in the performing arts since Junior High and has performed at the internationally acclaimed Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland. Nathan has performed such roles as Gupta in The Indian Wants the Bronx, King Berenger in Exit the King, and the Father in Eurydice. He has also played a lead in a SAG experimental short film titled August. Nathan is very excited to make his debut at UNO and would like to thank his family, friends, and Connor for all of their love and support.

Tiffany Anderson (Ellen) - Thank you to everyone involved in this project. Thank you to my family and friends for your continued support.

Milan Holman (Stage Manager) - Milan is a first semester, international student from the Netherlands. He is at UNO to pursue his BA in Theatre and Film. He would like to thank the cast and crew of Two Rooms and especially Erick Wolfe for this great opportunity to get involved.

Kevin Griffith (Scenic Design) - Kevin is an Associate Professor in Design, and Resident Scenic Designer for the Department of Film and Theatre at the University of New Orleans, and member in good standing with The International Alliance Of Theatrical Stage Employees, Local 478.

Tony French (Costume Design) - Tony is the New Orleans Theatre Association Endowed Professor and costume designer at the University of New Orleans. He has designed numerous productions at UNO, including many original plays. He has worked with Southern Rep, The Shakespeare Festival at Tulane, Actor's Theatre of Louisville, The Old Globe Theatre, and The Cincinnati Playhouse.

Diane K. Baas (Light Design) - Diane is a freelance lighting designer, and an Assistant Professor in the department of Film and Theatre at the University of New Orleans, where she is also the Technical Director. She holds a BFA in Lighting and Scenic Design, a BA in Art History and Painting, both from Tulane University in New Orleans, and an MFA in Lighting Design from the School of Drama at the University of Washington in Seattle.
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This production is entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). The aims of this national theater education program are to identify and promote quality in college-level theater production. To this end, each production entered is eligible for a response by a regional KCACTF representative, and selected students and faculty are invited to participate in KCACTF programs involving scholarships, internships, grants and awards for actors, directors, dramaturgs, playwrights, designers, stage managers and critics at both the regional and national levels.

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Last year more than 1,300 productions were entered in the KCACTF involving more than 200,000 students nationwide. By entering this production, our theater department is sharing in the KCACTF goals to recognize, reward, and celebrate the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.
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by and large, fine work, seldom making a false move... All the more wondrous, since the play’s first act is full of false moves as it waits to get underway full steam... which it finally does - but not until Act Two.

And even then, in this tale of a young man hiding in a religious cult, and from his parents and deprogrammer, there are far too many father-mother-son-deprogrammer predictables.

To make matters better (or worse) the production features some fine performances (John Howard is, as usual, a standout), sharp direction, and a main point which, once gotten to, is substantial and strong. Getting there is half the fun. Trouble is... there is no other half.

"Agnes of God"

The New York Times
March 31, 1982
Stage: ‘Agnes of God,’ in a Convent

By FRANK RICH

When Elizabeth Ashley marches forward to give the opening speech in John Pielmeier’s "Agnes of God," you instantly feel that you’re in good hands. Miss Ashley wears a professional woman’s no-nonsense suit, and there’s no-nonsense authority in everything she does. Her eyes are alert; her voice makes one think of the Music Box as insistently as the smoke of her cigarette. Her monologue lays out Mr. Pielmeier’s premise with brisk, elegant efficiency.

The stage set Miss Ashley inhabits at the Music Box also promises a trajectory of pure, unchallenged theater. Eugene Lee has designed a curving expanse of blond wood that rises from the floor to the sides and contains only two chairs and one standing altar. And, once we meet the occupant of those chairs – no less than Amanda Plummer and Geraldine Page at full throttle – our expectations rise still further.

Equally alluring is Mr. Pielmeier’s premise, which is designed to lock his gifted actresses into old-fashioned, to-the-nail conflict. Miss Plummer, in her title role, is an angelic 21-year-old nun facing a manslaughter charge. Although she fervently denies any knowledge of the crime, she is accused of giving birth to a baby in a convent, strangling the child with a umbilical cord and stuffing the corpse into a wastebasket. Miss Page is the nun’s mother superior and chief defender. She wonders if there might not be another, supernatural explanation.

The Cost

AGNES OF GOD, by John Pielmeier; directed by Michael Lindsay-Hogg; scenery by Eugene Lee; costumes by Carol Rosenthal; lighting by Roger Ford; presented by Kenneth Wagner, Lou Adler and Pantages Theater Productions.

Almost as long, but no less effective, is "The Exorcist."" There is a chilling thriller and a startling reaffirmation of the power of faith. It fails on both counts.

Indeed, one concern cancels the other out. Mr. Pielmeier clearly sides with the mother superior in his play’s central argument. He wants to believe that Agnes is “touched by God” and that her baby, like the inexplicable stains that bloodied the nun’s hands before its arrival, was a divine phenomenon. Fair enough, but the audience wants its miracles and its whodunit, too. Mr. Pielmeier instead uses his message to throw a holocaustic smoke screen over the baby’s paternity. The anticlimactic Act II of “Agnes of God” suggests what “Rosemary’s Baby” or “The Exorcist” might be like if they had alternately cheating final reels.

The philosophical debate that pre codes the闷气 is too tired to carry the play alone. As Dr. Livingston and the mother superior plead their respective cases for the transcendental powers of rational medical science and primitive relatives belief, the actress reprays “Equis” — even to the extent of drawing arch, explicit contrasts between the psychiatrist’s steril, lonely personal life and her patient’s otherworldly, if murderous, religious passion. But this time the rhetoric is usually as pedantic as the sentiments it expresses, and there’s not a bone in sight.

The sparring match reality comes alive only when Mr. Pielmeier nudges his characters in unexpected, and unconvincing, revelations about his antagonists. Dr. Livingston proves to be not
Agnes of God —continued

SOME plays are no concern with being theatrical that they forgot to be dramatic. I presume that Agnes of God, which opened at the Music Box Theater last night, face rather easily and noisily into that category.

Yet make no mistake about it — while admittedly generating more light than heat, it is unquestionably binding theatrical. It also contains three sensationally powerful performances calculated to wring your whiteout, wherever they may be.

John Pielmeier's play is apparently founded on fact — a very grisly fact. It is based on infanticide in a nunery. "The baby was found dead in a wastebasket with its umbilical cord tied around its neck.

There is a young nun called Agnes, sweet-natured girl, with a singing voice like an angel. She claims to have no recollection of its conception, birth or murder. In the circumstances a court psychiatrist is sent to report on the girl — and the play, in effect, is the psychiatrist's story. The psychiatrist is a strange woman. A lapse Catholic, she has a grudge against nuns because she feels their neglect toward her sister while she was a novice.

She tells us, as if she expected to be believed, that she keeps going to see Garbo in Camille because she hopes one day it will have a happy ending. Like many psychotics in real life, her own mental health is not the most robust. In fact, she is clearly a neurotic. However, she is certainly better balanced than the other two characters, the lovelorn Mother Superior and Agnes herself.

As the psychiatrist proceeds as narrator and detective like investigator, the comparison with Peter Shaffer's better-acted Equus becomes inevitable. Because both are essential explorations into the unusual individual, the genius, the saint, the one touched by God. In Pielmeier's play even the title, presumably a bad Latin pun on Agnus Dei, Lamb of God, implies Agnes' spiritual provenance. She is a creator of miracles.

As the play proceeds, the psychiatrist becomes "more and more entranced with Agnes. Slowly Agnes' story is revealed — her abuse and molestation by her mother, her simplicity, even an unusual episode where the palms of her hands bleed — spontaneously.

The Mother Superior, worldly, even cruel, and yet still with blind faith, believes that possibly there was no father, and that the conception occurred through some form of parthenogenesis. This would be, as she points out, "nothing more than a slightly miraculous scientific event."

But as the battle lines are drawn up, the psychiatrist still insists: "This is murder we are dealing with." Murder.

More like holocaust to me. And religio-psychological holocaust at that. Even the playwright — after a load of blathering and a few surprises — comes to no decision, offering merely an outcome.

Yet the play does provide for three grandstand, grand-slam performances from its well-balanced trio of actresses. Michael Lindsay-Hogg has staged the play as if it were a series of boxing bouts, getting the maximum dramatic mileage from the impact of the situation, and removing our attention from the bareness of the play's pretensions. A smart, glossy job of glossing over.

But when we are down to the wire it is to three actresses themselves lost in the stark simplicity of Eugene Lee's starkly setting that makes the play seem more like a dramatic reading than theatrical presentation, quite simply to deliver.

Amanda Plummer as Agnes has the simplest yet most showy role. She is wonderful, whether comically or saintly innocence, or struggling with the simulated praying, the breath brought on by hypnosis, she never loses her always fragile credibility.

In the devious yet not unsympathetic role of the Mother Superior, Geraldine Page seems wise and convincing, funny and yet not altogether unsentimental, a complex and brilliantly etched portrayal.

The fulcrum of the piece is, however, based on the chain-smoking, chain-smoking, chain-smoking psychiatrist, and Elizabeth Ashley, almost attracting the inside of her skin with anxiety, manages to make neuroticism a mastery performance.

So there it is — cleverly executed blood and guts evening in the theater with aspirations beyond dramatic butchery. However, as with so much therapeutic reading, there is less in this than meets the eye.

— CLIVE BARNES
Nun Acquitted in Death of Newborn Son at N.Y. State Convent

March 5, 1977

A Roman Catholic nun was acquitted yesterday of charges that she killed her baby in her convent room shortly after giving birth.

Judge Hyman T. Mass, who presided at the 10-day nonjury trial in Monroe County Court, said Sister Maureen Murphy, 37, was innocent of first-degree manslaughter, the charge on which she was indicted.

He also acquitted her of second-degree manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide, two lesser charges.

When Maas announced the verdicts, Sister Maureen placed a hand over her face and appeared to be crying. Members of her family also wept.

Sister Maureen, who was unavailable to reporters, is still a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph, which she joined 19 years ago. Her future, however, was not immediately clear, Church officials have refused to discuss the case.

The name of the baby's father has not been made public.

The prosecution charged that last April 27 Sister Maureen gave birth to a full-term baby boy at Our Lady of Lourdes convent in suburban Brighton and asphyxiated him.

The defense contended that Sister Maureen was so emotionally disturbed about her pregnancy and the birth and so weakened by loss of blood that she could not have intentionally killed the baby.

The Post Recommends

Don't eat that shrimp

There's a serious problem with the shrimp sold at just about every grocery store in the United States.
Transforming into Mother Superior
Production Photos
“Lord, Thank you for allowing me to complete the UNO M.F.A. Theater Program.”