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Gruesome Playground Injuries

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Performance & Analyzation of the show:

“Grusome Playground Injuries”

By

Jaclyn Toop

Submitted in partial fulfillment

Of the requirements for

Honors in the Department of Senior Theater Project

UNION COLLEGE

Winter 2012

Jaclyn Toop
Fall 2011
Senior Theater Project
Advisor: Patricia Culbert

Letter of Intention

For my fall term 2011 and winter term 2011 senior theater project I would like prepare and perform in the show "Gruesome Playground Injuries" by Rajiv Joseph. It is a two person cast that shows an emotional rollercoaster endured by a man and a woman from elementary school until their early thirties. There is obviously feelings shared for one another, but they are so trapped in their own darkness that they cannot be all that the other person needs. The injuries they endure throughout the years are out of chronological order, which is a unique styling to a play that is more effective than watching it in sequence. Upon reading this play I realized it would be a perfect senior project because of the emotional depth Kayleen, the female character, offers. There are emotional struggles and choices that I have not had the opportunity to prepare for yet, and would be a great stepping stone into preparing me to deal with future emotionally disturbed roles. The show itself will be with an extremely small ensemble, with a fellow student working as director and a male actor to play Doug. The show will aim to go on in the second half of winter term.

The first term of this two-term project will be spent mentally and emotionally preparing to take on this character. Since it is a character type I have not explored before, I will need to do research on what makes this character act and react the way she does. A good way to start would be to read a handful of other plays that are centered around emotional characters as well. These will be recommended by my senior project advisor, as well as a handful of monologues that I can use to help prepare for the character as well. These plays and/or monologues will range across a series of styles, including Greek, Shakespearian and modern tragedies and dramas. After reviewing each play, I will write a review paper that will include relating the play I read back to "Gruesome Playground Injuries," and how each particular play can help me further develop the plot and Kayleen. The monologues will be performed at the second half of the fall term, to help me prepare for emotional performances. I also believe part of the mental and emotional preparation for this performance will be spent closely examining the script, as well as creating an entire back-story for Kayleen. Since the play takes place with a span of time between each scene, it would be a good tactic to write out what is going out in this character's life during this span of time that would make her act the way she does every new time she comes face to face with Doug. This writing will be documented in a journal, and will include a character analysis that documents Kayleen's thoughts and intentions, as well as a

breakdown of each individual scene. My project advisor will also lead me in character discovery through various exercises, which will also be recorded in the journal.

The second term of the project will be spent getting ready for an actual performance. It is expected to rehearse at least ten hours every week starting winter term, with a full rehearsal schedule drafted by the end of Week seven in the fall term after consulting with the student director. Technical requirements will be included within this scheduling, and we will look to determine a performance date by fourth week of fall term.

The second term is also when I will be applying all my internal research and the studying of other plays into this role. Every injury will have a different story for Kayleen, so rehearsals will be spent practicing the communication of each injury to the audience, and the emotional weight it carries for the relationship of the two characters. I am also very excited to see who my fellow actor will be, because a lot of rehearsals – I imagine – will also be spent communicating the chemistry between the two characters as written. After the end of the performance I will write an overview of my experiences, including everything I have learned along the way and how I feel the performance turned out.

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Fool for Love: "May" Character Analysis

This character analysis of "May" in Sam Sheppard's *Fool for Love* was chosen mainly for May's anger and disgust she has harbored for both Eddie and his father over the years. May and Eddie half siblings, but they are also in the politically incorrect situation of lovers as well. I use these three exercises as a way of decoding May's character to further understand how her anger and disgust has developed and what makes her reveal them. Understanding May is an essential building block to my senior project since I am hoping to take away more understanding about the emotion of anger especially, and applying it to the character "Kayleen" in Rajiv Joseph's *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, performed next term.

Seven Deadly Sins

1. **Lust:** Lust seems to be the driving force between May and Eddie. While I do believe there are moments of love between the two – May speaks of coming home every day after being with Eddie and being "filled with such joy," and being "in love" – eventually they realize the emotional aspect of the relationship is not going to work, and it is strong, sexual desire that

keeps them tearing at each other. Mainly every physical moment between the two is sexual: She lunges at him on the bed, or he tries to pin her down on the floor when his other lover approaches the house. The ending embrace, a tender moment, is followed by her knowing he's left her again, and strengthens the point that the love is almost always followed by loss and heartbreak, and not strong enough to keep them together.

2. **Envy:** Being an insatiable desire, it seems very fitting that this would be one of May's top three deadly sins. It is apparent throughout the play that Eddie is May's focus of desire, but she wants herself to be his only focus of desire as well. Even when she is pushing him away telling him to "give this up," she displays severe envy towards the Countess she accuses him of being, because she does not want anyone else to have him but her.

3. **Wrath:** May does not know how to handle her hanger. She'll go from entering a fit of rage, "erupting furiously" and "hitting" Eddie, to begging him in an "agonizing scream" not to go. She has a brief monologue where she speaks of how she would kill both Eddie and his new lover with a knife, vividly capturing the scenario of how and when she would make her move. She uses vulgar language – she uses "pussy" almost immediately upon her opening lines – and never backs down from a fight – which coincides with pride.

4. **Pride:** May exemplifies pride when she introduces Eddie to Martin, believing that she has found a reason to put herself above Eddie with such a nice, new guy. She also has too much pride to back away from a fight, as she exemplifies not just with Eddie, but when she refuses to leave her house when a former lover of Eddie comes terrorizing. She even threatens to match her advances and "tear her damn head off" – also supporting her struggles with wrath.

5. **Gluttony:** May displays gluttony very sparingly when it comes to food, since she knows how to take a swig from a bottle of tequila and leave it at that. The term gluttony is used in reference to food or drink, but if used in reference to emotion it is very apparent on her list. She is over indulgent when it comes to Eddie, past a point of what is emotionally stable and healthy.

6. **Greed:** May does not desire or pursuit wealth, status or power. She lives simply, putting "everything in the bathroom" for safety reasons. She is residing in a motel that she herself describes as "not a Mercedes Benz type of motel." While she does try to grasp at some control over Eddie – making him go, making him stay – power is not the driving force throughout the play. She is comfortable in a white t-shirt and bare feet, and her hotel room is minimally adorned.

7. **Sloth:** Sloth is the least prominent of the seven deadly sins within May because she is never emotionally inactive throughout the entire play. She rigorously fights for what she believes is right and she has fought for Eddie throughout their entire relationship. While she may suppress her emotions for him at certain times, it is always a forced effort on behalf of what she thinks is right.

Character Essences

Color: If May were a color, she would be Cerise. Cerise is a vivid hot pink that coincides with May's hotheadedness. She loses her temper and becomes aggressive very easily, especially with Eddie, but she cannot fully commit to her rage because she still has underlying tones of longing for him. Such softens her from the initial red color I thought she was to a deep hot pink instead – still aggressive but not as committed to pure anger. She is also very in touch with her sexual side, and this pink color is feistier than a normal pink.

Animal: May, in animal form, would be a hyena since she is outwardly tiny and cute but in actuality would tear someone apart with her teeth given the chance. She is very aggressive, as previously mentioned, and is not afraid to snap. Hyenas are very unique creatures in that they are similar to canines, but in actuality operate entirely differently. May is a woman, but is unlike any other relationship Eddie will come across. Not only are they half-siblings – which already sets them apart from any other relationship they've been in – but they both do not know how to function with or without each other. Hyenas are also very territorial and are not afraid to challenge other predators for their prey – a vital comparison between this animal and May.

Clothing: May is a girdle. She makes Eddie feel as if it's hard to breathe but he needs her for support. A woman does not feel comfortable in a tight outfit without her girdle, but she does not necessarily feel comfortable in the girdle itself. Such is a mirror of Eddie and May's relationship: May is lost when Eddie is not there and fears when he is going to leave again, but when he is there she gets so angry for all of the hard times he has put her through. Girdles hold on tight against a woman's shape and May has a tight grip on Eddie as well.

Character Analysis

This scene takes place in a low-rent motel room in the Mojave Desert at sunset. The Mojave Desert takes over land in California, Nevada, Utah and Arizona, and is where Las Vegas resides. It is a very hot and dry climate here, which adds to the discomfort between the two characters. May is not materialistic; her motel room is very basic and not elaborately decorated, and she has a casual and comfortable fashion sense to help her against the warm

weather. The only time she hints that she may be jealous of others who are more financially sound than her is when she patronizes Eddie for choosing to become involved with a Countess. She does protect her belongings, however, and is always thinking ahead in case of an emergency – as shown with putting her valuables in the bathroom instead of where everyone can see them in the main room. There is very little presence of God throughout the play, although the two characters are aware that what they are doing is frowned upon.

The principle past events of May's life is that she fell in love at a young age with a boy she did not know was her half brother. Years later, they still cannot get rid of each other because of the bond they have developed as adolescents. Eddie continually leaves and goes off with other women and while May is trying to fill that void with other men – currently one named Martin – her whole world gets turned upside down every time Eddie shows up again.

My character's attitude at the beginning of the play is that she hates Eddie, hates him for what he has put her through since they both met and hates him for finding ways to keep her still wanting him around. She knows he's been with another woman upon this particular visit but she also knows she doesn't want to see him leave again with bad tension still between them – perhaps the chance they can work things out. By the end of the play, however, Eddie leaves again, and my character is reassured that no matter what she will always be toyed with and their relationship will never work. She leaves the motel after Eddie, wanting to pick up and get on with her life and start over somewhere new.

May is a woman of little words, but she gets her point across. She is very sarcastic and many times that she speaks her words burn Eddie. She is not afraid to be vulgar – “Sonofabitch,” “Shit,” “Pussy,” – and she speaks very matter of fact; she does not apologize or give explanation to anything, be it keeping her glasses in the bathroom for safety reasons or when she tells Eddie she's been seeing someone else. Her small monologue about killing Eddie and his Countess illustrate both this matter of fact tone and her danger factor; she is as unpredictable as a loose cannon and will both yell at Eddie in hatred or scream for him to stay without any warning before hand. This monologue is also only one vivid depiction that May uses; she is very visual in her words and describe very graphic, unsettling scenes, like this devised murder plot, or hating the image of throwing up over having to live on a farm with Eddie. She is also a very visual-oriented character, as she speaks of constantly picturing Eddie with other women before she learns they even exist, or fantasizing about what type of car his countess drives.

May wants for her and Eddie to work out. Deep down – as shown in her “need” – she knows it will never be possible, but there is still a part of her that wants everything to clear up on its own and make life easier for them to be together. It is hard being both with and without Eddie, and she wants him around, but his presence cripples her. Ultimately, May needs to be rid

of Eddie. Despite the moment where she breaks down and begs him to stay, or shows longing when he finally does leave at the end of the play, she knows they are better off without each other. When Eddie is there, the atmosphere becomes hostile and violent and ruins the relationship she has with others, and she needs to be able to live a less emotionally draining life. May is willing to die for honesty. She is a no bullshit type of girl who does not like being lied to, and she would rather die if it meant knowing the truth than living a lie. A lot of anger fueled between Eddie and May comes from May suspecting Eddie is lying to her. May holds herself as a feisty young woman. She is tiny, so in size she does not appear intimidating at first, but she has a sharp tongue and a rough physical nature that make her intimidating upon discovery. Getting into a fight with May is like falling into a snake pit. Adjectives that describe May are feisty, determined, stubborn, hard working, bitter, hurt, angry, confused, soft, unpredictable, intimidating, emotional, intuitive, gentle, and both simple and complex.

Upon first appearance, May's heartbeat is racing because she is angry at Eddie yet fears this may be the last time they see each other. May's perspiration is apparent, considering the hot desert climate outside and all the frustration and tension inside. May's stomach is unsettled, and her muscles are tense and ready to strike in attack or defense at any given moment. May's breathing is controlled as she tries to keep her exterior appearance collected when speaking with Eddie.

The Woolgatherer: "Rose" Character Analysis

This character analysis is designed to explore the emotional depth of "Rose," a timid, socially incompetent store clerk in William Mastrosimone's *The Woolgatherer*. Rose's character was picked for exploration and discovery due to her struggles with trust, but especially of shame. Rose brings home a truck-driver with whom she tells stories she does not normally share with others, highlighting that she does have the ability to trust people, but her shame of past experiences that she often blames herself for constantly gets in the way. These three exercises- the Seven Deadly Sins, Character Essences and a Scene Analysis – are meant to dig deeper into Rose's character and find clues into her character that help fuel her battle with her shame. This shame will be necessary to understand for the portrayal of Rajiv Joseph's character "Kayleen" in *Gruesome Playground Injuries* next term.

Seven Deadly Sins

Gluttony – This is Rose's most overwhelming of the seven deadly sins because Rosie is a glutton for punishment. She believes the death of the four birds were her fault because she did not

have the power to stop the gang of boys. She returns to the image of the dead birds again in the second act when Cliff starts throwing sweaters and she cannot make him stop; she starts picturing the birds again and is incoherent with her thoughts until Cliff makes her realize there are more birds left in the world. Rosie also refers to herself as a “Freak,” and allows herself to have feelings for Cliff even after he calls her a “Wham-bam-thank-you-ma’am,” and even chases after him at the end of the first act when he has already made her feel horrible and used.

Sloth – Rose’s second most dominant sin out of the seven is sloth, since she is very scared to make herself useful or utilize her wants, desires and even emotions. She is not adventurous, and while she is not lazy, she is not useful. She is too scared to come out of her own shell and while there are a few scarce moments where she escapes herself – saying “Fuck” for the first time in her life, even though she repents right after, is the most honest moment she has the entire play – she does not openly fight for what she wants.

Envy – Since Rose is very inhibited, the moments where she idolized others really stuck out as being an escape for her. Brenda, her former roommate, is talked about several times throughout the play, the first time being when Rosie reveals where she got her sweater from. When Rosie says she took it from Brenda when Brenda never returned home one night, Rosie allowed herself to have things she knew did not belong to her, but she justified taking them. Rosie also wants to feel valued, and knows that Brenda was in a relationship.

Lust – While Rose is not apparent in her sexuality to others, she shows that she desires men when she is alone in the second act. She has an entire monologue in the opening of Act two where she pretends she is speaking with Cliff in bed. She sprays perfume and wears ribbons in her hair even though she is by herself to set the mood for her imaginary friend. While it is not a sin to want to be loved, it is to desire what you cannot or should not have, and this monologue indicates that she does have desires, even if she represses them in the presence of others.

Wrath – Rose is extremely soft spoken and tries to reserve her temper even when Cliff tests her patience. As already noted, she does lose her patience once, but the remorse is almost instantly following. While Rose does go into hysterics at the end of the play, they come more from remorse and fear than from anger. We know that Rose has anger, though it is pent up, because her love for living things around her is so strong that when it is taken away from her, it arises the opposite strong feeling. She does not wish harm on anything.

Greed – Rose is greedy with her emotions since she does not want to share herself with others. As previously shown, she does have thoughts, hopes and desires, but she keeps them confined to herself and to the audience and gets very defensive when they are found out.

Pride – Rose does not rely on her pride. She does not excessively love herself – she actually comes off ashamed of herself – and she does not denounce Cliff’s work. In contrast, Rose seems like she looks for the good in others and hopes for the best until they show her a dark, hurtful side. She only hates those who do harm onto others, such as the boys who stoned the birds, and even then she shows more remorse over the situation than feelings of hatred.

Character Essences

Color: If Rose were a color, she would be periwinkle. It is a very soft color, pretty and understated, but also melancholy. Periwinkle is a pun on the word “blue,” since there is sadness to her, but there is a twinkle to the blue shade that shows the same hope Rose has within her. Cliff recognizes this hope at the end of the play when he convinces Rose not all the birds are dead, therefore taking some of the sadness away and instilling more hope.

Animal: If Rose were an animal she would be a moth. Moths are similar to butterflies, beautiful and happy, but are seen as less bright and smaller in size. Moths are attracted to light, which ultimately kills them, and coincides with Rose’s gluttony for punishment. Moths are easily injured – if you grab one in your hand a wing easily falls off – and Rose needs to be handled with kid gloves as well. She is afraid to be a butterfly; she would rather live in the shadows.

Clothing: If Rose were a piece to an outfit, she would be barrette. Barrettes are used for holding pieces of hair back, and Rose is all about holding back. Every now and then a piece of hair slips through, much like Rose every now and then would lose her patience and have a slight outburst, but she always collected herself and went back into place. Barrettes are accessible, and Rose adapts to the person she is with.

Character Analysis

Rose has a modest apartment with just the basics – a bed, a table and chair – but with a boarded-up window that does not allow much light in. She is not a lavish or indulgent person, and values living creatures much more than she values inanimate objects. She does not have company often, but when she does have company she lets them take precedence and therefore Cliff is the dominant party in the play, navigating where the conversation goes and manipulating Rose’s reactions. Rose does not indicate that she is a religious person, but she does not like Cliff’s use of “god damn,” nor any other curse word he uses. The play indicates to be set in South Philadelphia, but the audience never sees Rose outside of her apartment and therefore does not see firsthand how she fares out on the streets. There have been several past

events in Rose's life, one being the death of her former roommate, the most recent having met Cliff at her five and dine, but the most significant – and most referenced – is witnessing the death of four cranes she used to watch at the zoo. When Rose watches Cliff lose control over seeing all of the sweaters in her closet, she starts speaking incoherently about the birds, linking the two scenarios of watching someone do something she wants them to stop. At the end of the play, however, Cliff makes her realize that not all the birds are dead and that they have a chance to keep procreating and raise their number again. The end of the play sees Rose just as hopeful in the beginning; at first she is excited to have someone come to the apartment to spend time with her and speak with her, and at the end the two fantasize about leaving for Sacramento and seeing pretty sights and having companionship.

Rose is very inquisitive, asking many questions throughout her conversation with Cliff. She is also very defensive, willing to change a subject quickly if Cliff approaches one she is uncomfortable with, or if Cliff starts using foul language she does not like. She rarely yells, but when she does raise her voice it is to say "STOP IT!" several times throughout the play. She raises her voice to say "FUCK YOU" once, the only time in her life she has ever cursed. Rose speaks of many dark images throughout the play. Upon her introduction, she is speaking of a woman who committed suicide in her apartment before Rose moved in, and goes into detail about the poem the girl left behind, as well as how it was performed and the girl trying to back out at the last minute. She also speaks of her former roommate Brenda's death in the snow over a lost lover. She remembers the death of the birds very vividly and refers to them even after her speech. The only death Rose has a hard time thinking about is her own, as when Cliff asks what she would do in a situation that requires her to jump from a building. There is also no rhythm to the way Rose speaks; sometimes her sentences are longer and explanatory, other times she goes through a series of one worded answers in a row. She feels most comfortable talking to herself, since her longest monologue comes when no one else is in the apartment with her.

Rose desires a relationship with someone, complete with understanding, acceptance and affection. She needs forgiveness for not being able to help the four boys against the gang, even though that was not her fault. She is willing to die for the ability to let other creatures live, since she finds beauty in living things. She presents herself as quiet and reserved, even though there are always thousands of thoughts running through her head. Her adjectives would be guilty, reserved, patient, defensive, hopeful, dreaming, longing, shameful, distant, desperate, suspicious, cautious, lonely and confused. At first appearance, Rose's heartbeat is both fast and fluttering; she is bringing a guy back to her apartment, where there is a chance she could find her relationship, but this is also out of the norm for her. Her perspiration is light, since she is conflicted between being comfortable in her own apartment but uncomfortable with the company. Her stomach is excited with the idea of conversation. Her muscles are

tense around this still unfamiliar presence and her breathing is fast and hard to catch as she keeps anxiously talking with Cliff.

***This Property Is Condemned* – “Willie” Character Analysis**

“Willie” in Tennessee Williams’ play *This Property Is Condemned* is a young female prostitute who is living in the spirit of her deceased older sister Alva. She dresses in Alva’s old clothes and is courted by Alva’s old boyfriends, but she is not old enough to fully understand the weight or the consequences of her actions. Willie’s character is plagued by grief, with spurts of joy upon recollecting how her sister used to be. I wanted an analysis of Willie’s character in order to help me further understand how to apply the emotion of grief to a character such as “Kayleen” in Rajiv Joseph’s *Gruesome Playground Injuries*. Using exercises such as the ones provided below helped identify Willie’s strong character traits as well as her weak character traits, where grief is most dominant in her life and how she chooses to cope with this overwhelming emotion.

Seven Deadly Sins

Envy – There is a sense of both envy and admiration from Willie unto her deceased sister Alva. Everything that once belonged to Alva – with the exception of her gold beads that she never took off – now belongs to Willie. She states out loud to Tom that she has inherited all of Alva’s beaux, and by the end of the scene it seems as if she is trying to console herself and remind her that she is good enough, too. One of the first introductions to Alva was that she was beautiful and the Main Attraction for their boarding-house. Willie seems to now want all the attention.

Greed – Willie speaks as if she is infatuated with movies and the spotlight. She keeps referring to Alva’s death as being different than what the movies show death is like, with movie stars dying to orchestra music and flowers and surrounded by their lovers. Willie speaks very highly of attention, as demonstrated by surrounding herself with all of Alva’s beaux. She loves to be praised, and also loves that everything Alva once owned now belongs to her. She even adopted Alva’s favorite musical number as her own, which she sings throughout the scene.

Pride – The biggest indicator of how much Willie inside of her was the fact she quit school when she did not like learning algebra. She never says she was bad at math, but Willie would not quit something she excelled at, since she likes the attention and doing things right. She avoids what makes her uncomfortable and does not like to do things wrong; she snaps at Tom when he brings up her dancing naked for Frank waters, and she justifies the action by trying to cure

loneliness. She does not like to admit to herself when she feels shame.

Sloth – Willie is unmotivated in school and puts her education behind playing on railroad tracks and going along with her suitors. She comes from a broken home that the teachers are very judgmental of, since she indicates that the principal openly frown upon taking in railroad men that would sleep with Willie’s sister. She admitted she quit school when algebra began being taught, and she believes “social training” is all a girl needs to get by in life.

Lust – Even though Willie is a young prostitute, the innocence around her shows even she doesn’t know the weight of her own sins. She idolizes her sister so much that she is just trying to pick up where Alva left off, without understanding the true meaning of the attention being paid by these men. When Tom confronted Willie about dancing naked for Frank Waters, she immediately changes the subject before her outburst of how lonely she was at the time. She is a young girl who understands loneliness and how to temporarily escape loneliness, but she is not fully aware of what she is doing wrong. She makes it clear she enjoys the attention of these suitors, but she never indicates any sexual desires or fulfillment from them.

Wrath – Willie is not an angry girl, but she is feisty. Her tone is indicated in the script to get violent when she tells Tom her sister is in the “bone-orchard,” and phrases such as “you don’t know the half of it, buddy” show she is dismissive and a bit cold to those around her. She never stays in a challenging tone long, however; she is too conversational and willing to share information about her life and her sister to keep angry for long.

Gluttony – Gluttony would be the last sin on Willie’s list since she seems like a very active individual and food is not a priority in this scene. She looks for scraps outside restaurants and trashcans, as demonstrated by the “perfectly good” banana she eats during the scene. She is also not a glutton for punishment, as Rose from “The Woolgatherer” was. In contrast, she seems more motivated to do things that will take away any sense of unease and pain than do anything that will add to making her feel uncomfortable and unsettled.

Character Essences

Animal: If Willie was an animal, she would be a pigeon. This was the first animal that popped into my head, and the reason it sticks with me is because when I think of pigeons, I think of watching them in New York City, walking around depending on others to leave them crumbs and bits of food they can feed on. They aren’t scavengers, but rather go where it will be the easiest to get their resources. Willie has relied on Alva’s old life ever since Alva died, and she is holding on to Alva’s “crumbs” to get by. Pigeons are also tattered and dirty, much like Willie is

described in the beginning of the scene, and both pigeons and Willie are not afraid to rummage through trashcans. Pigeons may be alive and moving, but they also do not contribute to society, and with Willie following in Alva's old footsteps, she is not paving her own way or leaving any of her own marks either.

Color: If Willie was a color, she would be burnt orange. Orange is bright and youthful, which Willie is, but the burnt shade gives it a more mature, dimmer look. She has grown up fast with the death of her sister and the adaptation of Alva's beaux and lifestyle, so while she is still a child underneath, she is more matured and exposed than regular children. Burnt orange looks slightly soiled, but is still attractive and alluring, much like Willie's personality. Even just saying "burnt orange" takes away the bright, happy tone that orange is normally associated with and implies complexity.

Accessory: If Willie was an accessory, she would be an earring. They're pretty to look at and used often, but they are also all interchangeable. Much like women change earrings to match their outfit or their mood, men can change women for many similar reasons. Willie is interchangeable with her sister and can be just as lost, stolen or replaced as an earring can be. When someone gets tired of their earrings, they buy a new pair. Willie is still growing-up and has much to learn about the life she is paving for herself, but much like she took over for Alva, another girl will be there to take over for her as well.

Character Analysis

Willie is playing on a set of railroad tracks in a small Mississippi town when we are first introduced to her. She plays near an abandoned, boarded up yellow house, but aside from this and a few trees, the area is mostly desolate. While appearing as a lavish girl at first glance, the audience soon finds the reason behind the dress and the jewelry is the memory of her deceased sister, Alva. She is excited for companionship, as demonstrated when Tom takes an interest in speaking with her and she continually rambles. There is no indication Willie is a religious person; in all the times she mentions Alva's death and death in the movies, she never brings up God or religion, and therefore religion seems to be no comfort to her. We do not see Willie inside her old house, but the way she speaks of her past home life lets the audience know her mom and dad were not reliable and she has been exposed to men for years – perhaps why she takes so much comfort in their presence. The biggest past event of Willie's life would be the passing of her sister Alva; she not only lost the person she most envied and admired, but it also allowed her to step into her shoes and become who she thought was a person everyone else loved as well. Losing her parents or her house do not seem to hold much emotional weight to her as long as she is surrounded by men who can spoil her and make her feel like a movie star. The end of the play sees Willie just as we did in the beginning; she's off to play by herself, with

no real indication of where she plans to go, but she hopes to stay balanced for as long as she can – on the railroad tracks, and with the men who fancy her as well.

Willie loves to speak about herself, but everything she is has been inherited through Alva, and therefore Alva is her primary conversation subject. She is not very inquisitive, as she asks Tom no real personal questions. She pays no attention to whether or not Tom is interested in what she is saying, since most of his communication is “What?” or “Yeah.” She carries the scene, while Tom slightly directs where the conversation goes. She has the attention span of a normal adolescent, speaking of one subject to the next but always going back to them. She repeats herself, whether reiterating about all of Alva’s beaux, how death is in the movies or even just a story of what she drew in school for her teacher one day. While Willie is excitable, she does not yell, and her language is not mature or harsh yet. She is a dreamer, and she glorifies the experiences she has with her “beaux” because she is too young to understand the reality or stipulations of her situation. While she claims she only thinks of Alva “now and then,” it is obvious to Tom and the audience she continually speaks of her, and therefore she may not even be aware of when she goes into her rants about Alva.

Willie desires attention and affection from those around her as a means of security. She needs that same attention and affection to make her feel as if she is doing something right and to make her feel that she has some sort of value. Willie is willing to die for her sister’s possessions, since being like Alva is easier for her than finding out who Willie really is. She keeps everything of Alva’s as close to her as she can. Willie’s adjectives are youthful, enthusiastic, optimistic, naïve, ashamed, spoiled, envious, wanting, sharp, quick, needy and adventurous. At first introduction, Willie’s heartbeat is a little faster than normal with the concentration of her balancing act, but Tom’s presence has no affect on it until she gets uneasy speaking about Frank Waters. She does not have any traces of perspiration, since it is a moist, chilly day in Mississippi and the sun is not beating down on them. Willie’s stomach is settled in this scene, since she does not think she is doing anything wrong by not being in school or by talking of her assorted beaux. Willie’s muscles are tense as she balances on the railroad tracks, and though she has the awkward movements of a prepubescent girl throughout the scene she tends to loosen up the more she confides in Tom. Her breathing is very staggered at first, as she tries to keep her balance on the railroad tracks, but as she focuses less on the tracks and more on her conversation it becomes more normal.

***Romeo and Juliet*: “Juliet” Character Analysis**

No other play is as commonly associated with the power of love as William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. For this reason, I chose to study the character of “Juliet” to

understand the power that the emotion of love can hold over someone. After exploring Juliet's character through a series of exercises, I will take the emotion of love and apply it to Rajiv Joseph's character of "Kayleen" in his *Gruesome Playground Injuries*. While Kayleen may seem as a character who knows more about anger than love, it is unlikely that one is very far from the other. The previous characters have all helped me understand the gritty emotions of anger, shame and grief; here Juliet will help me understand gentler and uplifting emotion of love.

Seven Deadly Sins

Pride – This is Juliet's dominant sin because her determination to make her own decisions ultimately led to her death. While it does not seem practical to not live one's own life according to how they wish, if Juliet had honored the feud between her family and the Montagues, Romeo or she would never have ended up dead. She also went behind her families back and married Romeo, then found herself in a bind when her father forced the marriage of Paris upon her as well a short day later. While Juliet is very strong and willful, which can be positive at times, these two traits aided in bringing her to her deathbed.

Lust – Lust is Juliet's second dominant sin because of her driving passions for Romeo that also lead to both of their destructions. As stated with for the sin pride, if Juliet had honored her parents' requests to marry Paris at the beginning of the play instead of finding Romeo and pursuing him in secret, she may not have been living the life she dreamed but she would at least still be living. Juliet and Romeo also advanced very fast in their relationship, pronouncing other prior.

Gluttony – While Juliet is not overindulgent in food or punishment, she is overindulgent in Romeo, which is why gluttony is featured third. Considering how independent she establishes herself upon the first scene, she becomes obsessed and infatuated upon meeting Romeo, and puts him first in front of her own family after just one night of knowing him. She does not think clearly when it comes to her emotions for Romeo; she just knows she wants him around for the rest of her life.

Wrath – Juliet is not an angry person, but she begins acting irrational and hysterical when she finds herself torn between the marriage she entered behind her parents' backs with Romeo and the marriage they are forcing her to enter with Paris. She is so desperate and upset she threatens to kill herself in front of the Friar unless he produces a solution to her problem.

Envy – While Juliet never speaks of wanting anyone else's life or possessions – except for when others are around Romeo when she herself is not – she does send the message upon her entrance that she wishes she had more freedom. She is obviously less than enthralled when

speaking to her mother about how she views marriage, and when she meets Romeo she realizes she does not want to be dictated by her family. In the final scene she envies heaven for having Romeo, so much that she is willing to join him by taking her own life as well.

Greed – This sin is not very present in the normal sense, but when applied to Romeo it is. Juliet does not indicate that wealth and jewels are of importance to her, but upon meeting Romeo she is the only one she wants to be the center of his attention. She becomes fixated with having him at all times, and is selfish in the decisions she makes throughout the play that lead to her death and soon affect both her family and the community.

Sloth – Juliet is anything filled of anything but sloth, which is why it ranks as her last featured sin. Throughout the entire play, Juliet is driven. She wants Romeo to marry her, so she sends the Nurse to see what he says. She wants to marry Romeo, so the two lovers perform the ceremony in secret. She does not want to marry Paris, so she threatens the Friar to help her out of her predicament. She willingly takes a strange potion out of her own accord in order to run away with Romeo and salvage their relationship. She is a headstrong and determined girl, but as previously stated these two qualities also help bring her to destruction.

Character Essences

Animal: If Juliet was an animal, she would be a dolphin. She is playful in everything from her responses to her overbearing mother to joking around with her closest friend and supervisor, the Nurse. She, like a dolphin, wants her space and her freedom to play and dreaming comes as natural as swimming. She also performs “tricks” for rewards, but rather than fish she gets her reward in the form of praise from her parents. Prior to meeting Romeo, she says and does what it takes to please them and knows what is expected of her. After meeting Romeo, however, she acts just as aggressively as a dolphin does in fear of its own life. A dolphin can be dangerous, but many people are so distracted by its cuteness and fun nature that they often forget this warning. With Juliet, it was quite a shock to her parents when she rebelled against their wishes to marry Paris, and upon meeting Romeo her predatory instincts found their way out.

Color: If Juliet were a color, she would be burgundy. The blood-red color is not just a metaphor for her fate at the end of the play, but is also extremely alluring and passionate. Juliet steals Romeo’s attention from every past love upon one glance, and her passions for Romeo are enough to drive her straight to the grave. It is a very deep and specific type of red, and Juliet is a very unique individual who pays attention to details, as well as a very deep and emotional girl.

Burgundy is a very rich color and is associated with romantic symbols such as types of flowers and red wine – fitting for such a highly held romantic character in theater.

Accessory: If Juliet were an accessory, she would have to be a diamond ring. It shines and acts as a statement by itself, and leads little much other accessory without being overbearing. Juliet definitely stands out in a crowd, and is low maintenance. Yet people sometimes forget that if you are struck with someone by a ring on, how much extra damage that ring packs to the blow. Juliet leaves scars throughout this play for everyone: for Romeo it's a scar of love, for her parents and the Nurse it's a scar of devastation. Diamond rings can come in different cuts, and with Juliet we see her cut mold from start to finish of the play. We see her shift from a reserved, square cut that listens to her parents and constantly pleases, to a radiant cut that's shining with Romeo's attention, to a solitaire cut that realizes she must act on her own if she wants to leave her parents and be with Romeo in his banishment.

Character Analysis

Juliet does not leave her parents home often, although she does twice go to the Friar, once for marriage and once out of desperation. The final scene finds her in a tomb, having faked her own death. The play itself is set in Verona, Italy, and the atmosphere changes drastically from festive to grief stricken and panicked. While Juliet may live a lavish lifestyle, she herself is rather simple. She focuses more on people than material aspects; she loves Romeo for who he is as a person, not for where he comes from and of course not for the name his family holds. God has a presence throughout the play, as she shows she will not have sex before the marriage is approved in a place of worship, and she is deathly afraid of the sin of being promised to two men at once. The politics of the play center around these two feuding families, the Montagues and the Capulets, and the Prince who is in charge of making sure their violence onto each other ceases.

Throughout the play, Juliet's character morphs from the start to the end. In the beginning, we see a strong, level headed girl who obeys her parents and goes with the motions. In the middle, we see a love struck girl who is naïve and willing to make her relationship work, despite the distrust behind her parent's back. By three quarters into the play, Juliet has lost all reasoning and becomes hysterical as she looks to escape from her predicament of two lovers and even threatens her own death to the Friar. At the end of the play, she is content with death and does not enter into it afraid if it means she will be with Romeo. We see a transformation of a young girl to a woman who has found a driving force behind her life. Until meeting Romeo, she has never had any main event to shape her character, and meeting Romeo takes her strength and strong will to extremes.

Juliet is a very smart and romantic young woman, as is present in the way she speaks. She calculates what she will say to her parents, so as not to incriminate herself by giving away she does not agree with them all the time, but also to please them as much as she can. When asked about marriage, she tells her mother she will look to like it no more than they make her, which shows her disinterest while at the same time showing her willingness to please. On the balcony with Romeo, she goes back and forth about having him profess his love to her, so as to make sure it is said in the most meaningful and honored way. She sometimes speaks rushed, as when thinking out loud on the balcony with Romeo or waiting for the nurse to return from meeting with Romeo, and one can tell her emotions by the way she speaks. She does not curse, nor does she speak vulgarly. The only violent images she focuses on are those she speaks of before she takes the vile of potion.

Juliet desires to be with Romeo. From their first scene together to their last, it is obvious that Juliet is preoccupied with wanting to spend the rest of their lives together in peace. What Juliet needs is an escape from the laws of her family; she needs a loophole to openly love a Montague and to freely choose to spend the rest of their lives together. Juliet is willing to die for love, and does so at the end of the play when Romeo has killed himself. Juliet holds herself as a strong young lady who defends herself and her values when they are pushed to the limits. Her adjectives include strong, determined, obedient, prideful, romantic, love-struck, naïve, wonderstruck, dreamlike, smart, organized, willful, pure, and gentle. Upon first introduction to Juliet, her heartbeat is complacent; she is used to her mother demanding to speak with her and does not know what she could possibly want this time. There is no perspiration for Juliet, since she is not nervous in front of her parents or the Nurse. Her stomach is excited for the eve of the ball, though she does not expect that she will meet anyone as she ends up doing. Juliet's muscles are smooth and controlled, and her breathing is regular as she enters the room to meet her mother and the Nurse.

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Fall 2011
Senior Theater Project
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Kayleen's Character Analysis: a Breakdown of Scenes

This section of the journal analyzes each scene from the play as provided by the text. It leaves no room for interpretation, but instead relies on the facts of the scene such as place, time, incident and language that was used. Whereas the previous diary entries were an exploration into what Kayleen might have been thinking and feeling at the time of her

interaction with Doug, these breakdowns explore the facts of the scene that Kayleen gives to the audience.

Scene 1

Kayleen is eight years old and she is in the nurse's office during the school day. She comes here quite often for her stomach and therefore feels right at home – the “quiet and dark” of the nurse's office are comfortable for her. Before this scene she felt nauseous and wanted to escape from the other kids, and even though she is bored by herself she makes no attempt to go back to the playground.

Kayleen is wary of Doug upon his entrance (she pretends to sleep so she can survey him unnoticed) but is not intimidated by him since she is the one who begins the conversation. She has the natural curiosity of an eight year old (“What happened to your face”) but never lets herself get emotionally attached to the story at hand (“Why,” with the absence of a question mark indicates her lack of interest in details.) The absence of question marks also indicates a flat, unimpressed tone. She blurts out information without being asked (“I have a stomach ache,” “I like the nurse's office”) to prevent having to answer questions or giving away too much personal detail. Her phrases are kept very short, except for when she elaborates on how the nurse's office reminds her of a “dungeon”; here she goes into the most lines at one time throughout this whole scene. (She does not view a dungeon negatively, though, since she has already commented on the reassurance the nurse's office gives her.) She repeatedly asks Doug “Does it hurt,” so there is a preoccupation with pain. When she asks to touch the wound on Doug's face, there is a glimpse into how much fascination she has with scars.

In this scene, Kayleen desires to be left alone – as indicated by her need to separate herself from other children. What she needs, subconsciously, is to find a connection with someone to break her away from her solidarity, though it is too early in their relationship to know Doug will be the one she finds connection with. What Kayleen is willing to die for is a way to feel better, since her stomach is the cause of many of her problems. She holds herself cautiously but with interest to this new person who has entered her territory, the nurse's office. At this first scene, Kayleen is cautious, watchful, bored, alone, feisty, intrigued, pained, defiant, curious and comfortable. Upon introduction into the scene, her heartbeat is steady from laying down and trying to relax. She doesn't have perspiration since she is comfortable in the room. Her stomach is unsettled and irritated, while her muscles are relaxed as she is by herself. Her breathing is normal, with periodic heavy sighs from boredom and lack of activity.

Scene 2

Kayleen is twenty three years old and visiting Doug in the hospital at night. She has had a few drinks before this scene and enters with a fury toward Doug, making her both intoxicate

and hostile. She is trying to pull herself together but is struggling with her anger at Doug and at herself for veering her car off the side of the road right before her arrival. She is in a black dress she wore to the service earlier, which means she never changed before she started drinking. Before this scene Kayleen and Doug had a talk outside of a funeral home since it was her father's wake. Kayleen is going to bury her father the next day.

She repeatedly says "Shut up" throughout the scene, mainly when Doug starts asking questions she does not want to answer – a defense mechanism. She has gone from giving information away about herself as she did as a child when she did not want to answer a question, to shutting down completely as an adult. There is annoyance with Doug when he wants to think about old times, back when they were kids and her father was still alive; she gets defensive and uses the word "freak," or she tries to ignore the memories all together. She has lost her fascination with pain since she is not asking to see or touch his wound – in contrast, she wants him to stop showing her his wound. She gets aggressive in her refusal to look or touch his wound, and does not want to discuss any healing powers she may have.

In this scene, Kayleen desires to be at home away from Doug without being aware of his injury. She wants to help Doug but she doesn't believe she has the power to, and gets defensive when he asks her to help "mend" his wounds. At this moment, Kayleen is willing to die for solitude. She just lost her father and does not know what to make of Doug, and would rather be by herself with her thoughts. She presents herself dressed classy but a drunken mess attempting to keep it together. In this scene, she is drunk, angry, dizzy, emotional, sad, bitter, bleary, defensive, hostile, accusing, denying and spiteful. In this scene upon entrance her heartbeat is racing and she is a sweaty, drunk mess from the alcohol, and the stress and walking part way to the hospital. Her stomach is numb, and her muscles are tired. Her breathing is heavy and uncontrolled.

Scene 3

Kayleen is thirteen years old and she is in the nurse's office at night. It is after school hours due to an after school dance. She is back where she feels most comfortable with her surrounding and knows her way about. She looks nice; she came dressed for the school dance. Right before this scene she had gotten sick at the dance and then went to lie down in the nurse's office.

Kayleen does not like the dance and resents Doug for having so much fun at the dance. She challenges him to leave a few times - "So go back to it" / "Why don't you go back to your dance." She gets startled at the idea of Doug knowing what happened with her and her vomiting ("What?!") and does not sound happy with her stomach problems since she flatly asks Doug "Why would you want to" when he remarks that he can make himself throw-up on

command. The same absence of question marks indicates that even five years from their first meeting, she keeps the same flat, unimpressed tone. She doesn't care if she offends Doug by using a word he does not like ("Retard"), which fuels her sarcasm since she'll apologize for "offending" him right before she offends him again. She once again resorts to using "Shut up" when Doug starts asking questions she gets uncomfortable with. She throws-up after their first physical contact and shows shame at not controlling these impulses since she does not want to look at Doug and wants him to leave immediately.

In this scene, Kayleen desires Doug to stay with her even though he says he is having fun at the dance and she keeps testing him by telling him to go. She needs to lie down to get away from everyone after throwing-up and needing a minute to recollect herself. Kayleen is willing to die for one fun night out since she is not used to ever having one; her stomach or lack of social abilities always get in the way. She presents herself as a "regular" school girl, she dressed up for the dance but it is still not enough to make her comfortable and fit-in. In this scene, Kayleen feels unsettled, nauseous, curious, hopefully, nervous, intrigued, feisty, defensive, interested, ashamed and confused. At her first appearance in this scene, Kayleen's heartbeat is slowing down, since she is upset she threw up but has had time to lay down and calm down. Her perspiration is disappearing since she is comfortable in the nurse's office and she isn't anxious about needing to throw up after having already done so. Kayleen's stomach is feeling more settled than right before she threw-up, although the nausea comes back upon Doug's entrance. Her muscles are trying to relax and her breathing is heavy and exasperated.

Scene 4

Kayleen is twenty eight. She is in the hospital room at Doug's side, in the evening. She is used to being in nurse's rooms and hospitals so she does not feel uneasy with her surroundings, but she is pained at seeing Doug in a coma for the first time. She is talking to herself through this entire scene even though she directs most of it at Doug. Before this scene her and Doug have repeatedly fought over injuries caused by accidents and have revealed lots of personal information to each other. Now she speaks with an urgency at the need to make him better.

There is a conflict between wanting to be there for Doug ("Come on Doug, wake up, I'm here") and not knowing why she cares so much ("What the fuck am I doing here"). Her language is extremely harsh, using the word "Fuck" in all its tenses every few words. This is a huge change from the absence of curses when she was eight and thirteen, which shows her character is rougher and cruder. She feels "like an idiot" when her presence is not waking Doug up and implies at the connection between them, that she would "say two words" and he'd "snap-out" of his coma.

Her monologue in this scene is a giveaway for many of her emotions. She does not want Doug to marry Elaine because she does not want to be left behind. She starts blaming herself for being “fucked up” and “stupid” but wants him to stick around. She references them as “best friends” and “buddies” in this scene, getting to the connection of their relationship and admitting their relationship out loud for the first time. She needs Doug to break her serious life and come back to show her “stupid shit” and tell “some stupid joke.”

In this scene Kayleen desires Doug to wake-up from his coma. She needs things to go back to how they used to be, when they were kids and she could touch his wound and make him feel better, or when they would joke around and she would pretend it wasn't funny so she can feel something real and innocent again. She is willing to die to bring Doug back into her life again. She holds herself composed upon her entrance, but slowly starts to wilt as she rambles on to Doug. Kayleen is hopeful, paranoid, nervous, rambling, wilted, emotional, open, afraid, self-conscious, denying, worried, searching, desperate and exasperated.

Scene 5

Kayleen is eighteen. She is in her room and it is getting dark outside. She is very comfortable with her room since she has been there for years, but she is feeling discomfort with herself for having just had sex and then self-mutilating herself. In the scene earlier, she had just had sex with a boy she was not fully ready to have sex with. The last time Doug and her were together (in chronological order) they were both thirteen, and since Doug is climbing through her window they have grown exceptionally close within the last five years.

She likes thin mints, which is one of the only material things she gives away about herself throughout the whole play. She is sensitive to physical touch after her previous sexual experiences and it makes her defensive and suspicious of men – “You're a fucking pervert!” “You all act like you're playing around.” She uses her story of sex with Tim when Doug starts pressuring her with questions. She used sex as an outlet for her aggression and an alternative for her urges to self-mutilate (I thought it might make me stop”). She knows how Doug feels about her but doesn't shut him out. She was uncomfortable with his playful physical advances on her and compares him to Tim, though she does not shy away from his grazes along her legs.

Kayleen desires a connection with somebody, although physical connections do not seem to be working out. She needs an outlet for her aggression and self-loathing, although she cannot seem to find a healthy one or one that does not end up making her self-loathe herself even more. She is willing to die for the ability to make her own choices, although she does not always make the ones that are best for her. She presents herself as cool and collected, like sex is not a big deal, but there are a million thoughts running through her mind. In this scene she feels grown-up, apologetic, defensive, tense, nonchalant, suspicious, numbed, confused, eager,

confident, unconfident, and protective. At the beginning of the scene her heartbeat is slowing down as she thinks about her past actions, and her perspiration level is decreasing after her physical activity as she readjusts to being alone in the room and sitting still. Her stomach feels unsettled after what she has done earlier and her muscles are a bit sore and tensed. Her breathing is steady but sharp.

Scene 6

Kayleen is thirty three. She is in a health facility around late afternoon. She is incredibly uncomfortable with the health facility and ashamed of why she is there for trying to cut out her own stomach. This facility is designated more for mental injuries than physical injuries. The physical she handles better. She says right before this scene she was given medication for her unease and her instincts to hurt herself.

She is unaware Doug ever woke-up from his coma until they meet in the facility. She compares herself to ice-cream with a hard shell; her harshness is external and protecting the softer side. She returns to old habits she had when she was eighteen, specifically the self-mutilation. She lies to Doug and tells him that she did not visit him when he was in a coma because she doesn't want to believe she has the power to heal him after all. She resorts back to anger and stronger language when he presses her – "I wasn't fucking there!" "I'm not your guardian fucking angel" – and she sank back into her depression when she didn't think she had Doug anymore ("What about when I needed somebody?! Where were you the last five years?"). She is resorting back to her preoccupation with pain ("Does it hurt?") as well as her fascination with scars – "Do you want to touch my scar?". She lied about not remembering old childhood memories and is refusing to take Doug up on his offer to help her escape.

Kayleen desires to be out of this facility, although she needs to be there in order to get better and to save her from herself. She is willing to die for pride, and would rather that than have people she knows see her in such a negative, monitored state. She presents herself carelessly and resigned, and in this scene she is angry, bitter, denying, defensive, resigned, succumbed, clammy and tired. At her initial appearance in this scene her heartbeat is slow and there is clamminess about her. Her stomach is scarred on the outside and numbed on the inside from all of the medication she is taking. Her muscles are relaxed, also from the medication, and tired, and her breathing is deep and slow.

Scene 7

Kayleen is twenty three years old. She is outside of a funeral home smoking a cigarette on the curb at night. As previously stated she is very comfortable with the dark and the dreary. She is fed-up with the funeral home since it required her be around so many people for a man she did not love, physically touching them and conversing. It was a dreadful day for her, she

needs a cigarette. Right before this she had been inside the funeral home pretending to be glad to see everyone who was there to give their condolences for her deceased father. In the scene after this she will go home to have a few drinks and then unexpectedly has to go see Doug at the hospital afterwards. This scene reveals Kayleen and Doug have not seen each other for four years.

Her language is rough yet again in this scene (“Fuck off,” “Fuck you”). She’s drained from “hugging people all day” and reveals that she has a steady job as a waitress. She physically moves away from Doug constantly throughout the scene. She says she does not want to recap the last four years of their lives but she eventually answers his “What’s been going on with you question” without him asking a second time. She did not have a good relationship with her father, as Doug reveals for the audience. She doesn’t like her father but she had him to keep her from feeling “alone.” He emotionally degraded her, and she had not seen her mother in eleven years so therefore it was just the two of them. Her mother left before she even had her first kiss with Doug when she was thirteen. Her mother had stomach issues as well.

She cannot respond directly to Doug’s romantic gestures (kissing, “I love you,”) and instead changes the subject or creates physical space. She is living with someone who is not there to support her through her father’s wake. She claims herself as independent (“I don’t need anyone to take care of me”).

Kayleen desires to escape from her current setting – the funeral home, the random faces, the fake emotions. She needs to let out her frustrations through some outlet but she is expected to stay put together. She is willing to die for a cigarette right now, since she just wants an excuse to inhale deeply and clear her head. She holds herself conservatively in front of the public but is a ticking time bomb on the inside. She feels alone, tired, crabby, annoyed, desperate, exasperated, bored, defensive, irritable, bitter, independent, denying, stubborn and unyielding. Her initial heartbeat is slowed and steady as she reflects on the past day. She isn’t perspiring; she’s not nervous and it’s not hot outside. Her stomach is numbed but twists when she thinks of all the people she dealt with and past memories of her father belittling her, as well as when Doug tries to get close. Her muscles are tensed and her breathing is sharp, but long from taking drags off her cigarette.

Scene 8

Kayleen is thirty eight years old, conservatively dressed, cold and at an ice rink in the afternoon. She is unfamiliar with the ice rink and there is a discomfort with both meeting Doug and the coldness she feels in her location. This is the final scene of the play and the oldest the two have been throughout the production.

She refers to herself as a “train wreck.” Her language is very clean and soft for the first time since her adolescence. Doug is now just “Stupid,” instead of “Fucking stupid” like he was in previous scenes. She finally believes the magic between Doug and her, that she can heal him in some miraculous way. Her nauseous feeling is still present but she is not acting on it anymore. The two leave their future relationship up in the air, which no distinct indication of whether they will stay with each other from now on or separate for good.

The audience is given insight for the first time as to why the play is called *Gruesome Playground Injuries*: the night after the school dance, after Kayleen and Doug’s first kiss, they went out to the playground and sat on the swings and talked for hours. Kayleen was worried Doug would crack his head open climbing on the top bar of the swings. An injury is what brought the two together in the first place back when they were eight years old, and have been what reconnected them over every scene since, except there is no injury in this final scene of the play.

Kayleen desires to be happy from here on out, and she needs Doug to help her achieve that. She also needs to touch Doug to reassure they’re still “them.” She is willing to die for stability, since she now feels more in control of herself after all her hospitalization and personal accidents. She presents herself dressed nicely and more conservative than any other time in the play, and her list of adjectives include inquisitive, wondering, content, hopeful, needing, nostalgic, believing, anxious and controlled. Her heartbeat is fast paced, with anxiousness at meeting with Doug in unfamiliar territory. The cold deters any perspiration from nerves, and her stomach may be excited at first but does not turn nauseous until the end of the scene when they start recollecting memories and lightly arguing. Her muscles are tensed and her breathing is sharp, but both slowly ease as the scene takes place.

Jaclyn Toop
Winter 2012
Senior Theater Project
Advisor: Patricia Culbert

Department of Theater & Dance

SENIOR PROJECT

Jackie Toop

This second term of my two term senior project will be the application and performance process for my character Kayleen in “Gruesome Playground Injuries.” It is an application process because the materials I have been working on for the first term of the project now need to be applied to making the character as honest, realistic and alive as the writer created her to be. While the first term had me

analyzing Kayleen's character through both scene analysis of this play and analysis of characters with matching emotional states, this term will require me to break down those emotional states even further through line analysis and character motivations. These analysis and motivations will be discovered through daily rehearsals from week one of winter term until the production opens during week six. The rehearsals will also add to further character exploration of Kayleen through the physical interaction of having another person playing Doug. While the first term of this project analyzed the facts of Kayleen's character and relationship with Doug, this second term will focus on the physicality of her character and her relationship, and allowing an audience to see how the world affects Kayleen physically.

This play will be directed under a fellow theater major, Maisy Bragg, and feature the acting of Ryan Semerad to play Doug. While the director may work together with the cast in asking about lighting design and what feels most natural for the characters, character portrayal will be my main focus for this term. To help track my progress as Kayleen, as well as to identify discoveries made throughout the rehearsal process or connections linked between character analysis and physical portrayal, it would be best to keep a character journal I can write in after rehearsals. This journal will help keep track of the progress made throughout the six week production period, and will be a physical capture of how Kayleen is portrayed in the beginning of the journey compared to where her character is at the end of the six week development.

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Winter 2012
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Emotional Research: Kayleen

Rajiv Joseph's *Gruesome Playground Injuries* features two beautifully written characters who often times use physical injuries as an outlet for their overcoming emotions. Of these two characters, Doug and Kayleen, Kayleen shows more complexity in dealing with her emotions, and does not always allow herself to openly feel what will make her happiest. Focusing on the four central emotions that drive her – anger, grief, shame and love - this paper will both examine each emotion individually, as well as relate it back to Kayleen's character.

French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan believed anger to be a result of one needing to protect his or her unity. (Richmond, 1:2011) Starting as infants, we need to make sense of all the diverse biological processes we experience that help create our identity. When we feel threatened by someone creating confusion about our identity, we resort to anger – the quickest, common and most reliable defense available. (Richmond, 1:2011) Resorting to anger helps to hide our weaknesses and give ourselves the illusion of power in threatening situations. In reading about the emotional state of anger, I came across three important concepts. The first is that anger is a common occurrence that happens to us all more often than many of us are willing to admit. (Richmond, 2:2011) When going through the scenes where Kayleen expresses anger and frustration with either Doug or personal events, it makes me wonder if perhaps Kayleen is more honest than the average person; she does not shy away from her defenses, or even make excuses for her behavior. She does not want to be seen as weak or vulnerable and therefore snaps to the defensive very sharply.

The second concept that stood out to me the most is that anger is not truly an emotion, but rather a desire for revenge against those that threaten our needs or desires. (Richmond, 3:2011) Anger is the wish of someone who has been hurt for their offender to feel that same hurt. When reading of anger as such a wish, it changed the way Kayleen could be interpreted in certain scenes. In Scene 6, when Kayleen is in the hospital and discovers Doug has woken-up five years ago, she feels hurt that he never came to find her. Several times the audience has witnessed Kayleen come to Doug's side and somehow manages to heal him, and yet he wakes up and does not look for her. She lies to Doug about coming to visit him in the hospital, screaming denials about ever being by his side in the hospital, and demands to know why he

was not there for her the past five years. When reading this scene thinking of anger as a desire instead of an emotion, I found new motivation behind Kayleen's words. She does not want to show her vulnerable side to Doug, and instead wants him to feel the hurt of wanting someone by your side that is not coming.

The third concept that I found to be important is that anger can be manipulative. (Richmond, 4:2011) If an event arises out of someone's control that causes tension and frustration, the need for someone else to feel hurt and frustrated can cause unrelated fights. Circumstances are manipulated so that the person initially angered believes whoever they hurt in response somehow deserves it. In Scene 5, before Doug enters the scene, Kayleen is reflecting on events with a boy that did not happen the way she thought they would, and actually did not want to happen at all. Once Doug enters the scene, Kayleen is short and rude and Doug senses that she is directing frustration at him for no reason. In Kayleen's mind, Doug deserves to be yelled at after touching her without permission, but after reading how manipulative the need to act out anger can be, I read this scene as her taking out frustrations on Doug while she pretends they are Tim.

The healthiest response to feelings of hurt, instead of wanting to cause that hurt to someone else, is to openly acknowledge the hurt in general. Upon reading how to stop being angry, the best advice was to allow one's self to feel vulnerability and discomfort and stop trying to protect one's self from it. (Richmond, 5:2011) Kayleen would know better how to curb her angry impulses if she understood her own softer side. If she knows how feeling vulnerable

and susceptible feels, she will know how to work with those emotions to remain calmer when they arrive.

Anger coincides with another pivotal emotion Kayleen feels throughout this piece. Grief, the emotional reaction to a significant loss, may not be as present as the other three emotions, but is still an essential force behind some of Joseph's scenes. It is expected that some level of grief naturally follows any loss one undergoes, and the loss that grief stimulates is open to many aspects of life. Grief helps one to emotionally, mentally, and physically adjust after this loss has occurred, and there is no right or wrong way to deal with grief. There is also no "normal and expected" period for grieving; grief can overcome someone anywhere from weeks to years depending on the trauma or unexpectedness of the loss. (Web, 1:2009) During this time period, there are a vast amount of feelings when dealing with grief. Some are overcome with sadness, shock or numbness, while others are swept up in anger, guilt, anxiety or fear, and there are even instances where relief, peace or happiness takes over in one's grief. (Web, 1:2009) Some stressful side-effects of grief include weakened immune systems and sleeplessness, and illnesses one already has before they endure grief can become considerably worse after their feelings of loss. (Web, 1:2009) Social support is extremely important whenever someone deals with feelings of grief, and the passing of time also helps with healing.

For Kayleen, her losses include her father and on two separate occasions, Doug. She is a great example of how grief can be handled in many different ways without ever being wrong. In Scene 7 we are introduced to Kayleen outside of a funeral home having just dealt with her father's wake. She is smoking and less than enthusiastic to see Doug show up at her feet at this

particular time of loss. An old friend she once confided in, she keeps physical distance between her and Doug in this scene, and numbness and anxiety – two traits associated with grief – are given off as she denies small talk and dodges questions. Though never having a good relationship with her father, it is obvious his loss has affected her; she is “alone now.”

In going back to the previously discussed Scene 6, Kayleen has shown the audience an effect of her grief that has happened offstage. She has tried to cut her stomach out using a knife. This event took place within the five year time frame that she thought Doug to have been dead in from his coma. After reading grief and its effects, it never occurred to me that Doug would be such a valued loss in her life – enough of a loss to make her attempt to cut out her own stomach. This is the first time on stage we see Kayleen truly distraught. In readings of the play before, a motivation to harm her so severely was never as apparent as until after I read what some of the side effects of grief can be, as well as reading that everyone needs to handle it in their own emotional, mental, and physical ways. Soon after Kayleen is united with Doug again do we witness coping with grief fade into anger and frustration.

The audience is exposed to grief over Doug one more time, in the last scene of the show. Here the two characters sit together and lightly reminisce, but there is ambiguity over whether or not the relationship has come to an end; that whether after all these past years, the two are finally parting ways. This is not a loss or grief that is indicated, but after reading about the emotion it struck me as the underlying tone to this short scene. I believe grief is shown over all the obstacles the two have endured over the years, as well as grief over the end of an era.

So far Kayleen in her older years has been addressed, but there is still the matter of her younger years. A lot of Kayleen's appearances when she is an adolescent are revolved around the powerful emotion of shame. Prior to looking-up all that shame entails, I believed it was a synonym with guilt. I did not realize, however, that shame is more painful and dangerous than guilt and that the two are in separate categories; whereas feeling guilty signifies one understands they did something wrong, feeling shameful signifies one believes they are being something wrong, and can have far superior destructive outcomes.

In an online article that addressed the characteristics of shame, psychiatrist and medical director of a Washington, D.C. Psychiatric Center, Alen J. Salerian, M.D., gave an interesting take about this particular emotional response: Everyone acquires this emotion through early development – much like we do with the defense of anger – and therefore is a normal feeling that we all experience about ourselves and our behavior. (Vascov, 1:2006) Dr. Salerian comments that embarrassment and shyness are two downscaled forms of shame that seldom cause trouble, but admits when shame becomes a daily occurrence in one's self-image is when the emotion can produce violent effects. (Vascov, 1:2006) Effects such as social phobias, schoolyard rampages, sexual offenses and substance abuse are just a few of the results that stem from one's fear of being overly criticized, rejected or afraid of messing up, and shame has the ability to send those who cannot shake the emotion into a destructive downward spiral.

Just like with anger and grief, having read an analysis on shame has cleared-up several more motivations behind Kayleen. When the audience is first introduced to Kayleen, she is residing in the nurse's office and her stomach has been bothering her. Here we meet Kayleen

at her youngest age, eight years old, and while she might be too young to establish any clear emotional states, she does prove that injuries preoccupy her. We keep this preoccupation in mind when we skip to Scene 3, back in the nurse's office with Kayleen enduring another upset stomach. This time Kayleen is a teenager, and where I thought her harsh, rude responses to Doug's advances had stemmed from awkward stages in puberty, I see it now as her shame having started to settle in. Females typically deal with shame by introversion and self-hate, and Kayleen's introversion in the nurse's office shows that she is dealing with her own internal panic at these private moments with Doug. Embarrassment is clear after Kayleen throws-up in front of Doug at the end of the scene, but does not end violently because Doug does not have a reaction that adds to her shame; rather, he makes throwing-up seem downplayed.

Kayleen's self-hatred is explored more in Scene 5, when Doug and she are eighteen. We find at the end of the scene that Kayleen has cut marks all over her legs that were self-inflicted. She tells Doug she won't give up the habit, and this seems to be one of the violent outlets that shame causes. We also find in this scene she has had sex and seems indifferent to it, and when researching the emotion I came across women who feel shame tend to have a passiveness to sexual interest, or a lack in it altogether. (Vascov, 2:2006) Out of all four emotions Kayleen undergoes through life's transitions, shame would have to be the most serious and motivating of them all.

Yet while shame, grief and anger all have negative connotations, the last main emotion, love, is more uplifting but harder for Kayleen to express. Kayleen has proven herself to be smart and sharp throughout the play, as well as very passionate. Love itself is a passionate

emotion that is formed by neurochemicals in our brains that features our rational thought conflicting against what might make us happy. This internal struggle is important to understanding Kayleen: she sees things in long term and is not distracted by what is most convenient for her at the time, but here is where her struggles in dealing with her feelings for Doug occur. At the beginning of the millennium, psychology professor Shelley Taylor introduced the idea that fear and love are two emotions that stem from the same part of the brain, and that both are a response to stress. (Johnson, 1:2003) When presented with an unsettling or stressful situation, one can either appease the instinct to runaway, or they can follow the instinct to make peace in the situation. Similar to a “fight or flight” response, Taylor suggested that in times of stressful situations we are more likely to stand our ground and reach-out to others for help and support, and that love helps calm us down. (Johnson, 1:2003)

The idea that keeping someone around may help with feelings of loneliness, but I never considered it could help alleviate stress and fear as well. When taking another look at Kayleen, it is a fun concept to introduce; I never read Kayleen as understanding why she loved Doug so much, just that she knew she always wanted him around. From a scientific point of view, her keeping him around makes sense: he helps to make her stronger in the midst of her dealings with anger, grief and shame.

In researching about love, it was addressed that our brain’s capacity to fall in love stems from the need to help those who cannot help themselves. By helping one another we secure social bonds, which in turn give us feelings of pleasure, reward, and satisfaction for having established a loving relationship with someone. Kayleen’s ability to help Doug when he is hurt

is just as important to her as his ability to help her. By healing Dougie every time there is an accident she feels the rewards brought on in one's brains from the need to help and establish bonds with others. Out of all four emotions, love is the hardest to understand – for both Kayleen and real life – because the expression and the ways of coping are not as black and white as anger, grief and shame may be.

By researching each emotion individually, it has given me a greater understanding of why Kayleen may be motivated to say and act in certain ways. Lines that may not have made much sense before are looked over with new thought, and the break-down of each emotion will be an interesting new tool to bring into the rehearsal process this week. By thoroughly looking into the emotions that Kayleen feels so closely, I am hoping it will make an incredibly honest performance.

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Jaclyn Toop
Winter 2012
Senior Theater Project
Advisor: Patricia Culbert

Physical and Emotional Demands: Kayleen

Scene 1: Face Split Open –8 Years Old

The most physically demanding issue of this scene is to embody an eight year old. Eight year olds are fidgety and easily distracted. They are unsure of themselves and their bodies because there is a lot about their bodies that they are discovering and figuring out. What does sitting Indian style feel like? What does the bed feel like when I bounce? At eight years old, Kayleen does not have a clear definition of all of her emotions yet, and while the audience might be able to tell what is going on between the two characters, they also have to see that Kayleen herself is outwardly confused at what is going on. I have to find where it feels comfortable to lean in towards Dougie and fully face him, and where it feels more comfortable to turn back to introverted.

Emotionally, Kayleen is eight years old and vulnerable to her surroundings. There is a tension when Doug first appears in the room beside her, which soon turns to youthful curiosity and banter. Kayleen displays skepticism at much of what Doug says, dismissing his story of climbing a tree with bike in hand in order to ride it off the roof. There is a switch in power through this scene; upon speaking with Doug, Kayleen is standoffish and disinterested, making him act out for attention. At the end of the scene, however, Kayleen gives full attention to Doug's wounds and makes him the center of attention.

Scene 2: Eye Blown out – 23 Years Old

There are two main physical demands of this second scene, starting with needing to show that time has passed and Kayleen is now twenty three. She holds herself with much more tension than when she was eight, as she has many more life experiences under her belt. She also has the physical challenge of keeping her balance in the hospital room while she is under the influence.

Emotionally, Kayleen is at polar ends. On one end she is rambling and rash as she is trying to both see the situation clearly and figure out what this accident now means for her and Doug. On the other end she feels horrible on Doug's behalf and struggles with how much stress it causes her when he gets hurt. She is torn between wanting to help him and fearing her ability of being able to help him.

Scene 3: The Limbo – 13 Years Old

At thirteen years old Kayleen is awkward, stubborn, and miserable. She is still trying to understand her body, although she does not constantly shift her legs from Indian style to bumping against the side of the bed. She is not yet a lady but is more mature than when we saw her at eight years old. I will have to make a conscious decision of whether or not she knows why she throws up so much, or if that is weird to her too. She is also awkward at the touch of others, as indicated by Doug's need to constantly sit next to her and pull her up to dance.

Her emotions are overwhelming, as shown when she gets nervous at how close he gets with her; she starts to lash out ("Shut up," "go away," "leave me alone"). She also deals with embarrassment at throwing up, once before the scene starts and then again at the end of the scene. When she throws up in front of Doug, there is a feeling that she might cry, which quickly shifts to confusion when she notices Dougie making his self throw up, and then finally admiration.

Scene 4: Tuesday – 28 Years Old

Kayleen is fidgety in this scene, as she is forcing herself to sit next to Doug's bedside while fighting the urge to run. She paces at two different moments in the scene as an outlet for her nerves. She is uncomfortable in the hospital room, seeing Doug hooked up to different machines in a dark, blank room. She feels chills running down her spine as she walks into the room and sees Doug for the first time in his coma. At twenty eight years old she is very self aware, especially having spent the past five years taking care of herself. She is hesitant to touch Doug and is nervous to do so, but still feels obliged to touch him in hopes she can wake him up.

Emotionally, Kayleen is sporadic. We see traces of resentment at Doug getting struck by lightning, followed by a brief trace of disdain for a new woman in Doug's life, until finally she expresses everything she is feeling in order to make herself feel better. This is the hardest sight Kayleen has ever had to see..

Scene 5: Pink Eye – 18 Years Old

Kayleen does not respond well to touch in this scene, as shown when Doug is wrestling her. She is very protective of her body, first when Doug wrestles with her and then again when Doug points out her razor cuts. Kayleen is comfortable with her body, and does not fidget on her bed out of nervousness so much as because she is comfortable moving around so freely in her own bed.

While Kayleen has grown into her body, she has not mastered her emotions yet. She feels ease at talking to Doug about sex but still has suspicions about him when he is too physical

with her. In this scene, Kayleen really understands just how much Doug really feels for her, and she is very vulnerable when faced with harming Doug. It registers with her that she can stand to hurt herself, but she cannot stand to see Doug hurt.

Scene 6: A Blue Raspberry Dip – 33 Years Old

Kayleen accepts that she is in a hospital, but her body does not react either negatively or positively; she is just physically there. She does not react to the temperature in the room or the people around her. The most we see her body react is when Dougie puts his hand upon her scar. She has low energy; she can hold herself up in a chair, but her movements are slow.

Kayleen has to deal with separating her past with where she is now. While she is embarrassed at attempting to cut out her own stomach, she is not resentful at being in a hospital. Seeing Dougie is the first time she's confronted her past in five years, and while she acknowledges that seeing him and the owl and talking about St. Margaret Mary's is a bit astounding, given the circumstances, she does not allow herself to get caught up.

Scene 7: Tooth and Nail – 23 Years Old

This scene takes place outside of the funeral home, which Kayleen is more comfortable with than being inside the funeral home. Her nervous energy is channeled into reaching for a cigarette, and she uses the openness of the area to keep Doug at a distance when his advances become too much. It is past nine in the evening, and after an emotionally exhausting day, she allows her body to slump over and feel defeated.

Kayleen thinks she has her emotions in check more than she actually does. There is a reluctance to tell Doug about what she has been doing the past four years, as well as a reluctance to know what he has been up to. She also becomes resentful when Doug acts upon the urge to kiss her and tells her he loves her; it is easier for Kayleen to keep herself composed when their sexual tension is not shoved right in her face. This is also the first time Kayleen realizes that absolutely nothing will stand in the way of Doug's feelings for her, even her own father, and his words affect her whether or not she wants them to.

Scene 8: Zamboni – 38 Years Old

This is the most peaceful Kayleen is with her body the entire show. She has no new scars that bother her, nor is she dealing with an urge to use her body as an outlet for guilt or anxiety. There is also a noticeable oldness in her body now; she is not young and fiery, but sitting hunched over and chilled from the icy air.

In this final scene, Kayleen and Doug have years of emotion between them. Throughout the entire play, the audience has watched them as they discovered how deeply they loved each other, as well as underwent moments of disdain for one another, moments of shock and moments of longing. Kayleen has finally accepted she has a healing power for Dougie, but has

to mentally prepare herself for the future when she realizes that Dougie no longer wants that healing power to connect them.

Jaclyn Toop
Winter 2012
Senior Theater Project
Advisor: Patricia Culbert

Evaluative Essay

I cannot say that I am entirely content with my two performances of Rajiv Joseph's *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, but I cannot say that I was not proud of myself either. I distinctly remember saying to Ryan, the other actor in the show, after we walked offstage that there were marks I missed and moments where I could have done better. Yet it was still one of the happiest moments in all four years of my college experience. I will always look back on a performance that I am passionate about and speculate how I could have made it even more powerful. However, despite what I would go back and rework in this particular performance, I know the journey I took to getting there has set new standards for future roles. I cannot imagine taking on a future role anywhere near as close to Kayleen's mental and emotional state without doing different levels of research first. I like understanding the emotions of my characters, but normally I evaluate their emotions based on the words they are saying and the words that are being said back to them. This was one of the only times I ever really immersed myself in all aspects of the role, and I would have never been able to achieve the level of performance that I achieved without taking the time to analyze how Kayleen felt, looked, and moved in all different ages of her life. I realized the value of essence work and character analysis, and if those were steps that helped me achieve the highest level of performance, they are steps I will keep with me and use for future roles in hopes of achieving that same level of performance once again.

Yet it was not just written exercises, but physical too, that helped me prepare for performance. One of the most effective exercises for preparing to play Kayleen was last term's work on four different monologues that each tapped into a distinct, central emotion of Kayleen's life. Working on each of these monologues not only helped me to understand character choices that were appropriate for Kayleen, but overall helped me with memorization techniques, taking direction, helped me formulate a method of preparation prior to performance, and gave me an insight into performing for a small audience in the Actor's Studio. Since this was my first time performing in the Actor's Studio, it was nice to gain the experience of being in such an intimate proximity with the audience before diving into such an extreme role. The monologues themselves helped me to further understand what it means to feel and portray love, grief, anger and guilt, and were then carried over into next term's work on

Kayleen. Kayleen pushed my knowledge of these four emotions even further by taking them to more extreme limits than the original four monologues, but having the monologues gave me an essential starting point, and a much needed advantage than if I had dived into the role without the extra preparation.

Another important aspect that gave me confidence going into the two performances was the rehearsal process I underwent for the first seven weeks of this term. Under the direction of Maisy Bragg, Ryan and I spent a minimum of six hours every week bringing Doug and Kayleen to life. We reworked the same scenes every few rehearsals, breaking them down to understand motives and character choices. We also went through and created blocking for each scene that came most natural for the story that the characters were trying to tell. I found myself waiting for the end of the week to finally arrive just so that we could get to work the next scene in the play. I was anxious to see what new element became apparent to us as few brought every new scene to its feet. As a director, Maisy gave us free range to make our own choices and discoveries, but spoke up when she sensed something seemed forced or awkward. It was very beneficial to the play to spend time moving and speaking in ways that felt true and natural for the character, but to also have a person looking from the outside that was able to tell us when we were over indulgent in our roles, or perhaps not being mentally or physically present enough at certain parts.

I can honestly say I have never been one for role research before taking on this project. While there has been one other role that I remember underlying and circling every other word, trying to decipher emotions and meanings, it still does not compare to the preparation used in order to get ready for this role. I am used to identifying with characters based on just their words and the emotions that they feel from scene to scene. I think with a character of this dynamic however, the show would have never prevailed without the research on character background and scene analysis, as well as the additional research on emotions and physical demands. Joseph wrote the characters in this play to be unsure of their own feelings for one another; if the characters themselves cannot explain their own emotions, then the actors that play them cannot be expected to either, without some additional work. I was surprised at how much the research paper on the four main emotional states helped me for this project; there were scenes that we had already worked in rehearsal that I completely rethought after learning what actually motivated each of the four emotions in the first place, and what the emotions themselves actually physically and mentally required. In example, I realized that anger was too easy of a decision to resort to in every scene for Kayleen, and that anger itself stems from other emotions. This caused me to break down Kayleen even further, figuring out when certain lines were said, such as "Shut up" or "leave me alone," that were more of a defensive mechanism for her guilt or shame, and not anger. If I had not explored the four emotions as thoroughly as I did, I believe I would have made a lot of Kayleen's choices out of anger, which would have been

too easy and too boring. Audiences do not feel emotion for characters that are angry all the time, it is not interesting or effective; audiences feel emotion with characters that have the same emotions as they do, especially fear, shame, and love. While there were moments where Kayleen truly was angry and physically closed herself from Doug or stood at a distance, it was important to actively separate those moments of anger from other moments of aggression that unconsciously covered her other, deeper emotions.

Scene One is a big example of how my views on Kayleen changed after time was spent on character work and background research. This scene perhaps the most physically demanding of all eight scenes, and while I thought I understood all of Kayleen's physical demands, I realized bigger distinctions had to be made for every new age in each scene. Scene One happened to be the hardest distinction for me to make, and I was finding my inner eight year old up until performance night. When I realized I had to make Kayleen more apparently younger at this age, I thought back to monologue work I had done for Willie from *This Property is Condemned*, by Tennessee Williams. Willie was a thirteen year old girl who got caught up in any scenery that was around her, and who, like a young Kayleen, also liked to ramble about whatever is on her mind. I thought back to exercises on the floor of the Actor's Studio that helped me embody Willie, and I transferred those same methods to Kayleen. Sometimes all I had to do was envision Kayleen's life even younger than eight years old, whereas other times in preparation I had to overdramatize every move I made, just to emphasize how uncontrollable young children are. While in other performances I sometimes have the problem of feeling too "automatic," or make choices on stage that seem almost too planned out after weeks of rehearsal, Kayleen made me feel as if every time I was doing a scene, it was the first time. I found new elements to her physical characteristics and mental states every time we rehearsed a scene, because every time a new motivation for a feeling like grief or shame was uncovered. It was nerve racking to undergo new revelations repeatedly, but for this role, it was needed. In real life, we second guess ourselves on a daily basis and constantly examine our interactions with the people that mean the most to us. With Kayleen, I felt as if I kept her honest by constantly changing an emotional dynamic of a scene, even if I did not always realize that I was in fact changing it. I think part of this reason was because I would leave thinking about a conversation between Kayleen and Doug, and then the next time we rehearsed that same conversation, I would unconsciously perform it in one of the different ways I went over it in my head afterwards. Much like we sometimes think in real life how conversations would go if we had the chance to redo them, I believe part of my method to uncovering Kayleen was to perform a scene as many different ways as I needed to until I understood where she was coming from, emotionally.

The hardest thing about this process is always what happens the day after the final show, or when the entire process is actually over. My high school theater teacher told me that

when she lets go of a roll, she says it is like “losing a good friend.” I think this is the fondest way I will have to remember Kayleen; I have spent almost a year engaged in her life story, including her relationship, her physicality, and her emotions. While there was never a time that I believed I became too close with the character, I cannot say she did not affect me. Yet I would have been more worried about myself if I had spent all this time studying Kayleen’s emotional and physical states, but had never let her affect me. Taking on a character sometimes brings on new emotions or new outlooks that end up becoming an essential part of my real life. With Kayleen, I was able to question my own anger in situations and uncover deeper emotions such as my own shame, fear, and love. Much like I discovered with Kayleen and an audience, people in my real life find it much easier and are more willing to relate to someone who shows more dynamic than anger all the time. I was able to use what I learned in preparing for Kayleen’s life in times where I needed help with my own. Much like a good friend in real life, this good friend that I portrayed on stage gave me a lot to take with me in the future. As tough as it is to say goodbye to her, I have a confidence that there will be a will have me summoning her old tendencies as a means of preparation.

March 6, 2012

Jackie:

This is an evaluation and summation letter on your two-term Senior Project for Department Honors: Emotional Exploration: An Actor's Prep - Kayleen in "Gruesome Playground Injuries" (Fall) and Kayleen in "Gruesome Playground Injuries" - Rehearsal to Performance (Winter). It has been my privilege to serve as Faculty Coordinator of this independent work and I congratulate you on the successful completion of this creatively demanding project.

When you began formulating ideas for a "capstone" project that would complete your theater studies at Union, you knew that working on your craft as an actress would be central to the project. Your focus on this led to a very useful period of research into style and the demands of heightened emotional performance work, including useful preparation exercises that you undertook. From this work, your process of finding your performance methodology and then rehearsing and co-producing this play for the performances has been a good process. Despite some bumps in the road on your rehearsal and performance technique, the final product of this demanding script in performance was, I hope, as satisfying an experience for you as it was enthralling for your audience.

For the Fall project, initial performance ideas were those of a student still searching for a style and a voice for the themes you wished to explore in your character work. I am pleased for you that you found your way to a clear focus of what the initial project impulse seemed to invoke: that a full consideration of the process of character analysis and portrayal would invest your energy and time well toward developing your craft. While the rehearsal process was somewhat uneven and the written preparations under developed, it is to your credit that you made good use of the resources provided by this department: faculty mentoring as well as rehearsal feedbacks and re-writing opportunities. You were able to use the feedbacks confidently and completed sufficient re-writing so that your performance in the roles of Mae (Fool for Love), Rose (The Woolgatherer) Willie (This Property is Condemned) and Juliet (Romeo & Juliet) was a good preparation for the second stage of your project this Winter.

The final portion of your project, undertaking a fully realized production of Rajiv Joseph's "Gruesome Playground Injuries" was demanding on you as an actress, beyond any previous roles. Your completion of the project in preparation was also uneven in the academic and rehearsal portions. The emotional research and character psychological preparations could have gone deeper. The processing of your personal work as an actress was not fully recorded in your actor's journal. The rehearsal process was, at times, not moving forward on a level that one would associate with either professional work or

work of this caliber in thesis preparation. Your performances, however, were undertaken with great energy and investment, and demonstrated that you had greatly developed your abilities as an actress over the course of this project. Your Kayleen was fully realized in performance: engaging, raw, truthful, active, and as real as you intended her to be.

For the planning and delivery of all contractual aspects of this Senior Project, I am happy to award you a grade of "A-." Congratulations!


Yours very truly,

Patricia L. Culbert

Senior Artist in Residence

Department of Theater & Dance

Union College



Union College Department of Theatre and Dance presents

Gruesome Playground Injuries

By Rajiv Joseph

Directed: By Maisy Bragg

with Jackie Toop & Ryan Semerad

Friday, February 17 &
Saturday, February 18,
2012

7:30pm

Yulman Theater

Free

Senior Project in Theatre



Gruesome Playground Injuries

By Rajiv Joseph

Directed by Maisy Bragg

Yulman Theater

February 17th and 18th

7:30 pm

GRUESOME PLAYGROUND

INJURIES

BY RAJIV JOSEPH

DIRECTED BY MAISY BRAGG

Scenes

"Face Split Open"	Age Eight
"Eye Blown Out"	Age Twenty-three
"The Limbo"	Age Thirteen
"Tuesday"	Age Twenty-eight
"Pink Eye"	Age Eighteen
"Blue Raspberry Dip"	Age Thirty-three
"Tooth and Nail"	Age Twenty-three
"Zamboni"	Age Thirty-eight

CAST

Kayleen.....Jaclyn Toop

Doug.....Ryan Semerad

PRODUCTION CREW

Stage Manager & Lighting Designer.....Andrew Persson

Sound Designer.....Connor Gagliardi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Bill Finlay, Charles Steckler, Bob Bovard, and Brittany Belz for their continuous assistance throughout this process. Thank you Patsy Culbert for your valuable guidance, support, and time in helping to make this production a reality

Maisy Bragg

Every Theater major is given the opportunity to take on a senior thesis. After four years of studying in Union College's Department of Theater and Dance, I chose to culminate my time here by directing "Gruesome Playground Injuries". It has been fun, challenging, enlightening, and an experience that will stay with me as leave Union. However, it would not have been possible without the help of a few important people. First and foremost, my wonderfully talented cast, Jackie and Ryan. I had so much fun playing with you both. Andrew, I would have been lost without you. And Connor you are such a lifesaver. Last but not least Patsy; thank you for all that you have done for this show and for me over the last four years, I wouldn't have been able to get here without you.

JACLYN TOOP

When I read "Gruesome Playground Injuries," I knew I wanted to bring it to life for others to experience. This play is too beautifully written to not bring to life on stage. I would have never been able to complete this project, though, without the help of some lovely people. Ryan: I love you, you're awesome, and thank you for helping me bring Doug and Kayleen to life, my second favorite relationship next to Ross and Rachel. Maisy: I only like you a little. Thank you for taking on this project with me, I wouldn't have trusted anyone else with it. Here's to hoping you never hear the words "cigarettes," "wheelchair," or "owl" ever again! Andrew: You're always coming to the rescue! Thank you for your input and your lighting/technical talents. Patsy: Thank you for introducing me to this play, and for keeping the bar set so high the past four years.





























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