

## ABSTRACT

Women, Witches, and Water: A Director's Approach to Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's  
*Abigail/1702*

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American playwright Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa took inspiration from many sources, most notably Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, and combined them to reexamine the post-Salem life of the infamous Abigail Williams in his *Abigail/1702*. His play stands as a feminist counter-point to Miller's work, allowing for the redemption of Abigail, who becomes the central character. In the play, Aguirre-Sacasa's propensity for working in a postmodern style and his strong interest in American gothic combines powerfully with biblical imagery and is influenced by popular culture forms including the comic book and episodic television. This thesis will explore and outline the production process for the 2020 Baylor University production of *Abigail/1702*, including how the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges were addressed. The evolution of the directing concept into the final image of descent through a well to find living water will be outlined, as well as the design and rehearsal process.

Women, Witches, and Water: A Director's Approach to Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's *Abigail/1702*

by

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A Thesis

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## DEDICATION

To my dear Fern... or is it Fig?  
Either way, I could not have gotten to this moment without you.

Most of all, to my parents. You have never wavered in your absolute support of me, and you gave me the freedom long ago to pursue the things that make me happy. I literally could not have survived this year without you. Thank you, and all my love.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Context of *Abigail/1702*

Chapter One of this thesis will provide background information on the playwright, Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, and his writing career thus far both for the stage and in episodic television. This chapter will explore the use of Miller's *The Crucible* as source material and consider other artistic influences such as fantasy literature and comic books. The chapter will also briefly discuss American Gothic literature and its use of witches and Native Americans as literary tropes. Through these discussions, the chapter will establish some the major thematic threads of the play to be explored further in this thesis.

The contemporary play *Abigail/1702* was written by American playwright Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa and received its first workshop production in 2012. The play explores the aftermath of the plot of Arthur Miller's American tragedy, *The Crucible*, first produced in 1953. Using *The Crucible* as source material, and drawing upon popular culture, comic books, and American Gothic tropes, *Abigail/1702* offers another perspective on the often-told Salem witch history and provides a feminist reading on the literary character of Abigail Williams. Nelson Pressley notes, "In Aguirre-Sacasa's mind, stories and characters are ripe for adapting and expanding, naturally hopping boundaries."<sup>1</sup> Thus, while he has clearly been influenced by—and is currently working in—the arena of comic book adaptations and teen-drama television, historical events and

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson Pressley, "The Killer Career of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa," *Washington Post*, May 7, 2016.

Americana are recurring themes in his work. The play also contains repeated Biblical allusions and imagery, most significantly references to water and forgiveness.

*Abigail/1702* is obviously linked very closely with Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, and by extension the exploits of Senator McCarthy and his House Un-American Activities Committee, though Aguirre-Sacasa references these influences in other works. In his work on the Netflix television series *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, Aguirre-Sacasa utilizes several character names from *The Crucible*, which is a fitting homage to both the fear-based witch hunting of the series as well as the source material and its historical basis. As media critic Avery Kaplan states, "Aguirre-Sacasa's work never allows itself to be limited by the past, instead using history as a ladder to step upwards into the future...."<sup>2</sup> In the case of *Abigail/1702*, that history specifically relates to America's long fascination with witchcraft.

### *The Playwright*

Writer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa was born in 1973 in Washington, D.C.<sup>3</sup> His father was a diplomat from Nicaragua. In his teen years, Aguirre-Sacasa attended the prestigious Georgetown Preparatory School.<sup>4</sup> He later attended Georgetown University where he dabbled in writing short plays, though to little success. After completing his

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<sup>2</sup> Avery Kaplan, "The Weird History of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa," *The Beat: The Blog of Comics Culture*, June 6, 2019. <https://www.comicsbeat.com/roberto-aguirre-sacasa-weird-history/>.

<sup>3</sup> Bill O'Driscoll, et al., "Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's Imaginary Folklore Drives The Muckle Man.," *Pittsburgh City Paper*, January 18, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Sobel, "Edward Sobel Interviews Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa," Steppenwolf Theatre, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://www.steppenwolf.org/articles/edward-sobel-interviews-roberto-aguirre-sacasa/>.

time at Georgetown University, Aguirre-Sacasa pursued journalism, writing for the *City Paper* and the *Washington Post* on the arts as well as politics and city news. Aguirre-Sacasa later attended McGill University in Montreal, Canada where he pursued graduate studies in English. During his time at McGill, Aguirre-Sacasa continued to explore playwriting through submitting one-acts to the university's play festivals.

While in graduate school, Aguirre-Sacasa wrote the first iteration of a play that melds the comic book character of Archie, of Archie comics, with the Leopold and Loeb murders of 1920s Chicago. This blending of influences would later become a hallmark of Aguirre-Sacasa's style as a writer. To complete his degree at McGill University, he elected to write a creative, rather than an academic, thesis which resulted in a play loosely inspired by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>5</sup> This project refigures Aguirre-Sacasa's later work adapting prominent works of literature.

After completing his graduate studies at McGill, Aguirre-Sacasa found work at the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. During this time, he continued to write plays and produce them with friends that also worked in the industry, as well as submitting to various festivals and competitions. This eventually led to mentorship from Michael Kahn, Artistic Director of the Shakespeare Theatre Company. Kahn's influence provided Aguirre-Sacasa the chance to participate in a playwriting intensive under Paula Vogel. This proved to be a formative experience. As Aguirre-Sacasa relates, "At the end of the two-week workshop, Paula Vogel said, 'Is this what you want to do?' And I said, 'You know, I think so.' And she said, 'Well, you better get serious about it, fast. And you

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<sup>5</sup> Sobel, "Edward Sobel Interviews Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa."

should apply to graduate schools’.”<sup>6</sup> Aguirre-Sacasa would soon go on to attend Yale University where he completed his M.F.A. in Playwriting.

Aguirre-Sacasa’s *Abigail/1702* was written sometime between 2007 and 2012 and received its first production in 2012 as a part of the New York Stage and Film’s Powerhouse season, an annual event workshopping new theatrical works. The production was directed by David Esbjornson. The cast featured Chloe Sevigny as Abigail and Patrick Heusinger as John Brown; Paxton Whitehead played the Judge, Reverend Parris, and the Man in Gray; Laila Robins portrayed Elizabeth Proctor/Richards, Ann Foster, and Margaret Hale. The role of the Thomas was played by Lucas Pfeifer.<sup>7</sup> In 2013, the play had its world premiere at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park and was also performed at both the City Theatre in Pittsburgh and the Curtain Call theater near Albany. Other notable productions include Merrimack Repertory Theatre’s 2016 production and International City Theatre’s 2015 West Coast premiere.

### *Pop Culture and Fantasy Influences*

A major characteristic of writer Aguirre-Sacasa is his use of a wide variety of influences, sources, and artistic styles. Aguirre-Sacasa’s topics are eclectic and his approach to creative writing is postmodern. Journalist Nelson Pressley writes about this quality in his May 2016 *Washington Post* article titled, “The Killer Career of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa.” Pressley notes, “He’s the go-to guy . . . because he holds that

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<sup>6</sup> Sobel, “Edward Sobel Interviews Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa.”

<sup>7</sup> Adam Hetrick, “Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa’s Crucible-Inspired Drama *Abigail/1702*, Starring Chloe Sevigny, Debuts June 27,” *Playbill*. June 27, 2012. <https://www.playbill.com/article/roberto-aguirre-sacasas-crucible-inspired-drama-abigail-1702-starring-chloe-sevigny-debuts-june-27-com-195123>.

idiosyncratic place in the industry.”<sup>8</sup> Aguirre-Sacasa is particularly known for his use of supernatural or fantasy story elements and ability to play with pop culture genres:

I read a lot of Stephen King, Clive Barker, H.P. Lovecraft – not so much science fiction, but more fantasy and horror and supernatural stuff, along with other things. I guess a lot of pop cultural elements are in my plays because my plays have young people – young meaning our age – and a lot of what we do is talk about movies and books. That’s our vocabulary; there’s a lot of common ground. I also grew up seeing old black and white movies and reading comic books, so it seems totally natural to absorb all that stuff and then translate it and refigure it in a different kind of way.<sup>9</sup>

His plays and screenplays often feature homages to other influential works of pop culture, notably *Twin Peaks*, the “seminal TV show that so readily deals with the idea of dual identities, doppelgangers, and literal reflections,” created by David Lynch and Mark Frost in the early 1990s.<sup>10</sup> As entertainment writer Amy Roberts states, Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa’s *Riverdale* features so many loving tributes to [*Twin Peaks*] that it feels like a strange reflection of the iconic 90s hit – a modern day TV twin.”<sup>11</sup> His ability to synthesize diverse influences into new forms is rooted in Aguirre-Sacasa’s belief that the basics of creating stories are the same. As he states, “Even though ‘Spider-Man’ was this \$70 million machine, it was the exact same job I had playwrighting and on ‘Big Love’....

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<sup>8</sup> Nelson Pressley, “The Killer Career of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa.”

<sup>9</sup> Sean Bugg, “Other Worlds,” *Metro Weekly* (Washington, DC), December 10, 2003. <https://www.metroweekly.com/2003/12/other-worlds/>.

<sup>10</sup> Amy Roberts, “Reflections of a Killer Dad: *Riverdale* Mirrors *Twin Peaks*,” *Film Daily*, December 7, 2019, <https://filmdaily.co/obsessions/riverdale-mirroring-twin-peaks/>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Rewriting, cutting, punching up jokes, trying to build the connection between characters, trying to land story and dialogue.”<sup>12</sup>

Not limited to stage and screen writing, Aguirre-Sacasa has written for both the Marvel and Archie franchises of comic books. For Marvel, he has written for such characters as the Fantastic Four, Nightcrawler, Marvel Divas, and Loki. In addition, he wrote for *The Strand* series of comics based on works of Stephen King.<sup>13</sup> In 2013, Aguirre-Sacasa created a zombie-based comic series featuring the characters from Archie comics including all of Riverdale and Sabrina. As Avery Kaplan states:

No stranger to horror comics . . . Aguirre-Sacasa incorporated a variety of horror-genre inspirations on top of the archetypical foundations of the Riverdale gang. Combined with Francavilla’s uncanny illustrations, “Afterlife with Archie” became a cult hit, delighting fans of the horror genre and the Archie gang alike.<sup>14</sup>

This success helped propel Aguirre-Sacasa to a position as Archie Comic Publications chief creative officer in 2014.<sup>15</sup> The unique dual career path of Aguirre-Sacasa demonstrates his propensity for mixing low and high art, a hallmark of the postmodern style.

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<sup>12</sup> Pressley, “The Killer Career of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa.”

<sup>13</sup> “Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa,” *Marvel Comics*, Marvel.com , accessed May 10, 2021. [https://www.marvel.com/comics/creators/13661/roberto\\_aguirre-sacasa?byZone=marvel\\_site\\_zone&offset=0&byType=creator&dateStart=&dateEnd=&orderBy=release\\_date+desc&formatType=issue,digitalcomic,collection&byId=13661&limit=8&count=10&totalcount=26](https://www.marvel.com/comics/creators/13661/roberto_aguirre-sacasa?byZone=marvel_site_zone&offset=0&byType=creator&dateStart=&dateEnd=&orderBy=release_date+desc&formatType=issue,digitalcomic,collection&byId=13661&limit=8&count=10&totalcount=26)

<sup>14</sup> Avery Kaplan, “The Weird History of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa.”

<sup>15</sup> George Gene Gustines, “Archie Comic Picks Film and TV Writer for Top Creative Post,” *The New York Times*, March 3, 2014.

The world of comics seems to have also influenced the structure and style of *Abigail/1702*. By their very nature comic books are episodic in structure and they sometimes feature flashback scenes. Both of these techniques are used in *Abigail/1702*. “Afterlife with Archie” is further linked with *Abigail/1702* by virtue of Aguirre-Sacasa’s stated and implied aims in each piece. George Gene Gustines describes “Afterlife with Archie” as, “a boldly dark and violent tale aimed at more mature readers.”<sup>16</sup> He goes on to quote Aguirre-Sacasa as stating, “I want to go deeper and reveal things we didn’t know about these characters, maybe get at some emotional core that wasn’t there before.”<sup>17</sup> Both Gustines’s description and Aguirre-Sacasa’s quote could be used to describe *Abigail/1702*. The presence of the literal devil, the hangings and piracy, and occult content all contribute to the violence and bold nature of the piece. Most importantly, Aguirre-Sacasa explores in his play a character that had previously been one-dimensional. An important part of Abigail’s journey in his work is the exploration of her emotional core.

Interestingly, Aguirre-Sacasa's earliest professional interaction with the world of comics occurred in April 2003 when a play he wrote called *Archie's Weird Fantasy* was being produced in Atlanta, Georgia. In this play, the classic character comes out as gay and sets off for New York so that he himself can work in comics. However, the real-world Archie Comics Company demanded the play not take place with a legal cease and desist order. Aguirre-Sacasa rewrote the play, specifically changing names of characters. The revised work was called *Weird Comic Book Fantasy*. One of the characters in

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<sup>16</sup> Gustines, Archie Comic Picks Film and TV Writer for Top Creative Post.”

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



Aguirre-Sacasa's play was based on a real-life comic book publisher who faced Senate hearings regarding the effects comic books have on American youth at almost the exact time of the Joseph McCarthy hearings which inspired Miller's *The Crucible*.<sup>18</sup>

### *Relationship to The Crucible*

*Abigail/1702* is written as a sequel to Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, picking up the story of the aftermath of the Salem witch trials on some community members ten years later. *The Crucible* is one of the most renowned plays of the twentieth century due to its riveting narrative, links to infamous historical events from the colonial period, and its interplay with political failings contemporaneous with its writing in the 1950s. Miller's decision to use the names of the real figures involved in the Salem witch trials, as well as many other historical facts, provides another interesting facet to the discussion of identity raised by *The Crucible*. Miller takes the identities and legacies of both John Proctor and Abigail Williams and uses them for his own devices. Miller manipulates the details about the historic John Proctor to craft a story of a tragic hero, yet in the process gives attributes and faults to the man that have no proof to support them. At the same time, Miller turns the historic Abigail Williams from a decidedly imperfect eleven-year-old girl, to a conniving and vengeful young woman. Miller's appropriation of the legacies of the real inhabitants of the Salem of 1692 is in some ways the exact fate John Proctor of *The Crucible* gives his life to avoid. Miller himself acknowledges that his work is, "not history in the sense in which the word is used by the academic historian." He further

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<sup>18</sup> Avery Kaplan, "The Weird History of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa."

states that that the characters may, “therefore be taken as creations of my own.”<sup>19</sup>

However, Miller also says that, “the fate of each character is exactly that of his historical model, and there is no one in the drama who did not play a similar – and in some cases exactly the same – role in history.”<sup>20</sup> Though both the historical Williams and the Williams of Miller’s invention are primary initiators of the witch hysteria in Salem, there are important differences between the two.

Miller creates in the character of John Proctor a heroic icon of the American stage by ascribing actions and characteristics to Proctor that are not based in history. Miller describes Proctor as, “a farmer in his middle thirties...powerful of body, even-tempered...a man in his prime.”<sup>21</sup> However, as David Booth states, “the historical John Proctor . . . was an inn-keeper of advanced years, not the sturdy, self-sufficient citizen farmer of the play.”<sup>22</sup> There is no evidence of Proctor having an affair, let alone with Abigail Williams.

In Miller’s work, Abigail and the other young women engage in playing with occult elements for entertainment, a detail which conforms to the known history of the real Abigail Williams. According to Robert A. Martin, Abigail and her friends, “began playing with spirits simply for the ‘sport’ of it, as a release from an emotionally

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<sup>19</sup> Arthur Miller, “A Note on the Historical Accuracy of This Play,” *The Crucible* (New York: Bantam Books, 1963) i.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (New York: Bantam Books, 1963) 18.

<sup>22</sup> David Booth, “Dubious American Ideal: Gender and Historical Knowledge in *The Crucible*,” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol.84, no.1/2 (Spring/Summer), 2001, 32.

oppressive society.”<sup>23</sup> In the opening scene Abigail confesses to her uncle that they danced in the woods and that, “it were sport.”<sup>24</sup> As Martin points out, Miller later uses, “a scene taken directly from the trial records, [wherein] Mary confesses that she and the other girls have been pretending and that they have deceived the court.”<sup>25</sup> Not only did the girls’ actions in the woods originate out of young people’s boredom, fascination with the occult, and the need to rebel against an incredibly strict society, but the accusations and demonstrations arose out of play or sport.

In Miller’s writing it is also clear that the accusations of witchcraft made by the girls were originally based out of fear. Abigail is questioned by Reverend Hale, as he asks her, “Why are you concealing? Have you sold yourself to Lucifer?”<sup>26</sup> Abigail is well aware that she is facing intense punishment for any experimentation or playing with the occult. Even her dancing in the woods is punishable by a public whipping. It is in the face of this danger and questioning that Abigail first makes her accusations, declaring, “I never sold myself! I’m a good girl! I’m a proper girl!” adding as Tituba enters, “She made me do it!”<sup>27</sup> These accusations made out of fear, while immoral and wrong, are understandable and fitting with the historical fact of Abigail being a young girl. Miller’s Abigail, however, quickly moves into a far more insidious territory.

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<sup>23</sup>Robert Martin. “Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*: Background and Sources.” *Modern Drama*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1977, 282.

<sup>24</sup> Miller, *The Crucible*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Martin, 283.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, *The Crucible*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Miller makes Abigail Williams the primary instigator and villain of the piece, with her actions being motivated by jealousy and lust. She is described by Miller as, “a strikingly beautiful girl, an orphan, with an endless capacity for dissembling.”<sup>28</sup> In *The Crucible*, Abigail and John Proctor engage in an affair. Miller stated that when contemplating writing about the Salem hysteria that he would likely have never written about the events had he not discovered the fact that Abigail Williams, former servant in the Proctor household and primary instigator of the early accusations, publicly accused Elizabeth Proctor of witchcraft, yet, “with uncharacteristic fastidiousness [refused] to include John Proctor.” This seeming inconsistency raised questions in Miller’s mind, for as he states, “in no other instance could I find such a careful avoidance of the implicating stutter, the murderous, ambivalent answer to the sharp questions of the prosecutors.”<sup>29</sup> Abigail’s affair with John Proctor becomes the primary narrative of the selfish and unjust accusations and ensuing trials and punishments of *The Crucible*. Robert A. Martin states that by, “projecting several of the girls into Abigail, Miller has used the surface of the trial records to suggest that her hatred for Proctor’s wife is a dramatic equivalent for the much wider spread hatred and tension that existed with the Salem community.”<sup>30</sup> Instead of maintain the character amalgamation created by Miller, Aguirre-Sacasa creates a version of Abigail that is highly individual. The focus in this play is on her struggles, as opposed to those of a community.

*The Crucible* was first performed in 1953 in America in the midst of the so-called “red scare” and the horrific events of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-

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<sup>28</sup> Miller, *The Crucible*, 6.

American Activities Committee. This group investigated American citizens in order to root out Communists and communist sympathizers through what was essentially a political witch-hunt. Many people were forced to testify before the committee and asked to name names of people they either knew or suspected to have communist ties. The playwright, Arthur Miller, was forced to testify as were many of his friends and colleagues. For Miller, this dark period of American politics called to mind the frantic and frightening events of the Salem witch trials in 1692. The time period reflects many elements that would become deeply engrained in American identity: Puritan morality, a strong work ethic, and a government influenced by restrictive religious beliefs. This is a few generations after the original settlers of communities like Jamestown, Plymouth and more throughout the New England area. The last decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century saw great religious fervor in the colonies, and intense battles for survival. The period intertwined facets of government and religion with an ever-present awareness of danger. Those descendants of the first settlers also carried the legacy and influence of their ancestors who lived through elements of the witch-hunting craze in England and other parts of Europe before emigrating to the New World.

The environment of Salem in 1692, America in the 1950s, and the America of 2007-2009 when Aguirre-Sacasa conceived of his play share aspects of what Alan Nadel calls so-called containment culture, whereby there is an ever-present fear or threat from

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<sup>29</sup> Arthur Miller, "Introduction," *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays with an Introduction* (New York: Viking Press., 1967) 41.

<sup>30</sup> Martin, 284-285.

an outside force.<sup>31</sup> In early Salem, these outside forces included anyone standing in opposition to the regimented and religious order of the community, as well as the very real threat from violence with the Native population. The intensely religious nature of the early Puritan settlements, such as Salem, created an environment that was regimented, harsh, and allowed very little personal freedom. The deep intertwining between religion and government became fundamentally tied to the early American culture. In addition, the early settlers were in a constant state of alertness in case of attack from Native tribes. Violence between the two groups was common and often quite deadly. These same basic elements occur again in the 1950s when Miller wrote his play. In this era, the containment culture was focused on protecting America from the threat of communism and any other potential anti-American philosophy. Legal scholar Steven K. Green notes in his 2019 study, *The Third Disestablishment: Church, State, and American Culture, 1940-1975*, that in the 1950s, “Religion, both the private and public varieties, attained a visible presence in the culture that the nation had not witnessed since the revivals of the post–Civil War era.”<sup>32</sup> In an effort to more closely link Christian values with American identity during this period, government officials made “In God We Trust” the national motto and added “Under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance.<sup>33</sup> Throughout, America was engaged in a foreign war in Asia: the Korean War raged on and the early problems that would result in the Vietnam War were already beginning. Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa was

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<sup>31</sup> For more on the concept of containment see Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995

<sup>32</sup> Steven K. Green, *The Third Disestablishment: Church, State, and American Culture, 1940-1975* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019), 210.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

inspired to write his play in 2007 by a Steppenwolf Theatre production of *The Crucible*; *Abigail/1702* would first be performed in 2012. This period is marked by the conservative political climate under President George W. Bush (administration 2000-2008) and the ongoing war in Iraq and Afghanistan, creating a thematic link to both the environment in which Miller wrote his play and to colonial Salem. In this era the culture of containment is concerned with the threat of terrorism attacks from outside our own borders.

### *American Gothic, Witchcraft, and Women*

As Faye Ringel notes in Chapter One of the *Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*, entitled “Early American Gothic (Puritan and New Republic),” “Many colonists who were not Puritans shared old-world beliefs in witchcraft, omens, and apparitions. Though after Salem no witches were executed, belief in their powers did not die, and folktales from Maine to Georgia tell of witches’ curses, fortune-telling, and remedies for witchcraft such as silver bullets.”<sup>34</sup> The story and characters of *Abigail/1702* can be read as part of a larger tradition of the gothic literature that has grown from the social and cultural foundations of colonial America. Gothic literature is an enduring genre that, as scholar Heather Nathans argues, “ultimately proved curiously adaptable for American playwrights, and perhaps the greatest measure of its success lies in its persistence

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<sup>34</sup> Faye Ringel, “Early American Gothic (Puritan and New Republic),” *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 19.

throughout contemporary American culture.”<sup>35</sup> As with many works of American Gothic literature, Aguirre-Sacasa’s stories frequently center female characters who are—legitimately or illegitimately—described by the community as witches.

The work of gothic author Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810), often considered the United States’ first novelist, is subdivided by critics into four subgenres of the gothic style: Frontier, Urban, Psychological, and Female. Three of these—Frontier, Psychological, and Female—are relevant to a discussion of *Abigail/1702*.<sup>36</sup> Frontier gothic draws on fears of the “savage” Native Americans. Brown declares that, “‘The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the Western wilderness are far more suitable” for novels set in America (iii–iv).”<sup>37</sup> This same technique is used extensively as a way to reveal the true depths of suffering and terror that Abigail has experienced in her life. Aguirre-Sacasa links the Indian attacks endured by Abigail to her first pact with the devil, thereby increasing the gothic elements of the play. Psychological gothic stories blend supernatural elements, insanity, and murder. Aguirre-Sacasa utilizes the supernatural and deep-seated religious belief in order to create a complex psychological state for Abigail. Finally, the Female aspect of the American Gothic style is first explored by Brown. In his work, *Wieland*, the main heroine, “treasures her single state, even when threatened by attackers.”<sup>38</sup> Yet, both Brown and Aguirre-Sacasa create characters that,

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<sup>35</sup> Heather S Nathans, “Gothic American Drama,” *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 212.

<sup>36</sup> Ringel, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 26.



“are astray. They, not their houses and landscapes, are haunted. Their minds are their own dungeons.”<sup>39</sup> Abigail is tortured by her past as evidenced by her choice to forgo her own identity and assume an alias, as well as her willingness to dedicate the rest of her life to atoning for her sins through running a pox house. She is frightened of the looming specter of the devil, but not of the dangerous environment in which she lives.

The American Gothic style of *Abigail/1702* features a trinity of sorts: the continuing use up through modern times of the style, the interest in the gothic during Arthur Miller’s era, as well as the gothic elements of the time period of the play. Though some may argue that Gothic literature did not exist in 1692, Salem, Ringel argues that despite the fact that the, “colonization of the Americas predates use of the term ‘Gothic’ by Horace Walpole in reference to *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), his horrific romance of the Middle Ages. However, American Gothic is inherently ahistorical: It ‘revives’ a time and place that never existed.”<sup>40</sup> Thus all three time periods involved in the creation of *Abigail/1702* have been influenced in their own way by the enduring legacy of the American Gothic style.

The enduring feminist legacy of the American Gothic style continued long past this period. Perhaps one of the most influential and important examples is Susan Glaspell’s *Trifles*. As Linda Ben-Zvi notes of Glaspell’s murder-mystery drama, *Trifles* (1916), the author “externalizes” the desperation of farm wife Minnie Wright who has strangled her husband in response to his long history of mental and/or physical abuse. The “trifles” of the play, including the shattered jam jars, the mangled birdcage, the dead

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ringel, 15.

bird, and the disrupted kitchen, reflect the “broken, cold, imprisoning” world the character endures (Ben-Zvi 154). These elements create what Ben-Zvi describes as a “dark, foreboding, gothic scene” that set the stage for an audience to acquit Minnie Wright of her husband’s murder and to “see what might cause women to kill” (154). *Abigail/1702* similarly externalizes the internal trauma of its problematic protagonist, showing us Abigail Williams living in the woods and in isolation as she works through the demons of her past, sometimes quite literally.

Prominent among Aguirre-Sacasa’s works shaped by magic or witchcraft is the television series, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, which premiered in October 2018. *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* offers strong and relevant parallels to *Abigail/1702*. One of Abigail’s main struggles is learning to rely on herself and God, rather than artificial or superstitious safety mechanisms. Throughout the play she is bombarded and constantly reminded of her troubled past, the guilt of her actions, the opinions and expectations of others, as well as the looming specter of the Man in Gray. These themes are echoed in Aguirre-Sacasa’s later work on *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. Speaking of *Sabrina*, one critic states that the series uses the strong combination of the writing, visual design, and acting to, “root Sabrina’s journey in her own desire for autonomy and power, defined only by herself rather than the various great forces seeking to control her, including Satan himself.”<sup>41</sup>

Additionally, the intertwining elements of misogyny and witchcraft are clear in both works. Angelica Jade Bastien argues that elements of the *Sabrina*’s plot, especially

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<sup>41</sup> Angelica Jade Bastien, “Chilling Adventures of Sabrina Is a Decadently Malevolent Halloween Treat,” *Vulture*, October 23, 2018.  
<https://www.vulture.com/2018/10/the-chilling-adventures-of-sabrina-netflix-review.html>.

as it relates to the satanic and magical so-called Church of Night, lead to, “the undeniable fact that the Church of Night has noxious sexism braided into its rituals and beliefs.”<sup>42</sup> In Abigail’s accounts of her long history with the Man in Gray, the rituals she participates in feature dancing, nudity, and have a clear sexual overtone. Additionally, both *Abigail* and *Sabrina* explore similar themes regarding the, “dual nature of magic – as a means of power for women, but also a prison the Dark Lord has created for them.”<sup>43</sup>

Another common facet of early American Gothic is the propensity to demonize the Native American population. Puritan settlers viewed the native inhabitants as devil worshippers, and as Ringel states, “resistance to conquest by such foes was seen in apocalyptic terms.”<sup>44</sup> Though to modern sensibilities the language used to describe the Native Americans in the play is deeply problematic, it is historically accurate and captures the thoughts, fears, and beliefs of the Puritan settlers. This constant state of hyper-vigilance and fear of the Native population was deeply ingrained in the Puritan settlers and it is this fear of a nameless, unknown, ‘other’ that helps to create the tense atmosphere in Gothic writings set in this period. Furthermore, this demonization of the Native peoples gave gothic heroes both a literally and temporal enemy as well as a more psychological or supernatural one. As David Mogen writes, “the original frontier narratives present the journey into the wilderness not as a quest but as a captivity, the ordeal of the first American heroes, usually female, struggling to keep the light of faith

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<sup>42</sup> Bastián, “The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina is a Decadently Malevolent Halloween Treat,” *Vulture*.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ringel, 21.

aglow in heathen darkness.”<sup>45</sup> The relationship between colonial women and the Native community is of particular importance. In *Abigail/1702* this relationship is presented as a literal encounter with the devil.

### *Conclusion*

Playwright Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa says about his own work:

When you lay all that stuff next to each other, there definitely seems to be a common baseline to all those things. I am drawn to Americana, and I am drawn to gothic stories and I love American gothic stories. I love retro stuff, I love archetypes . . . I think I’m just drawn to these mythic institutions and I love exploring them in different ways.<sup>46</sup>

*Abigail/1702* specifically combines these elements through the play’s close ties to Miller’s *The Crucible* which has a history steeped in Americana both in the sense of the Puritan history of the Salem witch trials and the subsequent political “witch trials” of the Red Scare. In addition the gothic nature of the piece calls upon character archetypes and the powerful imagery of the devil, bringing in the powerful institution of religion. This propensity for mixing styles, inspirations, and both high and low art demonstrates Aguirre-Sacasa’s postmodern style of playwriting.

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<sup>45</sup> David Mogen, *Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the Frontier in American Literature*, (Lansing, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 56.

<sup>46</sup> Steve Marsh, “Afterlife With Archie Creator Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa on Bringing the Zombie Apocalypse to Riverdale,” *Vulture* (Vulture, October 9, 2013).

## CHAPTER TWO

### Analysis of *Abigail/1702*

Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's play *Abigail/1702* is a postmodern adaptation and feminist rebuttal of Arthur Miller's often-lauded American classic, *The Crucible*. Miller's protagonist, John Proctor, is willing to die rather than sign a false confession; John Proctor chooses to leave his wife, Elizabeth, and their family rather than to lose his personal integrity. Aguirre-Sacasa's protagonist Abigail, on the other hand, accepts false blame for the sake of preserving her son and extending grace to another woman. Abigail is the complete opposite of Miller's John Proctor; the different choices each is willing to make—and is forced to make—underscore the different lived experiences of men and women in America both in the past and today.

The titles of the two respective works—*The Crucible* and *Abigail/1702*—provide insight for potential themes of each work. The term crucible originally referred to a container that could be used to hold another material in extremely high temperatures as a way to purify the inner material. This process exposed the material to very difficult circumstances and essentially melted away or separated out the impurities or imperfections, resulting in a pure and strengthened form of the substance. The word 'crucible' then came to refer to a place or situation in which intensely concentrated forces cause a change development. Miller's use of the word crucible is highly effective as it evokes the historical process of purification that would have been used in the era in which the play is set while at the same time explores a deeper meaning. The crucible of

the witch trial puts the entire community of Salem under extreme pressure. It becomes very clear who the impure and pure individuals are. Unfortunately, in this situation, wherein evil, suspicion, and selfishness have taken over the pure suffer while the impure survive. Additionally, John is put through his own personal crucible of having to fully confront his actions and his faults. This experience purifies him by stripping away his sins, indiscretions and lies. He is left an honorable and good man.

The very title of *Abigail/1702* indicates the ways that this adaptation differs from its source. Unlike *The Crucible*, this story is solely focused on Abigail. The inclusion of the year indicates the significant amount of time that has passed since the tragic events in Salem. However, there is another, deeper, meaning to the use of Abigail's name in the title. Throughout much of the play, Abigail exists under an assumed name. She tries to discard her past and hide the truth of her identity, while at the same time seeking forgiveness and absolution. She is healed only after she reclaims her identity, finally confronting the true depth of her actions and seeking forgiveness with a fully humble and contrite spirit, seeking forgiveness not just from God but from those she has wronged, that she is healed. While *The Crucible* demonstrates one man's willingness to pay the price of his life in order to maintain his legacy, reputation, and good name, *Abigail/1702* looks at the concept of name differently. In this play, one's name is shown to be something that you can never lose, even if you want to. Abigail must completely humble herself, taking her sins on her own name and completely destroying her reputation in order to find forgiveness.

This chapter will explore several features of Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's play, *Abigail/1702*. The chapter will discuss plot, including structural elements and relation to

the backstory provided by Miller's *The Crucible*. Next, characters of the play will be analyzed with particular attention to the way persons of the story are adapted from *Crucible* to *Abigail/1702*. The play's main ideas and imagery will also be discussed in order to uncover a useful approach to directing this production. This chapter concludes with a statement of the director's production concept.

### *Plot*

#### *Synopsis*

The play begins with a prologue in which Abigail is being chased through the woods by, not only her Uncle Parris, but by the voice of the devil, recalling the pact she made with him. As this scene ends, we find ourselves years later, in Abigail's garden outside her house. She addresses the audience directly at various times throughout the play. We learn that she lives just outside of Boston, watches out for a young orphan boy, and now runs a sick-house, as we are introduced to John Brown, a sailor who becomes her next patient. As John heals and their relationship develops we learn more about Abigail's history through flashbacks and story-telling. We learn the painful history of her early childhood and how she first became entangled with the devil. We discover, along with Abigail, that John Brown is not who he claims to be, and we are able to witness Abigail struggle with her need for holiness and redemption and her need for love. Finally, the devil makes an appearance to claim his due. But first, Abigail is granted one more day. It is during this time that she truly must give up everything, including the orphan boy, who is in actuality her son, along with the long-dead John Proctor. In the forest where all of the trouble in Salem began, Abigail is confronted by the specters of the

twenty people murdered as a result of the witch trials. As she cries out for forgiveness, it is most freely given, the devil is swept away, and she finally is able to accept the peace and atonement that have been there for her all along.

### *Episodic Structure*

The structure of *Abigail/1702* is episodic in nature as defined David Kaplan in his 2007 book, *The Collected Series*. Kaplan writes, "an episode is an event performed onstage that is understood by its audience complete and by itself, separate from the whole of the play."<sup>1</sup> The play can be broken down into multiple episodes, each of which contains a transaction of some kind, usually a back and forth between characters that may include counter-offers, and ultimately an acceptance or rejection of the transaction, culminating in what is called a gest. This of course relates to Bertolt Brecht's work, which is the most influential and first use of the concept of a gest or *gestus*. This term refers to a physicalization, a gesture to be precise, that captures the 'gist' of the moment. In effect, this physicalized gesture is a tableau of sorts that symbolizes the essence of the episode. Kaplan also notes that "the essence of an episode is that something changes in the course of its playing, and the audience notices that it has changed."<sup>2</sup> While the episodic breakdown of *Abigail/1702* is clear, the specific gests in each scene requires thoughtful planning and a deep understanding of the script.

As discussed in Chapter One, Aguirre-Sacasa's usage of this type of episodic structure is linked to his interest and work in comic books. Comics and graphic novels are

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<sup>1</sup> David Kaplan, *The Collected Series*, (Hansen Publishing Group, LLC, 2007), 71.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 72.



perhaps the most episodically structured creative arts. Interestingly, the nature of theatrical episodic structure has a further link to that of comics. The still images of comics are used to convey meaning. Similarly, the *gestus* used at the end of each episode is a singular image used to reinforce the entire episode. Thus both theatre and comic books make use of dynamic visual images to create and reinforce meaning and heightened emotion.

### *Exposition and Given Circumstances*

The background information for this play is complex because it takes elements from *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, yet develops a separate background and details that are not from Miller's work, or in some cases directly contradicts what is presented therein. This two-fold approach becomes even more complex as *The Crucible* is a treasured piece of literature in America and is often taught in schools. Strictly within the world of this play however, there is a rich backstory.

In approximately 1675, Abigail Williams is born to a family in Portsmouth. She grows up with parents and a sister. Around 1687 Abigail argues with a neighbor girl, the daughter of the town's minister about the devil. Abigail says that he isn't real, but that night she sees him walking through her family's land. She is frightened, and is beaten when the truth of her taunting the neighbor girl is revealed to her father. Abigail continues to antagonize the neighbor girl by claiming that, though she now believes in the devil, because she has seen him, she is not scared of him. Abigail soon steals an iron cross from the minister's home. It is that very night that Abigail is woken by an approaching raid from a neighboring Native American tribe. She hides with the cross as she overhears the brutal massacre of her village. She prays to Jesus for protection, but as

the terror grows, she finally calls out and prays to the devil. She agrees to do anything he wishes if he will spare her life. Abigail witnesses in this way the destruction of her village and the brutal murders of her entire family.

Following this, the twelve-year-old Abigail moves in with Reverend Parris and his family. A few years later, around the age of fifteen, Abigail begins working for the Proctors in their inn and living with them. John and Abigail begin an affair. Though Abigail thinks of John fondly and may even have a crush, it is clear from her account that John was the aggressor in their relationship. John continues to pursue Abigail. Eventually the relationship is discovered, and Abigail is fired and put out of the house.

Shortly after this she discovers that she is pregnant with John's child. Knowing the fate of a bastard child, she seeks out a way to break up the already deeply strained marriage of John and Elizabeth in the hopes that John will then marry her. Abigail communes with the devil to turn John from Elizabeth, and the devil replies that the best way to do so will be to drive a wedge between them and proposes that Abigail accuse Elizabeth of witchcraft. Abigail insists that this was her only intention: to accuse Elizabeth so that she would flee from Salem, leaving John free to marry her and raise their child. However, Abigail invites her friends with her into the woods to dance, conjure, commune with spirits, and call upon Asmodeus. Though the other girls thought this was all in fun, Abigail knew in her heart it was all serious. She at some point signed her name in the book of the devil and made a pact with him. The night the girls were dancing and conjuring with Tituba, Reverend Parris caught them. He turned his anger on Abigail who used Tituba as a convenient scapegoat. Tituba then turned on some of the townswomen and the accusations of witchcraft spread rapidly. This created a situation in

which Abigail could conveniently accuse Elizabeth, yet it ultimately led to the deaths of twenty innocent people.

Before the hangings begin, Abigail runs away with her friend, Mercy Lewis, after stealing Reverend Parris' entire savings. Mercy is caught and brought back to Salem, but Abigail moves on to Boston. John is eventually hanged, though Elizabeth is spared due to her pregnancy. She does however see John's death and is confronted with her children's torture. At some point in 1692 or 1693 Abigail gives birth to Thomas, her child with Proctor, and leaves him at a church claiming he is an orphan. She will later befriend him and provide care, but not reveal their actual relationship.

#### *Action of the Play*

Sometime later, likely around 1697, Abigail hears Judge Sewall in church apologizing for his part in the trials. Abigail later approaches him at his home and begs for his assistance. He tells her that it is selfish and foolish for her to confess herself. He finally relents and tells her that perhaps if she spends her life doing good and asks for forgiveness God may yet forgive her. He also tells her to go to a woman named Margaret Hale. Abigail visits Margaret and is taken in by the woman. Margaret runs a pox house and allows Abigail to join her. She gives Abigail the new name of Ruth Meadow and agrees to give her a new identity. Abigail works there with Margaret until Margaret's death in 1700, when she inherits the house and land. Abigail/Ruth installs iron crosses in the trees surrounding the homestead and grows onions as ways to keep the devil at bay. She continues to nurse the sick and develops a positive reputation in town as a gifted healer and honest woman. By 1702, when the majority of the action of the play is set, Abigail is approximately twenty-seven years old, lives on Weft Hill outside of Boston.

During all of this time, John Brown has also been surviving a tumultuous life. It is unclear exactly how old he is, though it is around the same age as Abigail. John's environment growing up was toxic. His father was a blacksmith, so he grew up near the forge and hated it. His father also beat him. At some point in his youth, John leaves his father's home in Maine and learns skills of boatmaking and all about the sea. At an undisclosed time, John returns to his father's home and kills him, which was an action encouraged by an interaction John had with the devil (unknownst to John). Somewhere between 1690-1700, John joins a ship and sails the world. It is unclear if Nat Quince's pirate ship was the only vessel he was ever on. John states that in his time with the pirate ship he never killed or raped and that he disembarked from the pirates as soon as feasible. Days before the main action of the play begins, Nat Quince's ship docked in Portsmouth. Several sailors, including John, fell ill with the pox. Quince and others were caught for piracy, but John escaped, making his way to Abigail.

### *Climax*

From a script analysis perspective the climax of the play is the final turning point, the final moment for the protagonist to undergo change, and ultimately the moment that the rest of the play has been building towards. In *Abigail/1702* the climax of the play occurs in the final scene, specifically as Abigail calls out to the spirits surrounding her in this, her most vulnerable moment. This plea for mercy and forgiveness from the people she wronged so long ago in Salem is the last part of her descent in the metaphorical well that is forms the directorial concept for the play. It is here, as she is finally at her most humble and weakest that she finds strength, true forgiveness, and the living water of the gospel.

## Character

### *Abigail vs. Abigail*

The play ends with a changed version of Abigail. She has been through incredible trauma, yet the events of the play have propelled her towards healing. In the play's final moments the audience witnesses a redeemed woman, healed and forgiven, heading into a future full of love, including both John Brown and Thomas. Aguirre-Sacasa has taken the fallen woman of *The Crucible* and given her a second chance.

While she is a prominent character in Miller's *The Crucible*, Abigail Williams is the protagonist of *Abigail/1702*. She wants so earnestly to earn forgiveness for her actions – not only what happened in Salem, though that is what weighs on her mind more than anything because of the horrific loss of life – but also her agreement with the devil. She tries to earn this through self-denial, sacrifice, and good works. There are several key moments that propel Abigail toward finally being fully cleansed of her sins and her past. At the beginning of the play we see that she seeks absolution from an earthly authority figure through her pleading with the Judge. She also claims to seek forgiveness through prayer, yet receives no answer.

The version of Abigail found within *The Crucible* is a vastly different young woman. Miller's character is charming, beguiling, and alluring. She is also head-strong, vindictive, manipulative, and controlling. She is deeply hurt by things and has been damaged very much by past events in her life including witnessing the murder of her family and the relationship with John Proctor. Miller's Abigail exists outside of the society; she seeks to destroy it through deceit, which John cannot abide. She is the mastermind, the center of chaos, and the harbinger of evil. Her actions simply bring to

light and give outlet to the evil residing in the hearts of some of the residents of Salem. Her lies lead to the countless lies of others, creating the conflict throughout the town between integrity/truth and self-preservation or advancement.

Abigail of *The Crucible* struggles with her most influential relationship, that between herself and John Proctor. As she states in Act 1:

I look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart! I never knew what pretense Salem was, I never knew the lying lessons I was taught by all these Christian women and their covenanted men!<sup>3</sup>

The relationship with John opened Abigail's eyes to the true nature of Salem, but also damaged her very badly. She desperately clings to the idea or belief that they should be together and that he loves her. When it is finally clear to her that John does not and will not love her, she allows Mary Warren to accuse him of witchcraft, effectively condemning him to death. It is shortly after this that she flees Salem after robbing her uncle. Miller's Abigail desires John first and foremost. She is still a young woman and believes that John is in love with her, as she is with him. She wants to win him away from Elizabeth and is willing to destroy lives and condemn to death anyone and everyone to get what she wants. At the same time, she very much enjoys the power and respect afforded to her as the chief accuser, ringleader of the girls, and an esteemed member of the court.

At the beginning of the play Abigail believes that she is in control of the situation surrounding her. By engaging in occult practices she can win back the love of John, she can also destroy the town that she views as hypocritical. She is also bored and mischievous. As Abigail says in Act One, "We were dancin' in the woods last night, and

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (New York: Bantam Books, 1963), 21.

my uncle leaped in on us. She took fright, is all.”<sup>4</sup> She manifests her fears as well as her incredible charm and manipulation through her accusations, made at first to save herself. As the truth of her involvement threatens to come out, Abigail answers Mr. Hale’s question of, “Did you call the Devil last night?” with “I never called him. Tituba, Tituba...”<sup>5</sup> This charge against Tituba sets in motion the following accusations.

By the end of the play, Abigail is gone and powerless. We do not know what her fate will be, yet before fleeing the town, Abigail had become progressively more contemptuous, proud, and vindictive. The thrill of going from powerless in the community to having near ultimate power brought out all of the negative aspects of her personality. However, she is ultimately left again with no power, only suspicion. This is too much to bear so she flees.

The Abigail Williams created by Aguirre-Sacasa in *Abigail/1702* is a very different individual. Though she shares much of the same background as Miller’s Abigail, her internal character is unique. Part of this difference is a result of the intervening ten years and the trials and experiences Abigail has encountered during that time. However, that alone does not account for everything. Aguirre-Sacasa’s character, even in her reflections on the period of time that overlaps with the events of *The Crucible*, is a far more relatable, broken, and scared young girl than that of Miller’s temptress.

At the beginning of the play, Abigail is a broken woman, haunted by her past. She lives a life of sacrifice and hard work in the hopes that she will somehow find eventual

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<sup>4</sup> Miller, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 39.

forgiveness. Though she craves freedom from her past, she feels completely unworthy of such a miracle. She is willing to continuously atone through her good works and self-denial. By removing herself from her former identity she in essence is seeking to deny the truth of who she is and what she has done.

By the end of the play, Abigail has lost everything. She has confronted her past through reclaiming her name and sharing parts of her past with John. This is furthered in her conversation with Elizabeth wherein Abigail finally admits the full truth of the events in Salem. This is the first and time that Abigail admits her culpability in the relationship with John, asks for Elizabeth's forgiveness, and reveals the secret of Thomas's birth. On her journey to meet the Man in Gray in the forest where everything began, Abigail loses everything. She must forfeit the chance at happiness she sees with John Brown, confront the woman she most fears judgement from and place her child with her, then finally she is met by the spirits of those who died due to her actions. It is only here, completely devoid of any hope and facing up to the full extent of her sins that Abigail is able to directly ask those she wronged for forgiveness. It is here that Abigail is finally forgiven. She ends the play cleansed of her sins and free from the pursuing devil.

Abigail desires to be clean again. She wants to be forgiven for her sins and to be free from the devil. There are several key personal climaxes that she experiences. One is when John broaches the subject of marriage with her. This moment forces her to confront her developing feelings for the man and face the lingering effects of the last John she loved. The next is her confrontation with John regarding the truth of his identity. She sees this as both a betrayal of what she has been trying to do, and at the same time punishment for her momentary weakness in thinking fondly on him. The next personal climax occurs



when she confesses her name. It is the first time she has spoken the truth of her identity in 10 years. This is combined with the consummation of her relationship with John Brown, the first time that she has allowed herself physical pleasure, the hope of love/a relationship, or any sort of hope for a future. She then convinces the devil to give her one more day to wrap up her earthly affairs. Next, Abigail must make what is the ultimate sacrifice for her – she must confront Elizabeth, admit her culpability in the entire affair, and leave her son with a woman who hates her. Finally, she is confronted by the spirits of those that she wronged that she begs their forgiveness once more. In this moment she finds what she has sought these many years.

She demonstrates exceptional levels of willpower. She has lived the past decade in a selfless manner, denying herself happiness or any thought of a future. She dedicates herself to difficult work, suffers the pain of denying the truth of her relationship to Thomas while at the same time fostering a loving relationship with him. Most of all, she has the willpower to completely set aside the woman/girl that she was. Abigail shows herself to be a highly moral woman. Despite the grave sins of her youth, she seeks goodness, forgiveness, and to be a godly woman. She gives to others, is humble, highly religious, and charitable.

There are four important relationships involving Abigail in this play. Abigail's relationship with John Brown, Elizabeth, Thomas, and the Man in Gray. Her developing relationship with John provides the driving force of the play. It is through her interactions with him that her confrontation with the devil finally occurs, ultimately leading to the resolution. The relationship with John is a journey in and of itself. At the start, Abigail is a strict, somewhat cold, nurse figure. As John's health steadily improves, their

relationship warms, ultimately making Abigail confront the truth that she does want to find love as well as the forgiveness she has all but given up on ever attaining. It is through her relationship with John that she is able to break down her walls and confront her own past.

Abigail's relationship with Elizabeth is a key element of this play though they only interact in one scene. The relationship is adversarial, largely on the part of Elizabeth, though this dynamic is clearly justified. Abigail knows that she has wronged Elizabeth in a profound and irreversible way. Abigail must face Elizabeth and confess the full truth of the actions that occurred so many years ago. Their scene together provides a fascinating picture of both women. Abigail humbles herself and begs the person on earth who hates Abigail almost as much as Abigail hates herself. Abigail must entrust her son, the most precious thing in her life, into the hands of Elizabeth. This demonstrates Abigail's understanding that she is at the end of her mortal time and of her ultimate willingness to sacrifice.

Abigail's relationship with Thomas is complicated by the deception. Throughout the play it is clear that she cares for and loves Thomas very much. She wants to protect him, and has already done so by nursing him through the pox in his infancy. She seeks ways to make him happy and clearly regards the boy warmly. Once it is revealed that he is her son, the relationship becomes so much more important. For Thomas it does not change as he still does not know the truth. It reveals much about Abigail, however. She goes from a sort of 'big sister' figure to a tragic maternal image of self-sacrifice. Abigail's relationship with Thomas is the dearest thing to her, yet she is willing to sacrifice it to keep him safe. Being his mother is her greatest joy in many ways, and yet

she is willing to keep all knowledge of their true relationship away from the boy that he may be safe from the devil and from her lasting legacy.

Abigail's relationship with the Man in Gray is complex. One aspect is the adversarial nature wherein the devil has sought Abigail's soul for some time and she consistently evades him. Their relationship is the longest in Abigail's life, as it goes back to her childhood. Literally everyone else that Abigail has known for that length of time is dead. The relationship is obviously toxic, as any relationship with the devil would be. It is very real however. There is also a level of familiarity and begrudging respect/admiration on the part of the devil. Abigail is able to charm him.

#### *John vs. John*

Aguirre-Sacasa's choice to name his male protagonist John cannot be a coincidence. Therefore it is important to consider both the John Brown of *Abigail/1702* and the John Proctor of *The Crucible*. Both men are integral to Abigail's life and change the course of events. Though John Proctor is never seen in *Abigail/1702* as he is already dead, his presence lingers and the profound effect he has on Abigail is an important element of the plot. Therefore, an understanding of Miller's version of Proctor is relevant.

John Proctor is, of course, the hero and protagonist of *The Crucible*. Throughout the play, Proctor takes actions that place him in opposition to the corrupt society in which he lives. As the world around him descends into chaos, it is only his admissions of guilt, his sharing of the truth, that has the power to end the insanity. Though his first attempt is unsuccessful, his character undergoes a more personal and private climactic moment when he sacrifices his very life for the sake of his integrity. He is put through a crucible, his sins are burned away as he willingly walks into the refining fire. His final action

demonstrates that he is willing to pay the price to retain his integrity and stand outside of a world and system he cannot abide.

Proctor exists as a man in a conformist society who refuses to conform. Though Salem is essentially a democratic theocracy, Proctor is not afraid to be outspoken in his distaste for the Reverend and his disbelief in witchcraft. While the majority of Salem demonstrates a fascination with and even perhaps a desire for a discovery of witchcraft (or at the very least a belief that it could exist), Proctor maintains that it is superstition, mischief, and folly. As he tells Abigail, “I come to see what mischief your uncle’s brewin’ now.”<sup>6</sup> And several minutes later says to the Reverend and witchcraft expert recently come to town that, “I’ve heard you to be a sensible man, Mr. Hale. I hope you’ll leave some of it in Salem.”<sup>7</sup> Though he exists in many ways outside of the society in which he lives, Proctor feels as though he can choose to exist in this separate way. He feels above the petty squabbles of his neighbors and at the same time feels ashamed of his actions with Abigail, leading to his belief that he is lacking goodness. He feels simultaneously lower than and above his society and believes he can remain outside of the machinations of society.

By the end of the play, Proctor has lost all of his faith in the society in which he lives because the society has shown itself to be shallow, hypocritical, and easily overtaken by lies. Though he willingly destroyed his own reputation in an attempt to save the life of his wife and other innocents, he struggles with the concept of lying to save his own. In his final triumph of spirit, he declares the truth even though he knows it is also

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<sup>6</sup> Miller, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 35.

his death warrant. He refuses to conform to the will of a corrupt society by losing his integrity. In Act Four, when asked why he will not give in and sign his confession he exclaims, “Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of those that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name.”<sup>8</sup> Most importantly, Proctor finds true goodness in his willingness to sacrifice his very life in order to be truthful, honorable, and a martyr. He now understands the price of goodness and is willing to pay it.

Proctor simply wants to be able to live his life in peace without the overbearing and overwhelming influence and interference of his community, specifically that of the men like Putnam and Reverend Parris. Proctor wants to be a good man, live a simple life, and provide for his family. Though he knows he is not perfect he tries to be a good man. In addition, he spends much of his energy trying to regain the goodness he believes he lost through his adultery.

*The Crucible* is a bit unique in that there are almost two climaxes and they both revolve around Proctor. The first is his confession of adultery with Abigail in court. Here we see Proctor put the well-being of others ahead of his own reputation. Additionally, it is the point of no return in the play, making it the crisis point. Later, we see Proctor have to face the question of integrity and truth versus death – not of someone he cares about, but of himself. Though he is very tempted to give in, to conform, to deny the truth, he ultimately breaks free and achieves goodness. This moment is climactic and leads to a speedy dénouement.

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<sup>8</sup> Miller, 138.

His relationship with Abigail is rooted in lust, amusement, and passion. For John, the relationship was a distraction and a mistake. Though he thinks of her fondly and is undoubtedly sexually attracted to her, he does not love her the way he loves Elizabeth. He knows from the outset that she is trouble and mischief, yet he is attracted to that. As soon as her lies begin to hurt others, John is disgusted and angry with her. He realizes that her charms are not enough to outweigh the evil she is perpetrating. He feels in some ways responsible for creating this monster.

John Brown, however, exists as an antagonist to Abigail. His presence in the play stands in the way of Abigail's attempts to quietly hide her past, devote herself to self-sacrifice, and deny her name. It is through their developing relationship that Abigail reveals her truth: her name, her earliest interactions with the devil, and her desire for love and a future. At the beginning of the play John is lying about his identity, desperately ill, weak, and a stranger to Abigail. Over the course of the play, the truth of his identity is discovered, he is healed, and he becomes a threat to Abigail's peaceful, if incomplete, existence. By the end of the play John is made new through his relationship with Abigail. He is willing to leave his life on the sea in order to build a new life with her. He, like Abigail, seeks to outrun the past and the horrors that he has seen.

John desires to create a new life. The first aspect of this is surviving the deadly pox he has contracted. Once that threat is over, he seeks to become a part of Abigail's life. He wants to leave his life of piracy aside and create a good, moral, and honest life with her. He has a few personal climaxes throughout the play. The first occurs when he asks Abigail if the pox is a result of his being punished by God. This is followed a few scenes later by his fevered attempts to fight with the devil and his breakdown in front of

Abigail. Here he reveals the extent of his fears, his vulnerability and his desire to be good. His next personal climax is when he begins to suggest marriage to Abigail and is rejected. He then faces a climax when the truth of his connection to piracy is discovered by Abigail. Shortly thereafter he has another personal climax when he begs Abigail to accept him, to make him a good man, and to be with him.

John demonstrates strong willpower. He reveals that he pursued an interest in working near/on the water despite violent objections from his father. He also fights through a significant illness. It is also revealed that even though he was surrounded by extreme forms of human cruelty, crime, immorality, etc. he did not partake in such actions. Though he was involved in piracy, he is shown to be a largely moral man. He is honest in his own way and seems to be honorable. He seeks forgiveness for his sins and believe in the truth of the religion that he has been taught.

John's only relationship in the play is with Abigail. He sees her as a savior at first, as she nurses him back to health from a deadly illness. He becomes more intrigued by her and attracted to her as time passes. Eventually he must confront the truth of his past because it is partially revealed to Abigail without his knowledge. He wants to understand Abigail and her past. He seeks a relationship with her and accepts her fully.

### *Elizabeth vs. Elizabeth*

Within *The Crucible*, the character of Elizabeth Proctor is that of a gentle and loving mirror that forces John to see the truth. Elizabeth's actions in the play stand in the way of John viewing himself as the man he wishes to be. Her actions constantly remind him of his own sins. Elizabeth functions as Proctor's conscience. Though she tries to show love and respect for him, she is honest to a fault and cannot hide her worries,

concerns, and disappointments. Elizabeth believes John to be a good, but somewhat confused and lost man, however she loves him deeply.

At the beginning of the play we see that while Elizabeth has forgiven John for his indiscretions, she suspects that he still has feelings for Abigail. Though she valiantly tries to move past them, she confesses this. She encourages John to do the right thing at every step along the way. She believes him to be in search of his goodness. In the final moments of the play, Elizabeth knows that John is a good man, and she is proud of him. Her tragedy is that to get back the man she loves she has to lose him.

Elizabeth wants John to completely break off from Abigail and reclaim his soul. It is only by his complete process of repentance, including forgiving himself, that he can find peace and they can move on as a family. Her personal climaxes occur when in her fight with John in Act 2 where she claims that Abigail still has an arrow in John's heart, when she confesses that she does not believe in witches, when she is arrested, when she protects John's reputation and in effect condemns herself, and in her final lines.

Elizabeth has tremendous willpower. Her honesty and longsuffering make her a fascinating character. Her moral stance is absolute, yet based on Christian principles of love, forgiveness, mercy, and kindness. She is a deeply religious woman yet she is not caught up in technicalities or judgement of others. She is in many ways the most Christian of all of the characters. Elizabeth values honesty above all else. She values compassion, reason, family, commitment, kindness, and sense. Elizabeth is kind and somewhat soft-spoken. She wants her marriage to work. She tries to please her husband, but she is also willing to speak her mind and broach difficult topics with him, despite his



unpleasant reactions. She believes in honesty, yet proves herself to love John even more when she lies to try to protect him. Therefore she is also selfless.

The Elizabeth Proctor of *Abigail/1702* is a woman who has experienced intense emotional pain and loss. The intervening ten years have provided her with a new life, yet the scars of her past linger and are exposed again with the return of Abigail. She is far more direct, powerful, and aggressive than the Elizabeth of Miller's creation. In Aguirre-Sacasa's work, Elizabeth Proctor functions as an important reminder of Abigail's past and a key element in her transformation. Elizabeth is the physical embodiment of Abigail's gravest sins. Elizabeth forces Abigail to confront the truth of the situation in Salem and her actions. Though Elizabeth never explicitly states that she forgives Abigail, taking in Thomas shows a softening on her part. Furthermore, the scene between these two is the first time that Abigail is ever able to ask one of the individuals she wronged for forgiveness. She drives the actions by demanding the truth from Abigail.

### *The Man in Gray*

The Man in Gray functions as a specter looming over Abigail's life. He doesn't directly stand in her way, as she does everything in her power to avoid him. However, he is shown to have been the most constant presence in her life. He drives the action of the play through his appearance later in the piece wherein Abigail is forced to wrap up her earthly matters and face the consequences of her actions. He exists both as an element of Abigail's damaged psyche, tormenting her with her past. However, at the same time he exists in a very real, tangible way. He physically sits down at her table and speaks to her. Similarly he relates the story of meeting a young John Brown as a stranger in a common house. Aguirre-Sacasa is careful to not make the Man in Gray an all-powerful devil.

Instead, his power is limited to making bargains, tricking people, and bringing out through subtle encouragement the very worst elements of people. This is a devil that is far more frightening than a creature with a ram's head, cloven hooves, and a tail. It is easy for most to avoid evil when it is blatantly so. It is the subtle and persuasive justification and embracing of selfishness that the Man in Gray encourages that is so difficult to ignore or resist.

### *The Other Characters*

The play's tertiary characters are Thomas, Margaret Hale, and Judge Sewell. Thomas functions as a sacrifice. He is the dearest thing in Abigail's life and her selfless sacrifices for him demonstrate her true character. He does not drive the action forward on his own. Margaret gives Abigail her new identity and is willing to accept her and help her divorce herself from her troubled past. She doesn't drive the action forward, but she is a key part of Abigail's journey. Judge Sewell sets out Abigail on a journey of selfless sacrifice and striving to do good in the hopes that she may find forgiveness some day. He also encourages her to keep the secret of her true identity as he believes revealing it will only cause more tragedy and pain.

Ann Foster and Reverend Parris are fourth-level characters. Ann functions as a momentary reflection on the destruction caused in Salem by Abigail. She does not drive the action of the play at all. Parris serves as a reminder of the prior events of the play. The chase through the woods is a physical embodiment of the way Abigail is pursued by her past.

### *Themes and Ideas*

Through plot and character, the play develops several key themes and ideas. The most significant ideas are 1) sickness and healing, 2) women and work, and 3) forgiveness. Supported by Biblical allusions and imagery, as discussed below, these ideas provide a network of associations that help the audience understand the plot and characters of *Abigail/1702*.

#### *Sickness and Healing*

There is a pervasive shadow of sickness throughout the play. The entire community is aware of the dangers of the pox afflicting so many, causing widespread fear. Amidst this, Aguirre-Sacasa creates a version of Abigail that battles against sickness. She personifies the act of healing through her fearless dedication to running the pox house. The bulk of the play takes place as Abigail is engaged in trying to heal John Brown, just as she herself is trying to heal from the wounds of her past. The battle against sickness is braved by the female characters in the play, specifically Abigail and Margaret, while the men have nothing to do with it. John Brown is healed both physically and internally through Abigail's ministrations. He is cured of the pox and of his past. Throughout the play, water is repeatedly linked to the idea of healing.

The idea of sickness and healing is further associated with the crimes that occurred. Judge Sewall repeatedly compares the events of Salem to a wound, first stating that, "A wound, a bleeding wound, was opened in that village," later adding that, "the wound is not yet healed – it may *never* be healed."<sup>9</sup> In his attempts to convince Abigail to

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<sup>9</sup> Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, *Abigail/1702* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2017), 14.

keep quiet about her true identity and role in the proceedings, Sewall states, “I implore you, girl: Let the wound alone. Let it heal.”<sup>10</sup> It is also important to note that amidst this discussion linking the witchcraft trials of Salem with wounds and healing, Judge Sewall sends Abigail to Margaret Hale, a woman thought by many to be a witch, as well as the keeper of a pox-house where wounds and healing are all-consuming.

### *Women and Work*

Aguirre-Sacasa also explores the idea of “women’s work” through this piece. Abigail, Margaret, and Elizabeth are all depicted as being engaged in typical women’s work such as gardening, child-rearing, and laundry. Abigail also is associated with drawing water from the well and with the work of healing. In keeping with the culture of the Puritan colonies, necessary and practical work is an expectation and hard work is a virtue. To be idle is to be evil. Interestingly, the labor of the women is simultaneously made questionable by its implied connection to witchcraft. This is especially so of midwifery and healing.

In a community defined so strongly by its religion, only the women in the play—those whose contributions to society are so often denigrated—are depicted in acts of work. On the contrary, the men in the play, specifically Reverend Parris and Judge Sewall, contribute nothing useful to society. The only man to engage in good works in the play is the criminal John Brown, and he does this in an effort to impress Abigail, and only after being healed by her.

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<sup>10</sup> Aguirre-Sacasa, 15.

### *Forgiveness*

Finally, the concept of forgiveness is key to understanding this play. Abigail's entire life is consumed by trying to rid herself of her guilt for her actions in Salem. She dedicates herself to the healing of the sick as penance for her crimes. She does not expect forgiveness, yet she needs it. It is her journey towards this eventual absolution that propels the play forward. Despite her many good works and selfless actions, these are not the things that earn her forgiveness. Forgiveness has always been available to her, but it is not until she fully humbles herself through her confession and pleading with Elizabeth and the final step of pleading with the spirits of those she wronged that she is able to finally feel the peace she seeks.

### *Imagery*

Aguirre-Sacasa uses a wide array of influences in his work, allowing him to create imagery with profound depth. His imagery alludes to other works, cultural norms, and folktales, creating a wealth of inspiration to draw from as a director. *Abigail/1702* is filled with Biblical and Christian imagery including the lion, the tree, and water. These choices by the playwright allow for rich layering of ideas surrounding sin, good and evil, women, and redemption.

The imagery of the lion is important and complicated in the play. In the Prelude, Abigail tells us that she is being followed by a "lion" that chases her through the woods. A voice noted as the "Lion's Voice" then speaks menacingly to Abigail: "Wherever you run, I will find you. We next hear the word associated with the evil from the mouth of Judge Sewall. In his speech from the pew of the Old South Church, he says, "I beg that He would defend me against all Temptations; and would protect me and all men from the

Lion—the Devil!—so that the events of Salem might *never* again be repeated.”<sup>11</sup> This usage of the lion as a symbol for the devil is an example of Biblical allusion. In 1 Peter 5:8, the writer admonishes, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.” This clearly connects to the Man in Gray in the play. Like the prowling lion, the evil figure of the Man in Gray is fearsome, strong, deadly, stealthy, and destructive. He presents real danger to Abigail, both mortally and immortally. Perhaps most well known in Western culture is the famous Bible story in the Book of Daniel wherein the simple faith of one humble man saves him from the mortal danger of a lion.

However, Biblical references also connect the lion to the goodness and power of God. For example, Hosea 11:10 which states: “They shall go after the LORD; he will roar like a lion; when he roars his children shall come trembling from the west.” Ezekiel describes the cherubin around the throne of God as having four faces, one being that of a lion. In Christian scripture, the lion is linked with Jesus Christ. Revelations 5:5 describes the returning Christ: “And one of the elders said to me, ‘Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” These positive associations of the lion are reflected throughout the play. Abigail submits herself to God, trusting fully in his power to save her, and finds forgiveness and deliverance from the Man in Gray.

A second important image in the play that draws from Biblical and Christian source material is the tree. Trees figure prominently in *Abigail/1702*; the opening words of the play are these stage directions: “Nighttime. Bare, winter trees. A moon. The sound

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<sup>11</sup> Aguirre-Sacasa, 13.

of wind, the sound of wolves.”<sup>12</sup> The first spoken words of the play are from Abigail as she runs through the forest: “I am running—*flying* through the dark woods.”<sup>13</sup> When Abigail recalls her experiences with the devil in Salem, it is always associated with trees and the forest. The Man in Gray reminds her of his original invitation to, “Come to the woods and write your name in my book.”<sup>14</sup>

The tree on Margaret Hale’s New England property is directly linked in the play to the Biblical Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.<sup>15</sup> Abigail recalls Margaret Hale telling her that the tree is “is as ancient as the Tree of Knowledge,” and warning her not to eat of its fruit. Abigail then shakes her head mournfully and says that such a tree “bears no fruit”. By alluding to the Tree of Knowledge, Aguirre-Sacasa is introducing concepts of sin, of good and evil. Just as Eve has historically been blamed for the entire downfall of humanity and our expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Abigail is the one blamed for all of the events of Salem, despite the clear guilt of other community members in the witch-hysteria. The Biblical allusion to the Tree of Knowledge highlight the pervasively negative view of women held by Abigail’s hyper-religious society.

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<sup>12</sup> Aguirre-Sacasa, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>15</sup> It is worth considering that trees are also explicitly connected to the idea of the colonialism in New England and the America frontier. Richard Slotkin notes the link between wild nature, trees, and Native Americans in the literature of the New World. Puritan colonists, Slotkin writes, “conceived of their movement to a new land as a means of achieving a new life, in a spiritual as well as economic sense” but they feared “the threat of Indians” and the “thick, encumbering woods that isolated them from their past and their kind.” [Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 412.]

Water is another powerful recurring image with this play. The choice to have the character of John Brown be a sailor/pirate and his description of swimming under water are key elements of the play. In John and Abigail's first encounter, John describes being under the water of the ocean as, "What Heaven must be. Cool...and quiet...and filled with grace..."<sup>16</sup> This imagery is later used by Abigail to calm John as he is overtaken by his fever, and as a result, his fear of being condemned to eternal hellfire. In addition, as John heals, he is found in the front garden singing a sea shanty about the story of Noah, the biblical prophet who built an ark at the command of God in order that he and his family would survive the impending flood to cleanse the entire earth and baptize it anew. Water is of course also linked to the Christian practice of baptism, whereby one's sins are washed away and one is labeled a follower of Christ. Margaret Hale is also connected to water, though in a decidedly more abstract way. She tells the newly-christened Ruth that, "this meadow is an ocean to me. *My* ocean of green grass. I look at it, ripples in the wind, and I feel peace...I float on this meadow...*You* need peace, girl. You need to float..."<sup>17</sup>

Abigail is also very connected to the imagery of water. In a time of prayer she pleads to the Lord, saying, "Fill me to overflowing with Your living water, oh Lord, and give me the fortitude that my heart shall be Thine alone, *Amen*"<sup>18</sup> Most importantly, Abigail is connected to water through the imagery of a well. In biblical history, wells are important places where women's work is done, such as the watering of visitors and their animals, and courtship occurs. One of the most powerful examples of this occurs in

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<sup>16</sup> Aguirre-Sacasa, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 31.



Genesis 24 wherein Abraham's servant attempts and ultimately succeeds in finding God's chosen bride for Isaac through an encounter at the well. Further, in Genesis 29 Jacob first saw Rachel and volunteered to work for seven years in exchange for her hand in marriage, though he was tricked into marrying Leah and made to serve an additional seven years before ultimately receiving the hand of Rachel.

Abigail mentions in her first description of the house on Weft Hill that there is a small well. It is from this source that she is able to supply herself with water, as well as the sick-house, thus the well becomes a source of healing, as well as a location for courtship to ensue. Later, as John is healing, they have an encounter reminiscent of biblical accounts of couples meeting at a well and the ensuing betrothals that oft occurred. At the end of scene seven, this exchange occurs:

JOHN: Ruth? That well behind your house – you draw your water from that well?

RUTH: Aye. (*Proud, boastful.*) Margaret Hale dug it. Then, when it dried, I dug it deeper.

JOHN: Fetch me some water from it.  
*She looks at him. This clown's unbelievable...*

RUTH: Fetch it yourself, since you are so strong now.<sup>19</sup>

John's command from John to draw water from the well hearkens back to the parable of Jesus and the woman at the well, wherein the Savior asks a woman to draw water for him from the well. Like Abigail, the woman at the well is unmarried in a society where that is suspect at her age. Furthermore, the woman at the well clearly has a complicated history, as does Abigail. It is in this encounter that Jesus tells the woman of the living water he

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<sup>19</sup> Aguirre-Sacasa, 34.

offers, the same living water that Abigail spends the whole of the play striving for, sometimes without knowing it. The strong biblical connection between water, particularly that sourced from wells, as well as the concept of living water is used throughout the play.

### *Directorial Concept*

In his 2001 book, *Thinking Like a Director: A Practical Approach*, Michael Bloom writes,

And while the director is responsible for all aspects of a production, she has a distinct choice in developing the visual elements. She can decide on a concept and hire designers to carry it out. Or she can prepare the play, formulate ideas and possible ways of proceeding, and then collaborate with designers to realize the production's unifying principles. Clearing, my preference is for the second choice, working with designers once I have done some preparation and research.<sup>20</sup>

Like Bloom, I preferred a more collaborative working method for developing the Baylor Theatre production *Abigail/1702*. This required me to use my analysis of the play to articulate a clear approach that would serve as a means of guiding decision making in the production process. This approach is also known as a directorial concept.

My initial idea for a director's concept for this production centered around pageant wagons of medieval theatre. I was inspired by several elements in the script, most importantly Abigail's journey and the personification of abstract concepts. Throughout the play, Abigail experiences both a spiritual and physical journey. She travels through both time and space, as well as her own memories, in order to find the peace she seeks. This recalls the traveling nature of the pageant wagons. The feeling of traveling, going on a journey, was especially important given the dynamic and creative

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Bloom, *Thinking Like a Director: A Practical Handbook* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 70-71.

initial plan for the use of our unconventional outdoor space which is discussed in further detail below. The second key element of the pageant wagon concept was the personification of both abstract concepts, and most interestingly, the devil. While *Abigail/1702* does not feature characters such as Good Works or Faith, such as those found in *Everyman*, these concepts are in many ways personified by the minor characters throughout the play. The strongest example of this is the character of Elizabeth who exemplifies forgiveness as shown by her eventual willingness to take in Thomas. One of the most unique aspects of *Abigail/1702* is the way Aguirre-Sacasa makes the devil a literal presence on stage. This, too, ties into the rich history of the pageant wagons and their morality and mystery play traditions.

However, the approach of medieval pageant wagons did not fully capture my analysis of the text because it did not focus on Abigail and her character arc. Though I was intrigued by the connection to the pageant wagon I realized that I was losing sight of the most important elements of the play, namely Abigail's character and the changes she experiences over the course of this story. The concept of medieval pageant wagons also did not capture the mood and tone that I wanted to create with this production. As I continued to read, analyze, and research the play I realized that the gothic nature of the piece required a mood and tone that was darker than I originally pictured.

The final concept for the production was the imagery of a water drawn from a well. This was inspired by Abigail's well described within the script and the many biblical allusions that resulted. The richness of these multivalent references also tied strongly to the postmodern style of Aguirre-Sacasa's writing style. Finally, and most importantly, the descent of a bucket in a well mirrors the journey undertaken by Abigail.

She must delve into darker and darker regions, drop back through painful memories, and lower herself in great humility in order to reach the living water she seeks.

### *Conclusion*

The analysis of the plot, characters, ideas, and imagery in *Abigail/1702* detailed in this chapter works as a complementary directorial tool with the contextual research represented in Chapter One. First, the research highlighted the playwright's interest in grappling with a master work of American drama, *The Crucible*, and its gothic associations. Second, it revealed the application of popular culture and comic book storytelling devices in the text. Finally, this preparation for approaching the play allowed the director to identify the central importance of water to the play and the complexity of biblical allusions throughout the play. Taken together, these overarching ideas provided a strong understanding and conceptual framework from which a production could be developed. The following two chapters will detail how the research and analysis helped with directorial decisions of design and rehearsal for this production of *Abigail/1702*.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Design

The design process is crucial for any production because the elements involved are powerful tools in creating a unified atmosphere and visual world for the stage which is consistent with the director's interpretation of the text. An ideal design process starts with broad, inspiring, collaborative discussions between the director and entire design team far in advance of the opening of the show. The early part of the design process can be one of the most pleasurable phases of production development. As director Mary B. Robinson writes, "Watching and listening while designers open up huge art books with colored tabs marking the images they want to share, or dig out folders filled with photographs torn from magazines and spread them on a table, I feel as if I could stay in this part of the process forever."<sup>1</sup> Then the design process moves into a period of preliminary designs, revisions, and fine-tuning before arriving at final designs. In this way, the production benefits from the collective creativity of an entire team.

The design process of *Abigail/1702* faced unprecedented complications in its production development, namely the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing uncertainty. We encountered numerous delays just beginning our collaboration due to the rapidly changing protocols and procedures of the pandemic. Throughout, we continued to adjust and pivot to changing circumstances that no one could have predicted at the start of the process. This chapter will explore the development of our production design

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<sup>1</sup> Mary B. Robinson, *Directing Plays, Directing People* (Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, Inc, 2012), 40.

approach for Baylor Theatre's *Abigail/1702*, including the elements of scenery, costumes, properties, lighting, and sound as they were conceived in the collaborative process.

### *Concept Presentation*

I created a presentation to share with the designers discussing the concept, discussed in Chapter Two, with inspirational images, color palettes, and initial thoughts; see Appendix A for details of the images shared in this presentation. I began the presentation with an agenda for the meeting to keep us focused and so that all involved could think ahead for the upcoming discussions I had planned. We began with introductions and then I shared with the team my directing philosophy and style of work. I always try to start the design process by sharing this information in order to put everyone at ease and make expectations clear from the start. Next, I asked the group to discuss the script. This included their initial impressions, anything that stood out to them. I encouraged them to share any questions they had about the script as well. The next agenda item was a discussion of designer's initial ideas. I knew that the designers would not have anything prepared or pre-planned at this stage. I asked for their initial ideas as a way to invite sharing of any inspirations, images, abstract thoughts, or questions that their individual script readings and group discussion inspired.

At this stage, I shared my initial design ideas through the aforementioned PowerPoint. In his book, *A Sense of Direction: Some Observations on the Art of Directing*, William Ball writes: "In order to make the best use of the designer's creative imagination, it is valuable to begin by telling him what excites you about the play and

why you find it beautiful.”<sup>2</sup> I followed Ball’s advice and began the presentation with ideas and images that I felt would communicate my passion for the play and its aesthetic. The opening images of trees captures the eerie and oppressive feeling of the forest that I wanted to capture in the outdoor scenes. The trees seem to loom, blocking the sun and creating an almost other-worldly feel. The next image depicts a barren New England landscape, dominated by a large church building. This image accompanied my explanation of the initial design concept as discussed previously. The overwhelming religious nature of the play, combined with the initial concept of the medieval pageant wagons made such an image especially relevant.

The next slide featured a list of imagery that I wanted to highlight and explore with our design work. The next slide featured an image of a woman’s hands and verdant plant life that seems to be growing on the forest floor. I chose this image because it calls to mind Abigail in her work healing in the pox-house as well as her expertise working with medicinal plants. On this slide I shared information about the mood, tone, and influences. This segment of our discussion featured many important elements. I wanted to capture the eerie feeling found in several scenes of the play, which also necessitates embracing the flashback scenes. I felt it was critical to keep in mind that this play must not become a museum piece – it must feel vital and relevant. I expressed that the best way for us to ensure we as a team achieved this was by never losing sight of the fact that this is Abigail’s story, as opposed to *The Crucible* which is obviously the story of John Proctor. This key difference is one of the most important aspects of *Abigail/1702* – it is a feminine story that in many ways stands in direct opposition to the source material of

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<sup>2</sup> William Ball, *A Sense of Direction: Some Observations on the Art of Directing* (New York: Drama Publishers, 2003), 97.

Miller's play. Finally, we discussed that some elements exist out of time and I encouraged the design team to think carefully about how we could utilize this.

I then selected images to share with the team that I found inspirational and that established the mood of the piece. The first two images portrayed opposite conceptions of the Man in Gray character. I was intrigued by the dual nature of this character as described in folklore in general, as well as the script specifically. One image includes a skeletal animal skull with horns and fur which expresses the rustic, animalistic nature of the devil. The other image that I found especially inspiring is Magritte's painting *The Son of Man* which is a surrealist painting featuring a man in a suit and tie, wearing a bowler hat. Hanging in front of his face, suspended mid-air is a green apple and leaves. I was drawn to this image as inspiration for the Man in Gray for several reasons. The figure seems to exist out of time and is rather unassuming. His ability to blend in anywhere fits with the Man in Gray's eternal nature. The apple calls to mind the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden. This links to one of the earliest stories featuring the devil as well as important issues regarding feminism, sin, guilt, and the status of women which are also aspects of the script I found especially intriguing. The next slide featured three images that captured the eerie, almost otherworldly or surreal feeling that I wanted to explore.

The last slide included two images of stage productions with lighting effects that I found intriguing; one utilized gobos to create the look of light coming through slats of wood and the other used saturated colors which I wanted to explore the use of in flashback scenes specifically. This slide also included another abstract piece of art in shades of blue and green, an image of an iron cross, and a proposed color palette for the production. This initial color palette featured a deep red with brown tones, a dark green



with yellow tones, gray, cream, and black. This concluded my presentation. At this point I invited any questions or discussion from the design team and we set some preliminary goals as we planned for the next meeting.

### *Design Meetings*

Due to the pandemic many of our design meetings were held virtually, with our first occurring on August 21, 2020. We engaged in discussion of the concept and impressions of the script. At this point we discussed initial ideas about color palettes, material choices for props and set pieces, and possible methods to transition items to allow them to be used in multiple scenes. We also explored ways to create the feeling of existing out of time. Primarily this included lighting and sound. We discussed the use of lighting changes to highlight flashback scenes. In terms of music we discussed the idea of utilizing underscoring for some key moments of flashbacks as well. In early meetings designers shared images with the group that they found inspirational and ones that were indicative of their designs. I was especially inspired by some of the images that were shared by our student props designer that featured trellises and other hanging plant elements. As we transitioned into my updated concept of the well, these images became even more important.

At this point, the location for the production had been chosen. The reality of the pandemic required creativity, as producing a traditional play on one of the theatre's two stages would not be allowable. We made the bold decision to plan the production as an outdoors, on-site theatrical experience. This option provided us with several exciting opportunities, the most fundamental of which would be to have a live audience. In addition, the abundance of potential locations within our chosen site allowed for myriad

producing choices. The mature trees around the property helped to create the feeling of being in the forest and added to the eerie mood. The reality of seeing this play, in an outdoor setting at night with the wind through the trees and the moon above was an intriguing and engaging concept.

However, there were elements of this reality that posed challenges for the team. As a director this location created several blocking and logistical challenges, especially when combined with the ongoing demands of COVID-19 safety requirements. The social distancing required between audience members meant that the seating arrangements had to be very specific and take up more room than I had originally anticipated. This meant that audience members would be sitting in a strange configuration, making it difficult to effectively block the scenes. In addition, the use of multiple locations meant that audience members would sometimes be in each other's line of sight as they turned in their seats from scene to scene.

A lack of rehearsal time in the actual space was a reality we had to consider. I was especially concerned about this issue as I am used to the luxury of a great deal of rehearsal time in the actual performance space. One of my main concerns is that the actors would not have enough time to fully reach their vocal potential. I knew that the outdoor environment would pose a significant challenge for the actors in terms of their ability to create enough volume and the lack of rehearsal time in the space would not help matters. Also, producing the play at the village would require striking and securing all set and technical equipment every day. This, like many other elements of the production was also further complicated by COVID-19. For safety we wanted to utilize as small a crew as possible, but the reality of having to do this amount of set-up and strike every on-

site rehearsal and performance meant that the number of required students had to be expanded. One possibility that we discussed was using the cast to help set-up the platform structure. In addition, the unpredictable nature of the weather demanded a contingency plan. We would be unable to move indoors due to COVID-19 regulations. One potential plan was to use freestanding portable cover for the audience. I was very concerned about this particular issue, especially the impact it could have on technical elements. Despite these challenges, the production team moved forward with the onsite plans.

### *Space Design*

#### *Location 1: The Historic Village*

The Baylor Theatre production team for *Abigail/1702* developed a plan to utilize a collection of historic buildings which is part of Waco's Mayborn Museum as a site for the production. This collection of buildings is properly known as the Governor Bill and Vara Daniel Historic Village. According to the museum's website, "The structures were relocated from Liberty, Texas to Baylor's campus in 1986, where they now reside along the banks of the Brazos River as part of the Mayborn Museum Complex. Today, the nine wood-frame buildings that comprise the Village provide a glimpse into the past, bringing to life a community in the 1890s."<sup>3</sup> The multiple historical buildings of the collection are set around a small footpath and located behind the large Mayborn Museum building on Baylor University campus. Though the structures are not time-period appropriate to the

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<sup>3</sup> "Governor Bill and Vara Daniel Historic Village" Mayborn Museum, accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.baylor.edu/mayborn/index.php?id=931881>.

play, the weathered and historic feel of them, combined with the mature trees and plant life, created a sense of time and place that was appropriate for the production.

On August 29, 2020, several members of the design team and faculty were able to attend preliminary meeting on site where I laid out an ambitious plan. Since we were using a non-traditional location with multiple structures I wanted to explore utilizing multiple locales and moving the audience between them. Ideally the show would have begun with the audience in the barn structure, yet this building was too small to accommodate the necessary spacing between audience members. Instead, it was decided to use a raised section of land behind the general store for the prologue, which would allow the audience members to stand across the footpath and maintain distance. The audience would then follow the character of Abigail to one of the houses with a front porch, large open area and a side area for seating. The audience would remain here for the majority of the play, simply turning in their seats to focus on different locales. The audience would then follow Abigail again for her confrontation scene with Elizabeth, which would take place in front of another house. Finally, the audience would accompany Abigail to a small copse of trees for the final scene. This plan was approved by all involved, though it did raise logistical concerns that we began trouble-shooting.

With the initial plan of utilizing the multiple locations around the historic village, the department agreed that I did not need a traditional set designer and instead the faculty scenic designer would assist as a collaborator where needed. However, as I continued working, I realized that the majority of the play takes place within Abigail's home and would require a more significant set than previously anticipated. I worked with the faculty scenic designer and the two properties/set design students to create a floor plan

appropriate for the interior of Abigail's house. The student props designer took on additional responsibilities in terms of set dressing. She introduced many ideas about how to make the interior space a visually interesting environment. We discussed the furniture we might use, an abundance of candles and other small elements to fill the space, and the possibility of a backing wall structure where items could be stored

Lighting in this location would have entailed creative solutions that made the best of the challenges presented and best served to highlight the incredible environment. One of the difficulties of the location was the lack of traditional theatrical rigging, allowing for lighting fixtures to be hung directly over the playing space and to be suspended from a considerable height. The outdoor location required portable structures from which fixtures could be hung, but their maximum height meant that any sort of isolation through lighting was virtually impossible. In addition, the movement between locations meant that the relatively minimal amount of fixtures available to us would have to be planned in such a way that the same lighting elements could be used to light multiple areas. The faculty lighting designer created a detailed plan and preliminary drawings detailing how this could be done effectively. One of the most exciting aspects of his preliminary design was the use of light boxes on the ground level that would direct light upwards. This was intended to create a spooky or eerie atmosphere and highlight the mature trees on the property. These light boxes were also portable, and there were plans to move them between locations, so that they would help create atmosphere at the top of the show and be utilized in the final scene in the forest. Despite the challenges of the location, the faculty designer's preliminary work created a cohesive and exciting design plan.

Sound is the other design area that was greatly affected by the outdoors and our intended use of multiple locations. Sound in this location would have entailed some similar challenges as lighting. The audience movement demanded speakers placed in multiple locations and the weight of such equipment meant that the re-use of equipment through moving pieces during the show was not feasible. One potential benefit of this location was the natural soundscape created by wind through trees, crickets, etc. There was some discussion about how much to augment the natural sounds, if at all. The negative aspect of this potential, however, was the lack of control we would have over such soundscape. In addition, the often intense wind, combined with the challenging outdoor acoustics, meant that we had to make difficult decisions about the use of microphone amplification for the actors.

#### *Location 2: The Berm at the Theatre Building*

Despite the positive aspects of utilizing the historic village and having the audience move throughout, there were several concerns. The first, and in my mind most significant, was that the audience movement would disrupt the entire momentum of the show. One of the key elements is the driving nature of the writing and the fluid transitions. After much discussion and thinking about the issue, I finally concluded that it was more important to heighten the growing momentum of the piece, therefore the audience needed to be stationary. Additionally, the collaboration with the museum would have required all light and sound equipment to be fully struck and then re-hung for every dress rehearsal and performance in addition to any set pieces. This would add considerable time and require more crew than anticipated. The suggestion was made to move the production to one of several areas around the theatre building. This would

allow for an earlier and permanent set up for the set pieces. Though the light and sound equipment would still have to be struck each night the timing would also be improved due to the increased proximity to storage and the potential use of crew hours. Ultimately it was decided to use an area near the rear parking lot. This particular spot would require the least added use of masking materials, featured several mature trees and a large open space for audience seating. The designers were told of this development on October 2, 2020, and we continued with the design process, accommodating this significant change.

### *Set Design*

Once the new location was established and we were firmly working with the final concept of the well the set design progressed. The platform-based structure that we initially created for use in the original space became the primary set piece. One of the challenges involved in this transition was the fact that the structure no longer only represented the interior of Abigail's home. This posed an initial challenge for us as it meant that we had to reevaluate our initial plans. It was a difficult choice to move on from some of the plans the student props designer and I had considered to help create the interior of Abigail's home, but since we were now dealing with the reality of trying to evoke multiple locations through one stationary set, it became increasingly important to find creative ways to use the space. Different areas of the platform structure developed designated uses. For example, one of the lower platforms became John Brown's bed for interior scenes in Abigail's house. An upper platform was used as a bed in interior scenes and then in exterior flashback scenes the same space was used to represent a tree stump. This fluidity helped keep the momentum of the play going. There was much discussion about the use of separate furniture pieces. I wanted to avoid this as much as possible as I

felt having too much clutter and reliance on such pieces would interrupt scene transitions and become both physically and visually cluttered on the small playing space. In addition to the platform structure there were many discussions about ways to use the vertical space available to us. The student props designer became increasingly involved in the set dressing of the space and we discussed utilizing hanging elements throughout the playing space that would provide a powerful visual element and serve the practical purpose of storing some prop pieces out of the way. The designer found many relevant and inspirational images that we drew from for this idea. One of the other key elements to the set design was the look of the structure. Ultimately, we decided that the platform structure should look as though it were made from weathered wooden slats. The hanging elements decorating the space and adding texture would use rope. These two materials—weathered wood and rope--were inspired by the bucket and rope of the well imagery. Appendix C includes several production photographs which show the result of our collaboration; see figures C.1 and C. 2 in particular for details of the wooden slats and hanging materials.

### *Properties Design*

The student properties designer was an eager collaborator and introduced many interesting ideas into the design discussion. One of the key props elements was the cane used by the Man in Gray. The designer and I had many discussions about what this piece should look like. We eventually decided on a relatively long walking stick with the head of a ram at the top that metamorphosed into a serpent's body for the main structure and ended in a cloven hoof. The entire piece was to look like carved wood. In this way, the Man in Gray would be walking with a subtle visual reminder of the many forms he can



take on. The designer planned to experiment with a special heat-sensitive paint treatment on the cane that would change color when touched by the actor's warm hand.

A second key prop was the Man in Gray's book, wherein years previously Abigail had written her name. Early on it was proposed that the book light up, highlighting the otherworldly nature of the object. Achieving this effect was a challenge for the student properties designer but the result was effective; see figures B. 15, B. 16, and C. 9. Other important properties included lanterns, poultices, household items such as laundry, brooms, blankets, and a jar of leeches which could be used believably in the scene where Abigail applies them medicinally to John's body. See figure B.17 for a design image of the jar of leeches and C. 4 for a production photograph of the prop in use during a performance.

One of the challenges faced by the properties designer was the need to ensure that props didn't pass between actors in order to minimize any risk related to COVID-19.

### *Lighting Design*

The faculty lighting designer faced many challenges and inconveniences in creating the design for this project, yet his expertise and professional attitude made for a successful design. Despite the change in venue, many of the initial difficulties still existed. The new outdoor space still posed the challenge of a lack of rigging. This presented two potential problems. The first of these is the reality of hanging and securing the fixtures in such a way that they do not interfere with audience sightlines. The second problem is that the lack of height eliminates the possibility of isolation lighting. Despite these challenges, the faculty lighting designer created a cohesive and effective design. The pivot to a single location meant that lighting would become even more important in

establishing differences between locations, especially interior vs. exterior. This was to be accomplished mainly through the intensity and color of the lighting. In addition, color and intensity played an important role in helping to establish the sense of existing out of time and heightened reality of the flashback scenes. See production photographs in Appendix C. for examples of the final lighting effects, especially figures C.5 and C. 6.

### *Sound Design*

The student sound designer faced logistical challenges as well as the creative challenge of creating a cohesive design. In practical terms, the outdoor stage poses several concerns such as how to deal with ambient sound, ensuring the actors can be heard, where and how to place the speakers given the lack of rigging, and the set-up and strike required for each usage. The student designer and her faculty mentor worked together to overcome these challenges. The sound designer and I spent considerable time exploring the use of underscoring for key moments and what type of music or other sound would be most appropriate for said moments. I encouraged her to find contemporary works that were not overly melodic but instead more atmospheric. She did an excellent job of finding multiple relevant works. We also discussed various options to accompany an important scene that includes Abigail dancing. For this particular moment I wanted something very percussive. In addition, we discussed the possibility of including live sound mixed in with some pre-recorded elements. The final sound element was the pre-recorded dialogue that allowed for significant creative license including things like distortion and other audio manipulation of the actor's voices.

### *Costume/Hair and Makeup Design*

The student designer responsible for costumes as well as hair and makeup was perhaps the least impacted by the pivot in location, yet faced significant challenges. The ongoing pandemic meant that the working reality of the costume shop was restricted somewhat and that had to be taken into account. In addition, all hair and makeup would need to be done by the actors themselves to maintain safety. Finally, two actors played multiple roles and the designer had to find creative ways to provide them with separate costume looks that could be rendered in simple ways. The student designer was an eager and effective collaborator. She provided many inspiration images and always remained open to discussion. We had significant discussions about the color palette we wanted to utilize. My initial color palette served as inspiration, but we agreed to introduce more blue tones, which coincided with the revised concept focusing on well imagery. We also focused many of our discussions on the Man in Gray and how to create the perfect balance of a historical look while still existing out of time in some ways.

Each character was carefully considered in our discussions. Abigail was a primary focus as she is the main character. We finally agreed on a light blue dress appropriate to the time period; see figures B. 2 and B. 3 for design development images and figure C.3 for a production photograph of the character of Abigail. The blue color was inspired by the well concept and imagery. By having Abigail wear this significant color we were exploring the idea that the peace and forgiveness of the living water she seeks has been within her grasp the entire time. Her hair and makeup design was simple and fit the time period and culture of the Puritan colonies of New England.

For the character of John Brown, we wanted to capture his pirate past. This was accomplished through the use of short pants which are seen frequently in drawings of the time period; see figures B. 4 and B. 5 for design development images and figure C.2 for a production photograph of the character of John. His costume was simple and distressed to represent the harsh conditions he had seen. John's character posed one of the most significant challenges for makeup design due to the need to visually represent his pox infection. Early on, these sores are described in the stage directions as, "gross."<sup>4</sup> As his illness gains strength, John's face becomes covered by the pox in, "bloody blisters."<sup>5</sup> As he heals, John describes the sores as, "a spider digging holes in my back and putting its eggs into me,"<sup>6</sup> and in the same scene Abigail mentions the, "crusting."<sup>7</sup> This vivid imagery inspired the designer and gave them clear attributes to include in their work. As time goes on, the pox sores must be removed to reveal healing skin. These requirements posed challenges for the designer in several ways. The logistics of how to alter the makeup with the actor on stage for almost the entire show were challenging. In addition, the restrictions for COVID safety complicated matters.

The character of the Man in Gray was inspired by the previously discussed painting, Magritte's *The Son of Man*. Instead of complete historical accuracy, the designer and I agreed that his costume must reflect his ability to be anywhere at any time. He should at once blend into any time period, yet have elements that set him apart; see

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<sup>4</sup> Aguirre-Sacasa, *Abigail/1702*, (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2017)17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 27.

figures B. 6 and B. 7 for design development images and figure C.2 for a production photograph of the character of Man in Gray. This was achieved through basic formalwear, slim-fitting to highlight the lanky build of the actor which called to mind another inspiration image by Edward Gorey. A silk tie or cravat was also discussed, in the green apple color of the Magritte painting.

Elizabeth is a pivotal character in the play though she is only in one scene. The costume for Elizabeth evolved through our design discussions into a deep green dress appropriate to the era. The style was more formal than Abigail's dress, which served to highlight both the age difference between the women, and their difference in social status. The green color was chosen for two reasons. First, it represents Elizabeth's jealousy toward Abigail as the person who had an adulterous relationship with John. Second, the color green represents the personal growth that Elizabeth exhibits over the course of her brief but powerful scene. Please see figures B. 8 and B. 9 for design development images and figure C.1 for a production photograph of the character of Elizabeth.

For the Judge and Reverend Parris, played by the same actor, we discussed how to allow for separate looks that could be achieved quickly and without a full costume change. The overall look for both characters needed to be formal in order to represent their stations in life, yet Parris's costume would be disheveled to show his mental state and the reality of the chase he was involved in. Please see figures B. 12 and B. 13 for design development images of these two characters.

For the character of Margaret Hale we decided on an era appropriate dress in an earthy orange-red color to represent her connection to nature and her status as a healer. To transition the actor into the character of Ann Foster a long cloak was added. Please

see figures B. 10 and B. 11 for the designer's concept art and costume renderings for these two characters. Finally, the character of young Thomas was to be dressed in ragged and patched pants and shirt to show his status as an orphan. The patches, however, were to be in blue tones, similar to that of Abigail's dress to reinforce their connection and imply that it was likely she who patched his garments. Figure B. 14 shows the designers sketch for Thomas's costume and figure C. 10 presents a production photograph of the actor playing Thomas in costume.

### *Conclusions*

The work done by both faculty and student designers in the pre-production weeks of summer and early fall 2020 was excellent. The process was characterized by a high level of collaborative spirit which resulted in creative solutions. The next phase of the project was casting the play and beginning rehearsals. Throughout rehearsals, the production design continued to progress in a positive way. No one on the team realized that we would face a major challenge during the rehearsal period which had ramifications for the designers as well as the actors. All of this will be discussed in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Rehearsing the Play

The Baylor Theatre production of *Abigail/1702* began rehearsal in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic. From auditions through opening night, every aspect of the process became more complicated and required the team to find creative solutions. COVID required great patience and flexibility from all involved as well since protocols could change at any moment with the constant influx of new information. In this chapter, I will explain how auditions were held in the pandemic and detail how our revised rehearsal process worked under safety protocols. In addition, I will expound on the significant challenge faced by our production, unrelated to COVID-19.

#### *Auditions and Callbacks*

In usual conditions, auditions for a Baylor Theatre mainstage production require students to prepare to present monologues in person to the director. Based on those initial auditions, the director then selects a small number of the actors to be called back for a second round in which they work with others to briefly rehearse and present scenes together in a variety of combinations until the director has enough information to make final decisions. All of this was changed by the global pandemic and the department's need to keep students distanced for safety.

The audition process shifted away from the traditional in-person monologue delivery and into self-tapes. This technology and/or technique had been used before, but in my limited experience it was mostly for film and TV opportunities or touring shows.

Students were required to tape themselves delivering a monologue. For the initial auditions I provided several cuttings from the script. I encouraged them to choose whichever piece they felt the strongest connection with, without worrying that they would be limited to that particular role. The students were given a deadline by which their tape must be submitted as digital video uploads. For this we used an online storage and sharing system through the university.

Once all of the videos were submitted, I reviewed every audition making notes of which students I wanted to callback and for which roles. In this process, I was looking for students that were well-prepared and had clearly made an effort to offer their best possible audition. I was also looking for strong vocal work and clear diction as I knew the outdoor location would require this. Finally, I was looking for strong character work as demonstrated through choices in gesture, movement, and line delivery. Some things I notice about student video submissions are that they tend to limit students movement as they are concerned with staying in frame. This makes some rely too much on facial expression to communicate. The self-taping also made some utilize poor vocal techniques since they were being picked up by the microphones on their recording devices. Were I to do this step again, I would remind students of key factors I was looking for within the audition notice.

In the callback process, the interference of COVID-19 was even more noticeable. One of the key elements of the callback process for me as a director is the way those auditioning interact with each other. This is a key factor in casting and I was concerned about how I would glean this information while not conducting in-person callbacks. We elected to make use of the video conference technology provided by Zoom and through



our university. We carefully planned how to create a process that felt the most like our traditional callbacks while figuring out the logistics of how to best use the available technology. Ultimately we created an effective plan wherein everyone called back met in a large Zoom meeting and then we progressed into callbacks. I thanked everyone for their patience and flexibility and gave some basic notes about what I was looking for such as bold character choices, appropriate projection, character interaction, etc. I had elected to not assign specific scenes to students ahead of time. Instead, everyone called back was asked to be ready to read any of a number of given characters and selections. Once we were ready to begin, the students were given specific scenes and assigned scene partners. The Zoom technology allowed for the creation of multiple break-out rooms, meaning that each scene assignment had a private video conference wherein the students could practice their scene and wait to be called on. Each scene assignment was eventually recalled to the main Zoom room and they then presented their assigned selection. From this point I was able to make notes, consult with faculty, make new assignments, and finish conducting callbacks.

Once I had seen everything I needed to from an individual they were free to leave the Zoom call. By structuring the callbacks in this way we effectively mimicked the structure of traditional callbacks. During the callback process, especially for a thesis show, the input of key faculty members is invaluable. To ensure that I didn't lose this help in the process myself and a few selected faculty met in a large meeting room on campus. The Zoom video was shared on a large screen where we could all see. This allowed me to consult with the faculty in between individual callbacks and was a very helpful part of the process. Those of us in attendance adhered to COVID-19 protocols by

sitting apart and wearing masks the entire time. The entire stage management team for the production did an incredible job of organizing and running the callback process. Most of it fell on one student assistant stage manager, as the other assistant and the stage manager were both involved in an overlapping show. The assistant in attendance handled all of the breakout rooms and all technology.

My two main concerns heading into callbacks were the aforementioned need to see students interact, and a lack of ability to get an accurate representation about a student's ability to project. Despite my initial concerns, the process worked very well. The students did an excellent job connecting and interacting with one another despite the isolation. In addition, they did an admirable job of demonstrating good vocal technique, which reassured me about their ability to be heard in our outdoor environment. Overall, I was pleased with the callback process and believe it was a success.

### *Casting the Show*

Casting is one of the most important jobs a director has and it is one I take very seriously. The right actors in the right roles can create magic on stage. I always strive to base my casting choices on the right combination of the actors that provide the best performances in the callback process. I am a proponent of diverse casting whenever appropriate; in my opinion it is almost always appropriate and valuable to find a diverse cast of actors. In the case of a play set in the past, some directors seek to cast actors who would reflect the ethnic and racial realities of the time being depicted. However, this usually has the effect of robbing a play of contemporary vitality and layers of depth.

There are multiple factors I look for when selecting a cast. During the callbacks I look for actors to engage with each other, not simply read the words from the provided

sides. I encourage them to make bold choices and if I see potential I will usually give the actor a note or two to try and have them do part or all of the scene again. I do this to evaluate how flexible they are and their ability to take notes. This is a key factor for me as sometimes an actor will deliver a good performance, but when asked to take a note is incapable of delivering a different performance. When this happens I almost always eliminate the actor as it is vital to have a cast that is willing to try different things, and ultimately take direction from me even if they do not agree with it.

In casting this particular show, I knew that finding the right person to play Abigail would be key, as well as the right combinations between that actor and those playing John Brown and the Man in Gray. I felt confident that if I could select the right group in these three roles, the show would have every chance of being successful. The biggest surprise of the entire process ended up being the casting of our Abigail. I do not precast before callbacks, but I certainly have people in mind that I think are strong and likely to earn the role. At the start of callbacks there were two young women who had greatly impressed me in their initial auditions. Both are gifted actors and each brought unique qualities to their portrayals of Abigail. As the evening progressed it became clear to me that neither actor captured everything that I was hoping for.

However, after a callback session for a completely different character, the young woman auditioning greatly impressed me. I consulted the faculty for their opinions and was given encouragement for my plan to have this individual audition for Abigail. I was impressed by this actor's performance and the way she interacted with both actors I was at this point considering for John Brown. It was at this point I felt confident that I had the right actor for Abigail. This made it significantly easier to select the right actors for both

of the male leads as it was their chemistry and energy reading with her that differentiated who was best suited to play John Brown and the Man in Gray. There were multiple strong candidates for the remaining three roles, but the three that I ended up casting brought just the right combination of factors to each role.

The final casting challenge is the young child required of the script. There were two faculty members with young sons. I held a separate audition for them, once I had cast the role of Abigail. We conducted a simple scene reading with each boy, and each was asked to prepare a song as the character of Thomas sings a hymn during the show. I selected the boy that offered the strongest reading and had the best chemistry with our Abigail. I was overall very confident in the final cast list and eager to work with them all.

### *First Read-Through*

Once our entire cast was approved and confirmed we organized our first full read-through of the script, which I chose to do at the Mayborn Museum. I did this so that the cast could get a better sense of what the overall vision for the production would be, and to get them excited about the possibilities of the outdoor show. At this point we were still planning on moving the audience to multiple locations, so the plan was to move our group on the same path so that each scene would be read in its appropriate location.

I began the read-through by welcoming the cast to the project. I then explained the overall vision and plan for the production. We then began the read-through. Once we were finished with the script we had a discussion about the script and whatever other questions or observations the cast wanted to discuss. I thought that the read-through went very well. The actors were able in this first experience in the space to recognize how important their vocal projection would be, helping them to work on this throughout the

rehearsal process. The students were excited to work on the project and contributed enthusiastically to the discussion. I also noticed that the actors worked well together and played off of each other effectively right from the start. Overall, it was a very positive and encouraging meeting and an effective way to begin the rehearsal process.

### *Rehearsal Safety*

In order to comply with the COVID-19 safety requirements dictated by our department, university, and the CDC, the rehearsal process had to undergo some significant changes. The facility itself was equipped with air purifiers that had to be used at all times. Everyone involved had to wear a mask at all times. This was a big challenge as it makes it much harder for the actors to project appropriately and it also blocks much of their facial expression. In addition, the constant need to readjust one's mask, especially as they move about while speaking, means the actors are sometimes distracted.

Another challenge we faced was blocking the love scene. I had originally planned to have the actors embrace and kiss, but in order to better protect the actor's safety I eliminated this. The leaders of the stage intimacy directing organization "Theatrical Intimacy Education" wrote on their website in March 2020, "changing a moment of intimacy from something realistic to a stylized moment performed at a distance may be an option."<sup>1</sup> We opted to handle the kiss in the play by having the actors approach each other while removing some layers of garments. This allowed us to clearly express where the characters were heading with their relationship in an effective, yet safe way.

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<sup>1</sup> "Theatrical Intimacy and COVID-19", Theatrical Intimacy Education, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.theatricalintimacyed.com/blog/covid19>.

Another area of safety that had to be addressed in departmental policy was testing for COVID virus prior to unmasking and engaging with other actors. We waited until as late as possible for this step. The was that those involved with the show must be tested for COVID-19 directly before dress rehearsals. Once we received confirmation that all actors were negative, the masks could be removed for dress rehearsals and performances only. The students were expected to maintain the highest possible levels of cleanliness and self-isolation through the end of the run. This included attending classes remotely and not socializing with any friends or family that may have attended the performances. Though it was challenging to adapt to these protocols, I believe we handled the situation well, according to the most reliable information available at the time.

### *Rehearsing in the Mabee Theater*

Due to multiple reasons, we were unable to rehearse in the planned performance spaces, so we made use of the Mabee theater in the Hooper-Schaefer Fine Arts complex on Baylor campus. A long-held practice, especially in professional theatre, is using an alternative rehearsal space with the dimensions of the set taped on the floor. This allows for accurate blocking and is the best possible way to familiarize the actors with the planned set when using the actual space is not an option. To achieve this, the stage management team works with drawings from the set designer and uses what is called spike tape to create a bird's-eye view of the proposed set. Any differences in height between areas of the floor are noted as well. For our production, the stage management team taped out the platform structure our set design team created and then at the start of rehearsal had the entire cast walk around and familiarize themselves with it. For this

phase of the process, the rehearsal plan included completing rough blocking quickly, then polishing and adjusting scenes as needed.

### *Blocking*

Blocking is a term that refers to the planned movements of actors around the playing space. My general approach to blocking is to find a balance between telling actors what to do and letting them explore. I approach each day's scenes with a loose plan for blocking, but prefer to begin with one run of the scene wherein the actors are free to move about however they are inspired. Sometimes this gives me a stronger or better idea than what I had previously. Regardless of that, I find it helps loosen the actors and get them thinking like their characters. I then like to work through the scene bit by bit, making sure the actors are notating their individual movement paths. Once rough blocking is done on the day's assigned scenes we ran through them multiple times, as permitted by time. In this way, we discover if elements of the blocking are ineffective or if they are weak choices. I encourage the actors to speak up if something does not work for them, or if they have an idea they would like to try. I strive to keep this communication open and collaborative. Once every scene has been roughly blocked in this manner, rehearsals proceed. Scenes are more deeply explored and at this point the focus is on the acting performances and making the show as strong as possible. Often I find that there are significant changes to the blocking as we work through the rehearsal process. I still find it helpful to begin with quick rough blocking however, as I find it gives actors a place to start from.

In working on *Abigail/1702* one of my favorite scenes to block was when the audience first meets the Man in Gray. It is a powerful section of the script and the two

actors involved were strong collaborators. I wanted to capture the power of the Man in Gray as well as the eerie nature of his presence. Additionally, I wanted to express Abigail's fear and familiarity with his character. To begin the scene I had the Man in Gray sitting/crouching near the sleeping Abigail and John. As Abigail woke, the action moved slightly away from the still sleeping John. I chose to have some moments during this scene wherein the Man in Gray pursued Abigail through the space. We did a "cat and mouse" acting exercise to explore this type of pursuer/pursued movement. I wanted to show the complicated nature of each character and their relationship, so in a different part of the scene I had the Man in Gray sit down next to Abigail, almost as if to comfort her. One of the strongest moments occurred when the two were discussing the terms of their new agreement. Abigail had her head slightly bowed in deference to the Man in Gray, and he used his cane to lift her chin, forcing her to look in his eyes. It clearly expressed the type of absolute power he had over her in that moment. This scene offers an interesting example of my blocking practices, yet each scene was shown this level of attention.

### *Unexpected Change*

Unfortunately, in addition to the difficulties presented by COVID-19, our production faced another significant challenge. About two weeks into the rehearsal period, I was afflicted with a serious medical problem that required me to miss rehearsals. I hoped this would only last a few days so I began by asking faculty to take over rehearsals. Faculty member A assisted for one day and viewed a stumble-through of the show and then did vocal work with the cast. Faculty member B then spent two rehearsals working with the cast on Viewpoints exercises. Faculty member C spent two days



working with the cast on scenes. My communication with these three faculty members was minimal as I was very ill.

Beginning on October 12, Faculty member B returned and took over the direction of the show as my illness progressed and I would not be able to return. This faculty member became responsible for finalizing the show and integrating all technical elements. My communication was limited by illness, but I was able to view a rehearsal on October 18, over Zoom. I had a brief discussion with Faculty member B after that. I was comfortable with all of the adjustments or changes that had been made since my departure as they made the show stronger and more engaging.

The relative success of this change in director was evaluated with a survey (sample responses are available in Appendix D). Of those that responded to the survey, 66.7% described themselves as either “somewhat comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the transition from myself to Faculty member B. I believe both cast and crew were largely comfortable with the transition because it provided much needed stability amidst the confusion of my absence. In addition I believe they were comfortable because of the reputation and expertise of Faculty member B. In this particular context, I think that “comfortable” means that they felt at ease and confident that the show would progress smoothly through the transition.

To have more respondents rate their level as “very comfortable” ideally, I would have communicated with cast and crew directly to apprise them of the transition and leave them with some encouraging words. At the time this was beyond my capabilities due to illness. While no respondents indicated that they were “very uncomfortable” with the transition, 16.7% identified as “somewhat uncomfortable”. In this context, I think

“uncomfortable” indicates an unease or nervousness about how the transition will affect what had already been established both with actors and designers by me. It may also be affected by how the change was communicated to the group. As I was unavailable, I do not know how said transition was shared with the cast and design team. To help make this group more comfortable perhaps we could have offered an involved but neutral party to serve as a sounding board where any concerns could be addressed and treated confidentially. Overall, I am incredibly proud of the way the entire cast and team worked together to make the best of a difficult situation. I believe it was handled with grace, compassion, and a high level of professionalism.

#### *Technical and Dress Rehearsals Outdoors*

Once technical rehearsals, often referred to as “tech”, begin, the authority of the production transfers to the Stage Manager. For our production the Stage Manager was a student, along with two student Assistant Stage Managers. In this phase of the production, the Stage Managers are responsible for a great many things including running the rehearsals, ensuring that all technical elements are running smoothly, preparing the playing space, and addressing any problems that may arise. In addition, the Stage Manager must coordinate with the lighting and sound designers to add all cues to their prompt book.

Severe rain and a drastic cold snap surrounding technical rehearsals and dress rehearsals became the final challenge faced by the production left the team. Stage Management worked with the actors and costumes to make sure the actors could add needed layers of clothing and accessories such as socks and fingerless gloves. Blankets were used backstage to help keep actors warm. The actor playing John Brown posed the

biggest challenge as he is onstage most of the show and his costume was made of thin material and he spends time with his shirt off. Costumes worked tirelessly with Faculty member B and with stage management to ensure that all of the actors were well-taken care of and had extra layers to wear to protect them from the intense cold. There also arose a small problem of mask storage for when the actors were not on stage. This was solved by using plastic tubs to keep the masks clean, dry and accessible. Dress rehearsals went well and the adjustments made to the costuming were approved. The weather held until invited dress which had to be cancelled due to rain.

During the tech and dress rehearsal period, the team became aware of light pollution coming from some exterior safety lights mounted on the side of the Hooper-Schaefer Fine Arts Center. These lights interfered with the production aesthetic and made it difficult for patrons to focus on the lighting design for the outdoor stage. Several solutions were discussed, including using ladders every evening to temporarily obscure the lights then take them off again at the end of the performance. Eventually, the department was able to work with the University offices of public safety and facilities to turn off the problematic exterior lights on the building for several hours each night.

### *The Performances*

Our preview performance occurred on October 27, with public performances on October 28, 29, 30 and November 1, 2020. This is about the same length of run for a typical Baylor Theatre play. However this was by no means a typical performance period. The show was limited to small audiences, seating was outdoors, and there was unseasonably cold weather for part of the run. The department developed a detailed plan

in order to facilitate the outdoor production, accommodate weather issues, and comply with COVID requirements.

In order to carefully monitor the number of expected patrons, all ticket sales were handled over the phone through the box office. The front of the building was used as a place for patrons to check in and scan their tickets. Patrons were then escorted to the playing space by ushers. Lighting provided these ushers with lanterns which served to both light the way, and fit the look and feel of the production. The first several rows of audience seating were reserved for those who chose to bring blankets to sit on, with the remainder available for folding chairs. In order to be prepared for inclement weather, large black umbrellas were purchased by the department and were available for ushers to assist patrons if need be. Finally, the university assigned “Safety Ambassadors” for our dress rehearsals and performances in order to monitor for proper mask compliance from all involved. The performances were limited to forty patrons in order to ensure proper social distancing and each performance was sold out.

### *Conclusion*

Despite the many challenges faced by the production team and actors, the Baylor Theatre production of *Abigail/1702* was successful. As a department we found creative solutions to working through a pandemic. We expanded the ways in which we use technology to assist with preparing for a production and provided valuable learning experiences for all students. Most importantly, the artistic team never gave up. Everyone involved rose to the occasion and worked as an effective collaborative unit to ensure that safety was a priority without sacrificing the important story we were trying to tell. Though it was painful to have to leave the project due to my illness, the knowledge that

Faculty member B was taking over eased my worry as I knew the project would be handled with great care. In addition, I had the utmost confidence in the rest of the design and stage management team, as well as the cast I had assembled. I am grateful to everyone involved for their tireless work.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Self-Assessment

Considering the unusual circumstances of this thesis project, I will not use this chapter to assess my work developing a strong production concept based on research and analysis, or discuss the success of my blocking decisions, or reflect on our team's design choices. Rather, I will assess my work as a director in the two key areas of communication and leadership. Further, I will consider how I managed the major transition of directors in the project during my unexpected absence.

#### *Communication*

As the production process began, communication was largely handled through email, both because school had not yet begun and to accommodate COVID protocols. Once the semester began our production meetings were held over Zoom, with occasional on-site meetings held in person. As previously discussed, the entire audition process was handled remotely through the use of Zoom. Though our first cast read-through was done in person, the next few rehearsals were held over Zoom as well in an attempt to minimize COVID dangers. In order to streamline communication throughout the process, I worked with the stage manager so that information could reach the entire team from one source. We had some communication hiccups along the way, especially in terms of trying to schedule meetings, but as time progressed this became less of an issue.

In terms of my communication style as a director, I strive to be as open and accessible as possible. If people working on the production have concerns, questions, or

problems I want them to feel like they can speak to me freely and honestly about them. I try to establish this type of environment through asking questions, asking if everyone is comfortable, and encouraging discussion of ideas. Specifically working with actors, I frequently check-in with them and ask how working a scene felt to them, if they have any concerns or ideas, etc. I also make sure at the first rehearsal to explain how I like to work to the cast. I encourage them to communicate with me while laying out that there is an appropriate time and place. Essentially, I explain that I would always like them to attempt the scene how I have asked, and after we try it they should feel free to express concerns or ideas and we will work from there. I also make it clear with a friendly reminder that they are not to give notes to other actors. All of this combined represents how I try to communicate with the design team and actors throughout the process.

### *Leadership*

My leadership style is built on the ideas of collaboration, equity and inclusion, and respect. I truly value the insights and expertise of those I work with and try to make sure that my leadership style balances between demonstrating authority for the project while inviting others to participate fully. I encourage those I work with to bring their ideas to the table and strive to always be respectful, even when the situation demands that I turn down someone's idea. I especially like to give a good amount of creative leeway in the early stages of the process as I believe this fosters creativity and encourages ideas that would otherwise not have emerged. I balance this with being as clear as possible with anything that is set in stone or ideas that I am particularly fond of or intrigued by.

In working with the actors specifically, I maintain a supportive and safe environment for them to take risks and push themselves as artists. I create an atmosphere

that balances professionalism, freedom, exploration, and comradery. I encourage actors to try new things if they feel so prompted and to never settle. I seek to lead through example and am always willing to acknowledge when an idea I have tried does not work. I also believe very strongly in always giving credit where it is due. I believe this leadership style worked for this project, as I believe it works on almost any project.

### *Managing the Transitions*

The multiple transitions between approaches and locations hindered the process to a degree, yet I don't think it could have been avoided. At each stage of the decision-making process the available information was carefully considered and discussed, leading to the eventual singular location on campus. If we had known at the beginning that we would be using more traditional staging, i.e. the singular stationary playing space, it may have been helpful to have a designated single set designer, but I don't know that I would change anything about the design team, as I am very pleased with the end result. I believe the casting was optimal and I would not change anything about it. One thing that I would do differently, circumstances allowing, would be to solidify my concept earlier. The process of discovery overlapped with the beginning stages of design work, causing some changes and possible delays as designers transitioned into working with the final design concept. I'm not sure how this could have been avoided, other than as I continue to grow as a director my skills in this area will improve.

I think that I handled the transition as well as I possibly could. It was a very challenging time and I had to make the difficult decision to put my health first, though I wanted to be able to continue. Leaving the project in the hands of Faculty members, with Faculty member B ultimately taking over, was challenging emotionally and mentally, yet



the talent and professionalism of the faculty eased my burden. I am forever grateful for their assistance, and for the willingness of the department to work with me in this way so that I could complete my thesis project, despite my health crisis.

There are things I would have liked to do differently, such as have clearer direct communication with both the production team and the actors, but my condition did not allow me to do so. If I had been able to do so, my hope is that everyone would have had a higher level of comfort with the transition. I also would have liked to have an early discussion when Faculty member B officially took over the project wherein we could have discussed the current status of the production and proposed changes.

### *Conclusion*

Though this project was far from ideal, I was still able to learn valuable lessons. This production taught me to focus on the things in a production that I can control, and try to accept the things that I cannot change. This applies to numerous aspects of this project, including the COVID protocols, scheduling, and my eventual departure. I sometimes let myself become overly concerned with details out of my control and the minutiae of every aspect of the production instead of focusing only on my job as director and those items that were within my power to affect.

I also learned about discovering and choosing a concept with which to unify and approach the production. I was pleased with my initial concept and excited to move forward with it, yet I remained open to discussion, further research, and the discovery process as I became even more intimately familiar with the script. The final concept that emerged was much stronger than the initial and I am pleased that I decided to trust myself and the production team in our abilities to transition to a new concept. Ultimately, I

believe that the concept allowed for a deeper meaning to emerge from the production while simultaneously allowing more depth and breadth for the designers to explore in their work.

This experience has affected me as a director in both practical and more personal or philosophical ways. In practical terms, the lessons I discussed previously will of course impact my directing as I continue in my career. In addition, every opportunity to direct affects my style and approach because I strive to evaluate what things were successful and what areas I most need to improve upon. This project showed me that I need to continue to work on creating a strong concept. In addition, I will continue to work on my skills in creating scene transitions that support the action of the play without slowing the momentum of the piece. I want to direct pieces that are dynamic and engaging in every moment, so this is an area in which I need to gain more expertise. I believe that this project also made me a more effective communicator. I especially improved in communicating with student designers through my interactions with the properties and costume designers.

My personal life unexpectedly became closely linked with this project in unique ways. Like Abigail, I was battling forces outside of my control in an effort to get my life back. I too had to humble myself and put my fate in the hands of others. For Abigail, this was Margaret Hale, John, and Elizabeth. For me, I had to put my trust in medical professionals and family members. The pervasive theme of healing became increasingly important to me as the process went on. Both Abigail and I had to come to a point where we accepted that we had done all we could and put our faith in a higher power to help us overcome our weakness. Additionally, as the process went on I felt increasingly linked to

the relationship between Abigail and Thomas. Just as Abigail had to be willing to give up the child she birthed in order to protect and support it, I had to give up the production I had birthed. It was heart-breaking, but the right choice. These unforeseen circumstances ended up giving me more insight into the character of Abigail than I had previously.

In more personal ways, this project has had a profound effect on me as a director. I tend to put all of my attention and energy into a directing project when provided with such an opportunity. I sacrifice other things in order to dedicate myself to the project at hand. However, when faced with a health crisis I was forced to step back. This was deeply painful, yet had to be done. I learned to remind myself that as much as directing is my passion, my calling, and my chosen profession it is vital to remember that it is just that, a profession. This project reminded me that there are other aspects of my life that require the same level of care I put towards my directing, and sometimes they must take priority. I have given it a lot of thought over the last few months and I believe that this realization will ultimately make me an even better director. This process has humbled and tried me, yet I am so proud of the final product and the process. I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to helm this project, and for the many lessons learned.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Images from Initial Design Meeting Presentation

Concept Ideas

- A pilgrimage
  - Abigail is on a journey, but so are each of us
  - Captures the heavy religious tones
  - Calls back to pageant wagons and morality plays
    - Personification of the Devil
    - Personification of various attributes (love, hope, lust, anger, forgiveness)
  - There is a sense of time – progression
  - Sacrifice




Figure A.1 Slide from initial design presentation detailing concept ideas

Imagery

- Wells
- Water
- Lions
- Trees
- Crosses
- Iron



Figure A.2 Slide from initial design presentation describing imagery found in the text

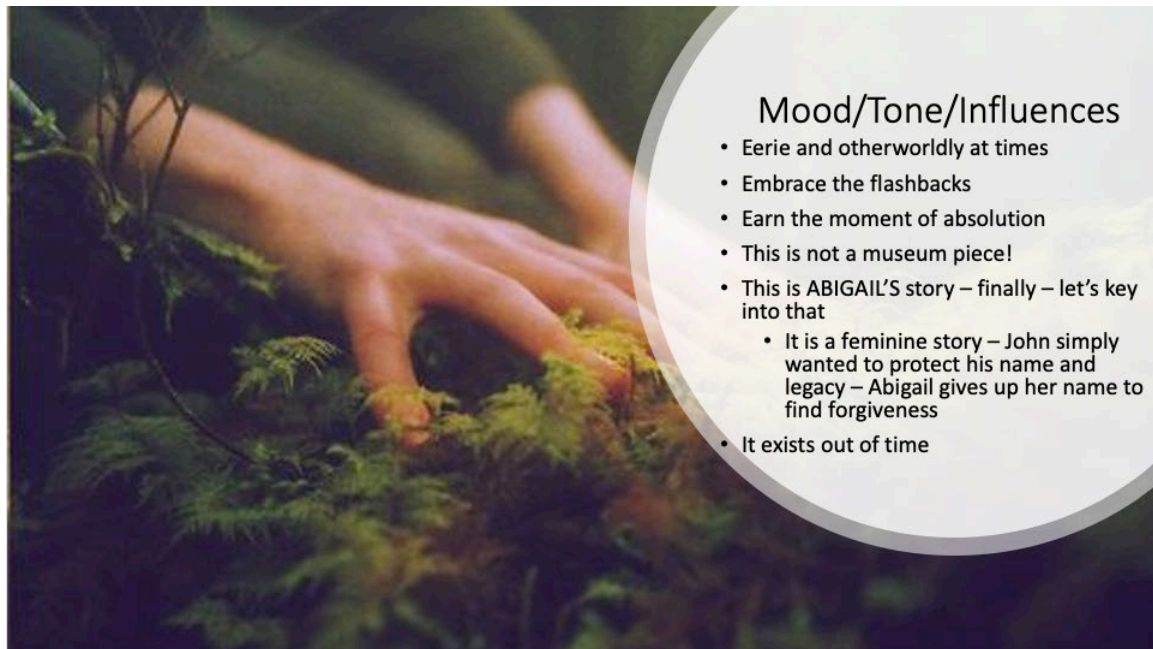


Figure A.3 Slide from design presentation listing the mood/tones/influences of the production



Figure A.4 Slide from initial design presentation showcasing the inspiration images for the show





Figure A.5 Images from the digital mood board detailing the gothic inspiration

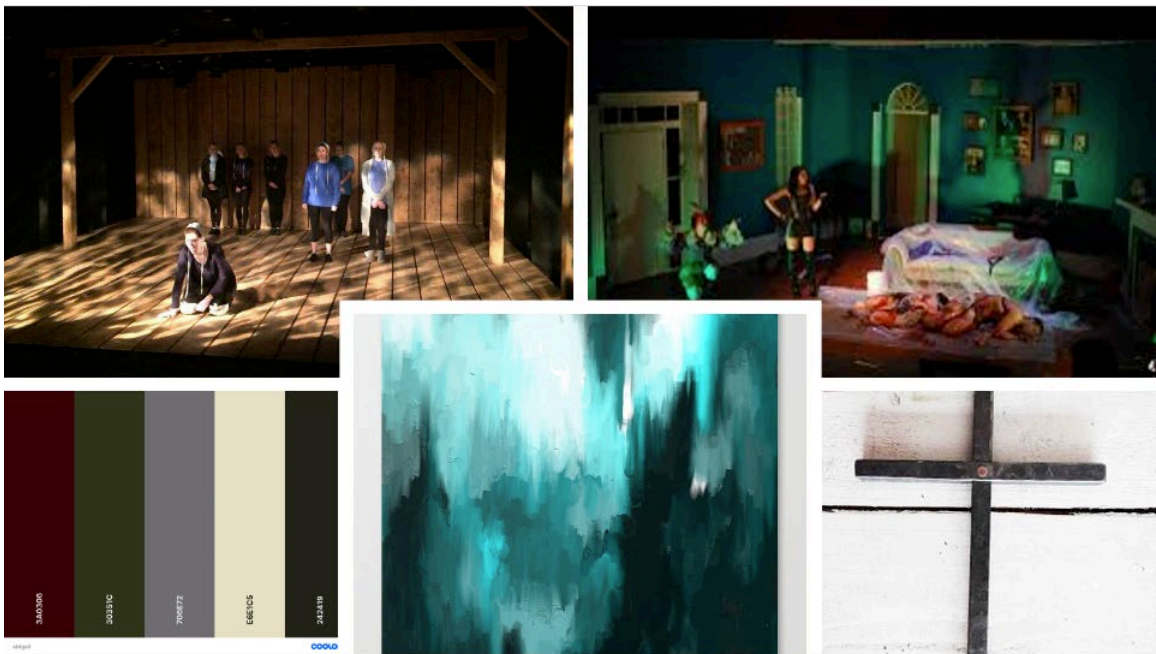


Figure A.6 Images from the digital mood board detailing lighting and set ideas

## APPENDIX B

### Select *Abigail/1702* Design Images

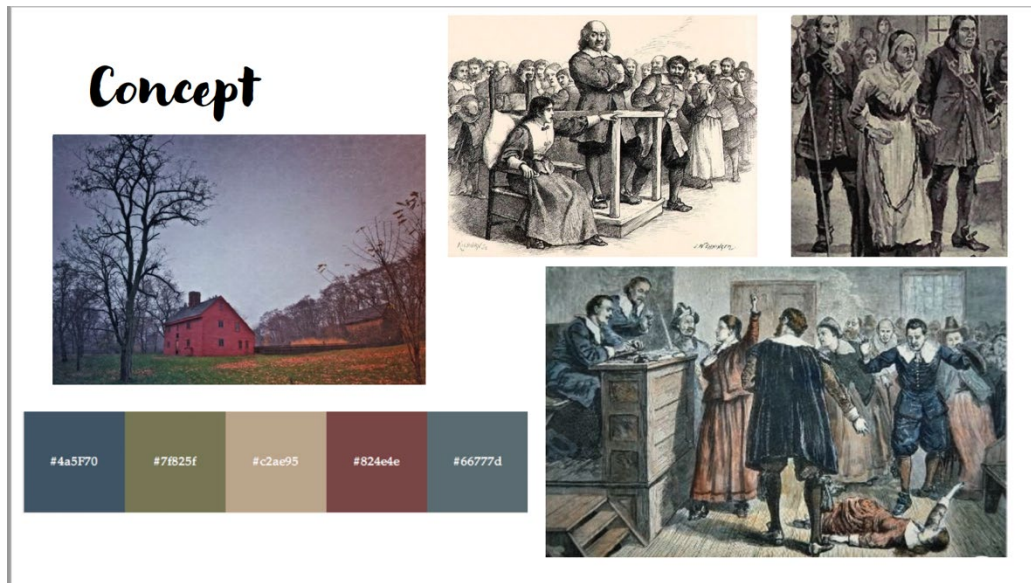


Figure B.1 Concept images detailing the Salem Witch Trials

### *Abigail* Concept

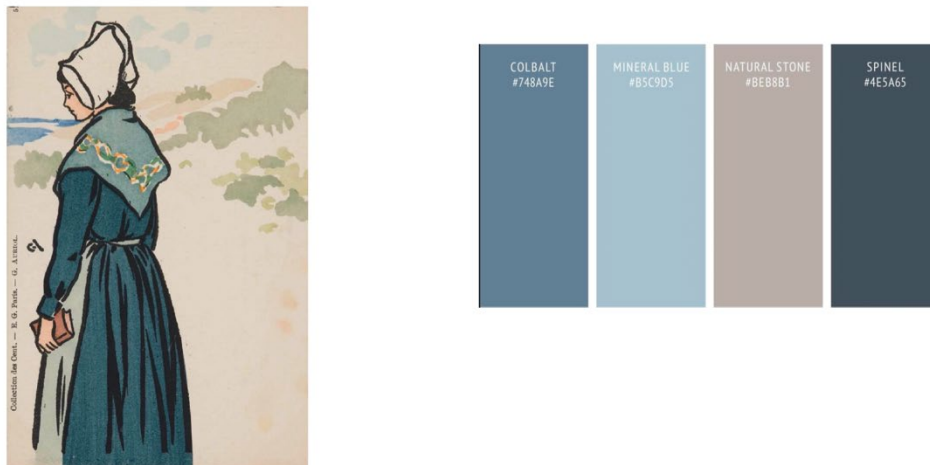


Figure B.2 Image detailing the costume color palette for the character of Abigail



## Abigail



Figure B.3 Sketch detailing the costume concept for the character of Abigail

## John concept



Figure B.4 Costume concept images for the character of John

John



Figure B.5 Sketch detailing the costume concept for the character of John

Man in Gray Concept



Figure B.6 Concept images for the costume of The Man in Gray

## Man in Gray



Figure B.7 Sketch detailing the costume of The Man in Gray

## Elizabeth Concept



Figure B.8 Costume concept images for Elizabeth

## Elizabeth



Figure B.9 Sketch of costume design for the Character Elizabeth

## Margaret/Ann Concept



Figure B.10 Concept art for the characters of Margaret and Ann



## Margaret/Ann

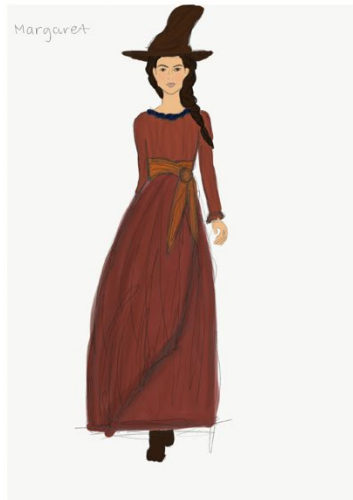


Figure B.11 Costume sketches for Margaret and Ann

## Reverend/Judge Concept

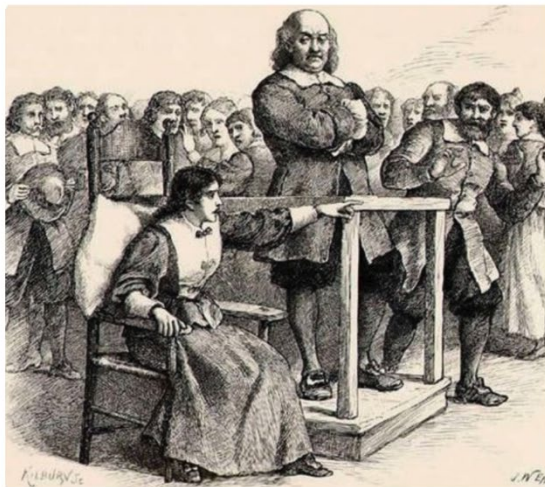


Figure B.12 Concept images for costumes for Reverend Parris and Judge

## Reverend/Judge



Figure B.13 Sketch of costume design for characters Reverend Parris and Judge

## Thomas

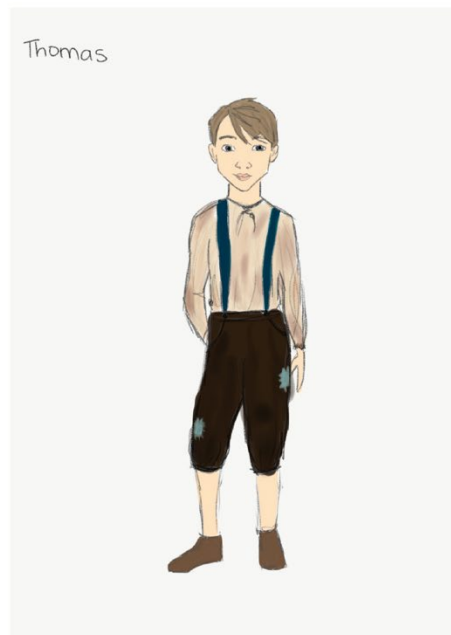


Figure B.14 Sketch of costume design for the character of Thomas



Figure B.15 Detail of cover of The Man in Gray's book



Figure B.16 Detail of The Man in Gray's book showing internal light detail

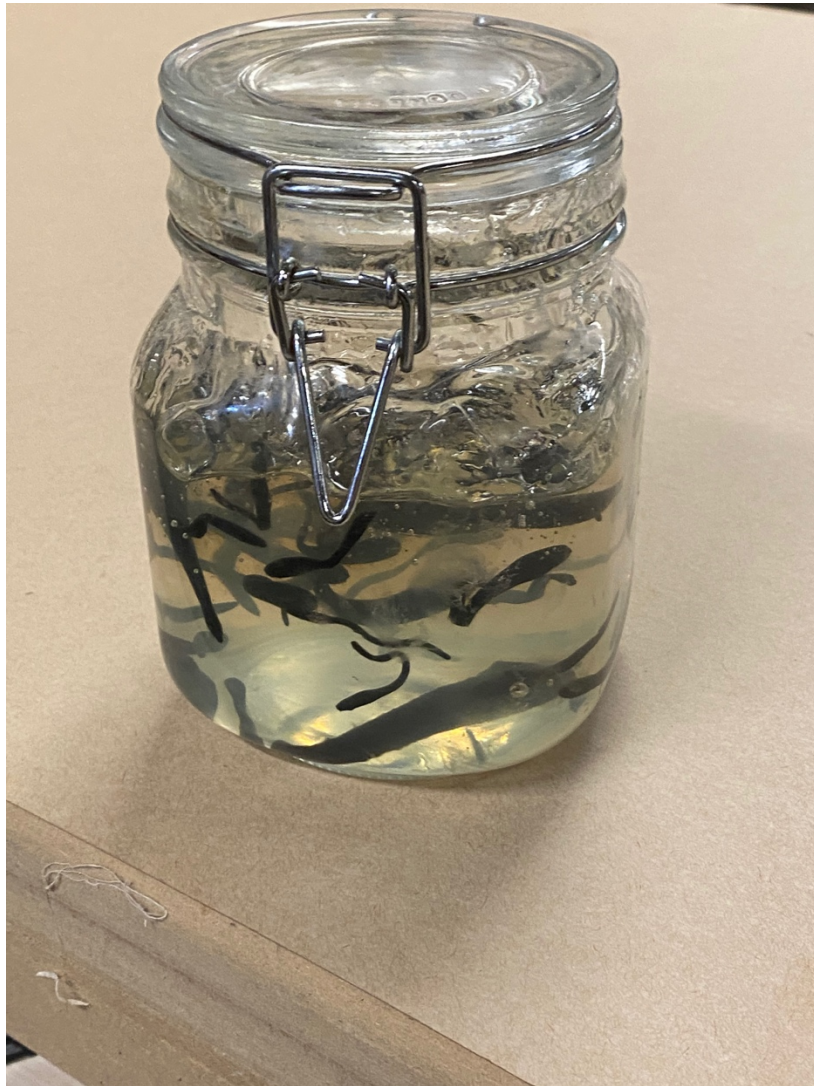


Figure B.17 Detail of prop jar of medicinal leeches



## Appendix C

### Selected Production Photographs



Figure C.1 Production photo featuring characters Abigail and Thomas with Elizabeth



Figure C.2 Production photo featuring characters Abigail and John with The Man in Gray in background



Figure C.3 Production photo showing details of Abigail's costume, hair, and makeup





Figure C.4 Production photo featuring Abigail applying medicinal leeches to John



Figure C.5 Production photo showing detail of lighting choice



Figure C.6 Production photo showing detail of lighting choice



Figure C.7 Production photo featuring Abigail and Margaret Hale with offstage character Elizabeth in background





Figure C.8 Production photo of Abigail confronting her past



Figure C.9 Production photo featuring The Man in Gray holding book prop with internal lights



Figure C.10 Production photo depicting the character of Thomas

## Appendix D

### Post-Production Survey Results

Please rate your feelings regarding the work done towards the initial location (the museum).

13 responses

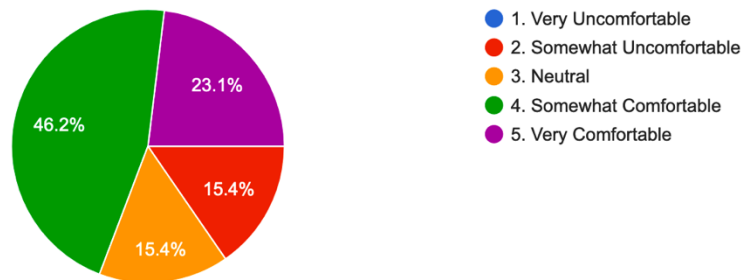


Figure D.1 Post production survey results depicting cast/crew's feelings on initial set location

Please rate your feelings regarding the transition in location.

13 responses

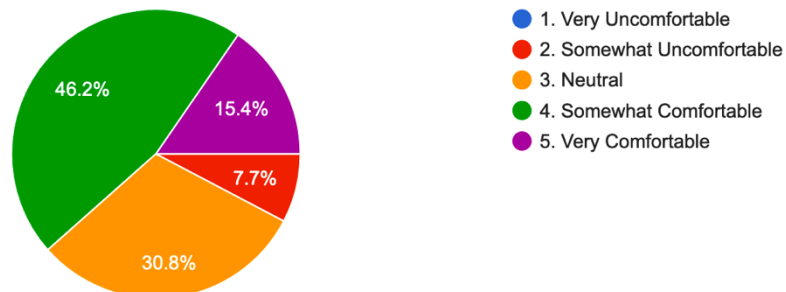


Figure D.2 Post production survey results depicting cast/crew's feelings on transition in location

Please rate your feelings about the transition from Jessica to John-Michael.

13 responses

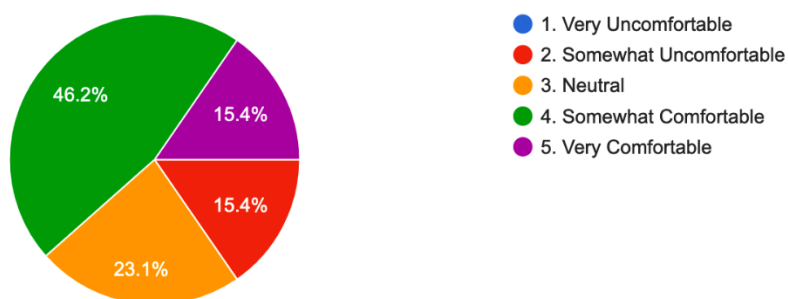


Figure D.3 Post production survey results of cast/crew's feelings

Please rate your feelings about your overall contribution to the final product.

13 responses

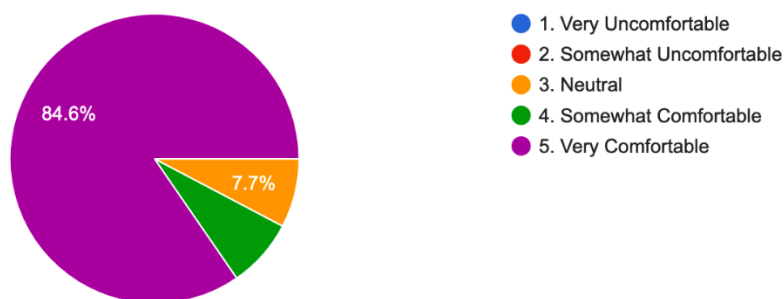


Figure D.4 Post production survey results of cast/crew's feelings on each person's contribution to the show



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