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THAT CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON

or

GAMES ANYONE?

By

Gordon V. Hayes

B.A., Humboldt State College, 1970

M.A., California State University at Humboldt, 1972

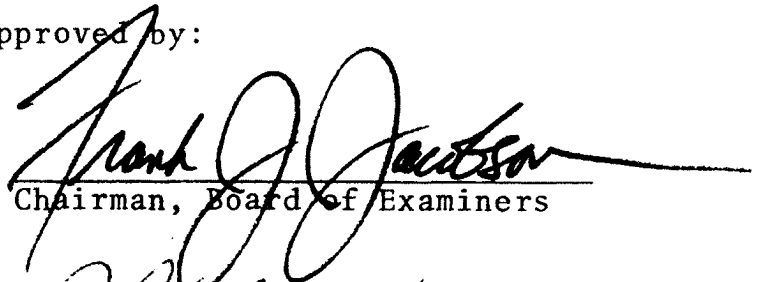
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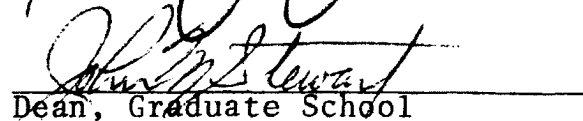
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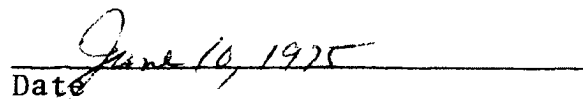
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1975

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Hayes, Gordon V., M.F.A., June, 1975

Drama

A report of the Direction of the Production That Championship Season (68 pp.)

Director: Frank Jacobson 

The purpose of this paper is to examine the direction of That Championship Season. It includes a conceptual analysis of the script and production considerations, a journal kept by the director during the rehearsal period, a study of the play and playwright, and a critique of the production.

Conclusions are based on the conception and execution of direction, acting, technical areas, and audience response.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

Chapter

I INTRODUCTION 1

II CONCEPTS AND QUESTS 5

III JOURNAL 25

IV THE PLAYWRIGHT AND HIS PLAY 52

V INSTANT REPLAY 57

BIBLIOGRAPHY 68

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a chronicle and evaluation of the production of That Championship Season by Jason Miller, performed on October 30, 31 and November 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 1974 in the Masquer Theatre, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana. This production was my Master's of Fine Arts directing thesis project.

This thesis includes my approach to the script, a journal of my thoughts, ideas, and events as they happened during the rehearsal period (October 1 through 29, 1974), a chapter about the playwright and his play, and a final chapter evaluating the entire production.

I have chosen this format for discussing That Championship Season because it reflects my approach to this production. My approach begins with the script because the script is a caterpillar that the director must metamorphose into a butterfly. One must note that without the caterpillar there can be no butterfly. Yet the caterpillar is not the butterfly. No matter how far a director strays from a script in a production, the script is where he must begin. I shall discuss my methods of dealing with the written word in my second chapter

entitled, "Concepts and Quests."

My third chapter is the journal I kept during the rehearsal period. This journal may or may not be of any worth to the reader, but it was of great worth to me as I directed the production. A journal helps a director to form his ideas with some sort of order. It allows one to refer to what happened in past rehearsals in order to help decide how to approach production problems in future rehearsals. Unless a director or actor has a photographic memory, he needs a journal to keep his art working toward his specific goals.

My fourth chapter is entitled, "The Playwright and His Play." Information about the playwright's life and his thoughts about his script are of interest, and may be the key to a director's approach to the production. This was not the case with my production of That Championship Season. I usually approach a script fresh, taking care not to read stage directions or author's notes until I have formed some of my own ideas. After clarifying my own ideas about the script, I research what the playwright and critics have written on the subject. At this time I may change some of my ideas. In this particular instance I found my concepts to be very close to Jason Miller's.

The final chapter of this thesis, "Instant Replay," is an evaluation of the entire production. This process is essential if a director is to learn and grow from one production to the next. I evaluated the entire production because I feel

that a director is ultimately responsible for all areas. For the evaluation process, I have created the character of an interviewer to ask the questions that I try to answer. This technique allows one to mentally divorce himself from the production while asking the questions. This is like being one's own devil's advocate, but it works for me. I like using the dialogue form for discussing theatre since this art is largely based on dialogue.

Throughout this thesis I have discussed the various areas of the production and those responsible for those areas. For this reason I have included a cast and designers list at this time.

THAT CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON

Cast and Designers

The Coach - - - - -	Randy Pugh*
Phil Romano - - - - -	Paul Shapiro*
George Sikowski - - - - -	Dave MacIntyre
James Daly - - - - -	John Keegan
Tom Daly - - - - -	Kent Epler*
Set Designer - - - - -	Neal Hirsig**
Light Designer - - - - -	Rick Meis
Costume Designer - - - - -	Liz Poore***

Makeup Designer - - - - - Gordon Hayes
Director - - - - - Gordon Hayes*

- *Frank Jacobson - Faculty Advisor
- **Glenn Gauer - Faculty Advisor
- ***Stephanie Schoelzel - Faculty Advisor

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTS AND QUESTS

In this chapter I will discuss my approach to directing That Championship Season. Before I began making decisions, I read the play four times. During the last reading, I took copious notes of my impressions. These notes were the foundation of my concept for the play, which, to my mind, is the first answer a director must find. The concept is the director's answer to the question, "What is the essence of the play?" This answer should affect the director's decisions on all other aspects of the production. The script is nearly always where a director finds his concept, therefore I shall begin my discussion with the problems I found inherent in the script.

THE SCRIPT

The script of That Championship Season falls under the heading of "a slice of life" script. If the action is too broad, this type of script becomes a melodrama of high emotion, wherein the most serious moments are met by gales of laughter. This is not what I wanted for my production. To circumvent the possibility of this happening, I continuously impressed the actors with the importance of subtleties. There

should not be any acting on stage. I wanted the actors to work in terms of real people (characters) reacting to each other on stage in a subtle realistic manner.

Jason Miller wrote this script in three acts. I did not think this was necessary since the play is only an hour and a half long. I kept the act break between the first and second acts, but cut the break between acts two and three. This caused a slight problem since Miller has a blackout as George begins to vomit in the trophy. I had George vomit in the trophy and the action continued. It was difficult to do without being too melodramatic. I think that the audience will probably laugh at this point no matter what is done with the moment. This was probably Miller's intent. There are a great many funny moments in this script that I intended to use to the fullest of my ability, but when the action is serious I did not want the audience to laugh.

That Championship Season is one of the better written scripts with which I have worked. The melodrama, "slice of life" problem, is one that exists in any serious emotional script. This is indeed a director's problem.

The Concept

My concept for That Championship Season was a "lie." (A slight pun is intended.) This concept deals with a lie as a way of life, not as an isolated action. Each character in the play lies about himself, to others, and most importantly

to himself. Even when he seems to bare his soul, we find later that he is lying. For instance, the coach says in the first act, "And I'm proud to see all of you climbing to the top of your professions, politics, business . . . education . . . travel."¹ However, in the third act the coach says of his boys,

You have no pride, none. You got a face for everybody. All slick smiles and empty eyes. You lost something, boy, lost something . . .
 . (Pacing) Phil playin' the lout screwing and ruining his life away. Lost something.
 (To Tom) You stumbling and reeling through the streets like some broken thing, hearing people laugh at you, breaks my You were a gifted boy²

George discusses his wife and dead child with Tom in the first act.

She's my conscience, for God's sake. My severest critic. She knows the political scene . . . she's almost as sharp as I am.
 (Pause) You know after the baby, she was . . . very depressed, not quite herself. She's coming around now, thank God.³

Later in the show, Phil talks about George's wife, Marion, and his child.

No. She had to convince him. He wanted to keep it. Wouldn't give it up until the coach damn near ordered him to. Hey, I'm not the first guy she's laid, she's been running around the last few years.⁴

¹Jason Miller, That Championship Season (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1972), p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 43.

³Ibid., p. 7.

⁴Ibid., p. 37.

Phil lies in smaller ways than the other characters. In the second act he states,

Offended. Know why I like married women? Nobody gets involved. They don't yell, tell, or swell, and they're grateful as hell. Marion took my cherry in school . . . nobody gets involved . . . I really cared for her⁵

In the third act he speaks of Marion again.

. . . She worked for it. I took her up to the Holiday one afternoon and fucked her on the bed, floor, tub, toilet, everywhere but the ice machine. (Pause) You know the only woman I ever loved . . . my mother, fuck the psychiatrists . . . my mother is the only . . . woman I ever knew. The rest are all cunts.⁶

James constantly contradicts himself throughout the show.

A good example of this can be found in Act two.

Mediocrity. My son, Jimmie, the bright one, asked me what it meant, definition of the word mediocrity. "It means of low excellence." You know why he asked? Because that's what he thinks of me, how he sees me, how I'm beginning to see myself.⁷

In James's very next line he says,

That's only the beginning. I found my talent late in life. I didn't get into politics until I was over thirty. There's always Congress, George, Congress in the distance. I'm going to make my stand in the political arena.⁸

Tom lies in a different way than the rest of the characters. He returns to the reunion as a broken-down drunk, and

⁵Ibid., p. 36.

⁶Ibid., p. 40.

⁷Ibid., p. 34.

⁸Ibid.

is on the fringe of the action throughout most of the show. Yet he reveals the ultimate lie in the play.

Stop lying to us. Stop telling us how good we were Martin wanted you to publicly refuse the trophy, remember? You told him in the third quarter to get that nigger center, the kangaroo, remember? He did. He went out and broke the guy's ribs We have gone through this phony ritual, champions? Shit! We stole it.⁹

All the characters are trapped in a cyclic reunion without end or gratification in itself. Their only victory is in the past. As Phil says,

Sometimes I think that's the only thing I can still feel, you know, still feel in my gut, still feel that championship season, feel the crowds . . . my best memory to date, yeah, nothing matched it nothing.¹⁰

Visually, this lying reminded me of a web dusty and sticky. One can get caught up in his own lie until he becomes the lie.

Audibly, the play is a laugh that never stops. This play tickles you one minute and kicks you in the stomach the next.

If there is a truth about the characters of That Championship Season, it is this: not one of them, Phil, George, James, Tom, or the Coach, is the man he wanted to be.

Casting Concepts

The following is a brief description of each character as I saw him before casting the play. In other words, these were

⁹Ibid., pp. 44, 45.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 35.

the qualities I was looking for in the actors.

Coach

This will be the most difficult character to cast. He is not a likeable man, but he is powerful and must have incredible charisma to carry the proper feeling. He must command respect. He is an extremely rough-cut, rustic kind of a man.

Phil Romano

Phil is the only character that has remained a jock. That is not to say he is stupid. He thinks with his body more than his mind. All his interests are based on the five senses, yet he feels empty and yearns for something more meaningful. I think Phil should laugh a good deal. Perhaps the laugh should be a bit forced.

George Sikowski

Although George is the mayor of the town, he is probably the least intelligent of the characters. He is all smiles and empty eyes. While George is a rather shallow person, he feels his shallowness deeply. He hates

. . . things. He is a pathetic failure.

James Daly

James has been second or third best his entire life. He is a mild man, but there should be a quality of a volcano about to erupt inside of him at any moment. He is intelligent enough. I would say that he never matured. He is a father of four--a burnt-out, mediocre, forty-year-old man.

Tom Daly

Tom is an alcoholic. He is probably the most intelligent of the characters, but he is not strong. He is smart enough to know that the championship season is a lie. He is smart enough to know that he must leave Fillmore High School and the town behind him, but each time he leaves, he fails and falls into the gutter. Eventually, he returns, at least for the reunion. He may be a masochist. Even though Tom is a weak, cynical alcoholic, he must be liked by the audience.

He has nearly all the clever lines, usually aimed at the other characters. In this sense, he is the audience. He asks the questions we need answered. Tom can be very glib with glimmerings of weakness, malice, and rage beneath his suaveness.

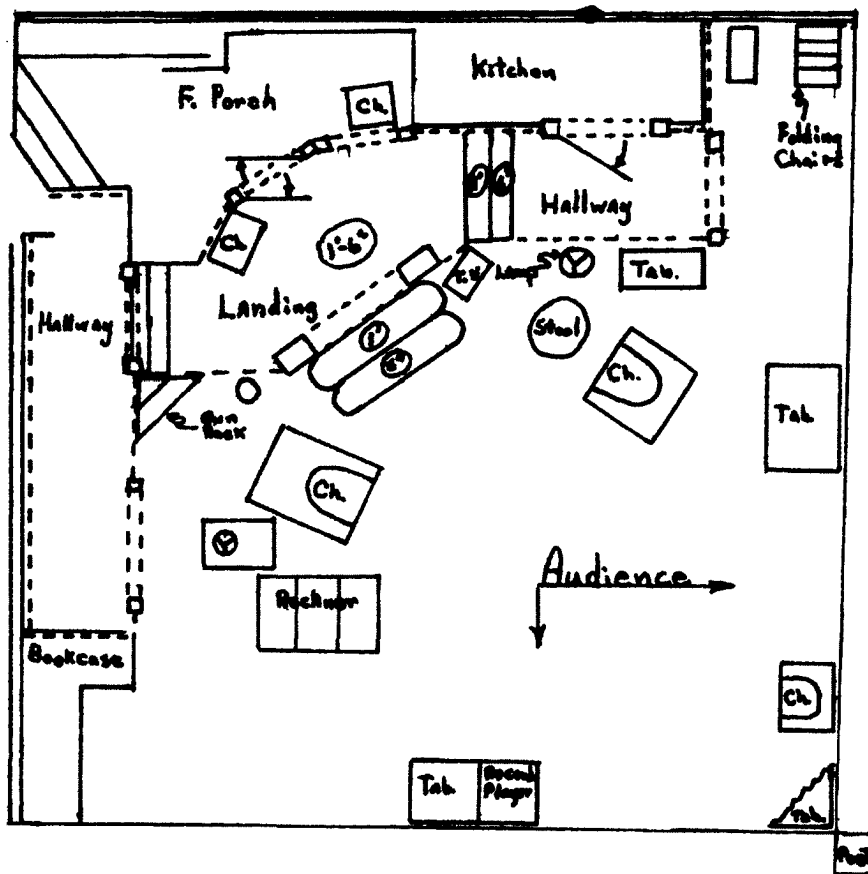
All these characters are different people than they seem to be. This ties into the concept of a lie.

After the first few pages of dialogue, one thinks he knows who each character is. In the second act each character bares his soul and one finds he was wrong in the first act. These new truths reveal the real characters in the play . . . until the third act when one finds from what the characters say about each other and from their own words and actions, that they were lying to themselves and everyone else in the first and second acts. By the end of the play, they are back where they started. The entire play is a self-delusion, or lie.

Blocking Concepts

This concept, of course, affected the blocking that I used in the show.

This is a floor plan of the space in which That Championship Season performed.



The audience was so close on two sides that they formed two walls of the room. This allowed the audience to see facial expressions and attitudes that belied a character's words because of the close proximity.

The characters become inebriated during the show. I did not think that five stage drunks running around the set would carry the emotional lines of the script, so I created this drunkenness partially through blocking.

At the beginning of the play, no one is drunk. The actors used the furniture and room in an ordinary, natural manner. As the play progresses, the characters become more drunk. I blocked them in more and more unconventional ways.

Some of these techniques were sitting on tables instead of chairs, lounging in a chair with a leg over the arm of the chair, lying on the floor, using glasses for ashtrays, sitting on stairs, and standing on stools or chairs.

Since the show was performed in a small, intimate space, the blocking and business was extremely detailed nearly to the point of being cinematic. Therefore, an actor, instead of just standing and giving a line, had to be doing something such as smoking, getting a refill, eating potato chips, looking at pictures, etc. This gave the production a realistic quality. The characters delivered lines straight to each other only at intensified moments. This helped in the orchestration of highs and lows, an important point for this script. This show could easily become a burlesque of high emotion. I thought that giving the actors a great deal of business would help the orchestration and make the show visually more interesting. The movie, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, is a good example of this technique.

The blocking was detailed carefully throughout the show, but the logic of blocking patterns deteriorated progressively.

Makeup Concepts

Makeup for this production was fairly simple with a few complications. Phil, James, Tom, and George had to be aged slightly since my actors were all in their twenties and the characters are nearly forty. I include my character evalua-

tions used in the makeup design process.

Phil is robust, dashing and Italian. I think I will design a small, sporty mustache and very dark brown hair. The rest of his facial details will depend on the actor who plays the part. Phil's hair should be curly if possible.

James, although he is the same age as Phil, should look older and more tired. I will achieve this through the use of shadows beneath the eyes, turn the corners of the mouth down, a more old-fashioned hair style, and stronger nasalabial folds.

Tom is the youngest character, but he is also the most dissipated. His eyes should be hollow and sunken. His skin should have a sallow, unhealthy appearance. It is my contention that Tom is physically ill from a disease called life.

George is the same age as Phil and James. He is healthy, at least physically. I somehow keep seeing George as being overweight. I think his complexion should be ruddier than anyone else on stage. George should look as though he has high blood pressure. George is also stupid. I will try to help the actor in this by making his eyes look far apart through the use of highlight and shadow. I think George should have very fleshy lips.

I have saved the coach until last because he will be the most difficult to deal with. The actor I cast in this role will undoubtedly be in his twenties. My job will be to

make him look like a sixty-five year old from three feet away. This is impossible to do with makeup paint alone. I will have to use liquid latex over the actor's entire face and neck. The latex will form tiny wrinkles all over his skin, and help make his flesh sag. He will have eye-bags, nasalabial folds, crow's feet, and sunken temples. He must have a rugged, commanding appearance, yet his complexion should be a bit sallow as he has had a stomach operation recently and is not well. The coach should have a shock of unruly, white hair. Historical descriptions of Sam Houston strike me as being right for the coach's character.

Set Design Concept

The following is Jason Miller's conception of the set as it is found in the script.

Set: A large and expansive living room in a Gothic-Victorian tradition. The dominant mood of the room is nostalgia. Its furnishings are frayed, dusty, the cool and airless serenity of a museum fills the room. The furniture is a compilation of decades. Down Stage Left, a large mahogany table, over it, a Tiffany lamp. A Stromberg-Carson console Upstage Center. Large leather sofa and matching chairs are scattered around the room. Gunracks, with shotguns, on both walls. Doilies on the sofa and chairs. Glass bookcase Upstage

Right, filled with leather bound books, on top of it a small collection of silver trophies. Upstage Center a large spiralling staircase winds up into the second floor. Overlarge and faded pictures of Teddy Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Senator Joseph McCarthy hang from the walls. Floor lamps flank the staircase. The wallpaper is faded and stained and the oriental rug covering the floor is worn and obviously in need of cleaning. An early make, 1950ish, fourteen-inch television set, with rabbit ears sits neglected in the corner. Upstage Center is the main entrance. Downstage Left is the entrance to the kitchen. Soiled lace curtains cover the two narrow Upstage windows. On the dining table sits a huge silver trophy.¹¹

This seemed to be the proper image for the play. However, the space in which I was working has a nine-foot ceiling and a square of twenty-two feet for an acting area. This condition necessitated some deviation from Miller's concept. The following was my attempt, prior to the production, to maintain the proper conceptual feeling for the set within the limited and technical conditions.

The set for this show is the coach's living room. Ob-

¹¹Ibid., p. 5.

viously the room should reflect his character. There should be a number of trophies on stage, the largest of them being the championship trophy. Many pictures of basketball teams from past years should adorn the walls. I believe that the coach would stack accumulated newspapers and magazines under a table to get them out of the way for the evening's reunion. The furniture, excluding the coach's swivel chair, should look as though it has been slightly rearranged for five people. I do not think the coach has many visitors. He is a solitary old man, living with his memories.

This room should also reflect the coach's mother in a few places since she and the coach lived together until she died a few years before the play takes place. This can be achieved through an ornate empty vase on a doily, embroidered pillows now dirty and ill-used, or a woman's old umbrella in an umbrella stand. There should not be many things that reflect the coach's mother, only those things that were special to her or could be used by the coach after her death.

I should like the walls of the set to be made of scrim so that the audience can see through them into the hallways and corridors to the kitchen, bathroom and the stairs to the second floor. If the walls are of scrim they can be made transparent or opaque at will through the placement and use of lights. In Miller's set suggestions, he states that the house is expansive. The space I must deal with is very small. I believe that the use of scrim walls will help open the space

and make it seem larger. Miller's set allows an actor to be visible to the audience while he is separated from his fellow actors. The scrim walls are my attempt to allow the same thing to happen under the limited given conditions.

The coach's house must have a front porch at the back of the stage with a front door leading onto a raised landing and so to the room where the action takes place. It would be advantageous to have more levels in the set, but the nine-foot ceiling makes this impossible.

This home should appear to be at least seventy years old. The woodwork should be mostly dark wood, but perhaps will be painted over in hallways or the kitchen. This house belonged to the coach's father, an affluent banker in the twenties. The father lost everything in the stock market crash except the home. These poverty years would have some effects on the house. Perhaps some rooms were closed off after the father's death, and more after the mother's death. The coach's only income is from teaching high school so he is not rich. The economic decline of this family must be considered. The newest articles in the house should be the cheapest ones. I particularly want a decayed quality to the coach's house.

Light Design Concept

The lighting for That Championship Season is basically realistic throughout the show. The rare exceptions to this

are the special light on the coach when James takes his picture, and the special light on the trophy at the beginning of the play. On these two occasions the rest of the lights must be blacked out.

This show seems to call for realistic, workable household lamps on stage. The lights should become slightly dimmer throughout the show. This will help carry the deterioration of the characters' relationships in terms of general mood.

There is one more special lighting consideration for the curtain call. At the end of the play, there will be a blackout, then in a prominent area on stage, an isolated pool of light will reveal the coach holding the trophy surrounded by his boys. They will all be in a frozen tableau as if they are stiffly posing for a picture. When applause begins to fall off, there will be a blackout.

Costume Design Concept

The following is my concept of the costumes based on my interpretation of each character.

Coach

This character should be dressed in an out-of-date suit at first. Then, after his attack, he will change into a gray sweat shirt leaving his original slacks on. He will exchange shoes for slippers. His suit should be from

the early fifties. I see the coach in blue, old in age, but not in wear. This man would not wear a suit except for special occasions.

Phil Romano

Phil is wealthy and sporty. He should wear a suit that would be flashy in the business world. The material should have a sheen to it. He should look like a successful New York businessman with a flare. This suit should be in the height of adult fashion for 1972.

George Sikowski

George believes in images. He would dress the way he thinks a mayor would dress. I would like to see George in a black suit with a black vest, pocket watch and conservative tie. This suit should be of good quality, but not flashy.

James Daly

James is a Junior High School principal. He is not rich and has four children. I think his suit should be a bit outdated (1960's). This suit should be gray. James is gray.

He would wear a white short sleeved shirt with a narrow tie to match the narrow lapels on his jacket.

Tom Daly

Since Tom is a drunkard that James has recently pulled out of the gutter, it is reasonable to presume that his clothes may be newly purchased. An alcoholic in the gutter usually does not possess a wardrobe. Taking into consideration James's financial status, one must assume that Tom's dress would not be very expensive. Since Tom is the most casual character on the surface, he should wear a pair of denim slacks, a sports shirt, and a loose cardigan sweater.

Wild Fantasy Concept

There is one more area of consideration that I have not covered. This is the area of wild ideas and fantasies about the play. It is important for a director to go through this process before finalizing his concept. The following contains the ideas that came to my mind for this show. I call

this process "what ifs."

What if this show were staged on a basketball court, and the characters were dressed in sweat suits?

What if the set, actors' makeups and costumes were all in shades of grays from white to black? This would be a statement of their 1950's attitudes and should bring to mind television or a black and white film.

What if this show had a dream sequence with stylized movement, voice, and lights? This could take place on page eleven when they relive their championship game and at the end of the play during the record. This would give the feeling that they were still living in their past glory more than they were in the present. This is a correct emotional interpretation, but the stylized action may be too distant from the style of the script.

What if there were a slow motion film of their last moments of the championship game that appeared during the two dream sequences? This would provide the stylized movement and free the actors to perform realistically. This film would be images of their memories.

What if the film were shown from a projector on stage? This would turn it into the coach's projector and film, which could be accepted in terms of realism. If the film belongs to the coach, it cannot be reasonably shown until the end of the play when he plays the record.

In order to use any of these variations on a dream sequence, I had to find a method of making it memorable and enlightening to the audience in terms of subtext. This is true of any wild idea a director may have. If it does not enhance the production and make it a more meaningful experience, it should not be done.

CHAPTER III

JOURNAL

October 1, 1974

Today was the first day of tryouts. Twenty men showed up. Too many! I guess that should be expected for the first show. Kent Epler is coming to tryouts tomorrow. This is a possible cast list:

Randy Pugh:	Coach, Tom or George
Paul Shapiro:	Phil, James, Coach
John Keegan:	James or Phil
Curtis Baker:	Tom or James
Kent Epler:	Tom or James
Dave MacIntyre:	George or Coach
Paul Fleming:	George or Coach

Paul Shapiro and Randy Pugh must be cast because this is the play they have chosen for their acting theses. As for the others, we shall see tomorrow.

October 2, 1974

Today is my little brother's birthday. Twenty-eight years old, what became of my baby brother?

This is the last day of tryouts. I think there will be more people there than I want. So it goes.

Yesterday's tryouts were entirely too formal. I must get loose. Improvisation? Let's toss an imaginary ball around.

What if I have them try some characterizations in an improvisation using the script? Examples:

Tom: try to get everyone angry.

George: make them approve of you.

James: make them feel sorry for you.

Phil: make them envy you.

Coach: make them relive and conform.

Different variations should be applied for tryouts.

Coach, play for:

1. suppressed pain
2. faked high spirits
3. meglamania
4. senility

George, play for:

1. blusteriness
2. nervousness
3. paranoia
4. heart-felt shallowness

James, play for:

1. unsureness
2. suppressed anger
3. persecution complex
4. dynamite: no blasting capabilities

Phil, play for:

1. striving for youth
2. jocularly

- 3. moodiness
- 4. laughs loudest at own jokes

Tom, play for:

- 1. casualness
- 2. spaced-out (not drunk)
- 3. satirical humor (understated)
- 4. illness (deterioration of body functions)

It should be interesting to mix these different aspects of each character for the tryouts and see what the actor comes up with. A good test to see how an actor responds to suggestion and whether he can think on his feet or not.

Note: I must make sure that the cast is willing to cut their hair, etc.

October 2, 1974

Well . . . it's cast!

Coach:	Randy Pugh
Phil:	Paul Shapiro
George:	Dave MacIntyre
James:	John Keegan
Tom:	Kent Epler

Now I begin to work.

- 1. Get script for director's book.
- 2. Go through the script for focus and action.
- 3. Find out about film. See Neal Hirsig, Glen Gauer, and Dick James.

All Right!

October 3, 1974

We had our first rehearsal tonight. We read through the play (1 hour, 21 minutes). The play should run around 1 hour, 45 minutes. I may or may not have an intermission. Probably will. The script is built for two, but that is too many for this short a show. I don't think I want the audience to be able to relax and light up twice during the show. It would spoil the tension lines.

After the read through, we discussed the show. The actors seem to have a pretty good understanding of the script. The assignment for tomorrow is: Take any line from the play and deliver it three ways with three different voices and three different types of movement. We shall see what happens. I want the actors to start stretching themselves immediately in rehearsals. We have less than four weeks to pull this off, so we must explore as many possibilities as we can this first week.

October 4, 1974

We had a two hour discussion on the characters at rehearsal tonight. The cast is really working on these roles. I am pleased.

I must get them to divorce themselves from their own personalities. This will allow, no, force them to experiment with their characterizations more fully. What about a Donald Duck voice and a goose step? At this early point in rehear-

sals, anything is worthy of consideration.

The read through had some very interesting emotional movements (in terms of relationships) after our discussion. Perhaps I am on the right track, at this time, for this group of experience-associating actors. I am beginning to find that asking them leading questions about their characters is better than telling them my answers. We are all learning more this way.

Sunday evening we play some basketball. This is more for our heads than for our bodies. I think a feeling for the game will help us get a feeling for the show.

I can hardly wait until I get a floor plan. Then we can really get down to work. The blocking must be well thought out, but I can't take up too much rehearsal time with this technical aspect. I think I will try to get all the blocking down on paper before rehearsal. Undoubtedly some of this written blocking will be changed, but the process shouldn't take as long as if I did it originally at rehearsal. We shall see.

October 5, 1974

This is a day off. I will probably work on an action line for the script today (orchestration). Perhaps some motivational stuff for the actors. This will make blocking easier when I get a floor plan. I hope I hear from Neal today!

October 6, 1974

I saw Neal today. We did a lot of brain storming and came up with some good ideas. I think there will be no couch now. We don't absolutely need a front porch. And although I had intended this since my first reading of the script, Neal hadn't understood that I wanted the actors to move the furniture around themselves during the action of the play. This helped him a great deal with his concepts. Keep up the communication!

I have been thinking about using a scrim wall for the hallway leading to the main door and into the room. This is a good way to let the audience know things about any one character that the other characters don't know by having my actors visible when they are alone in the hallway. Example: how does the coach handle his pain when he is alone compared to the way he appears when he is with his boys?

Neal just called. I must go look at more drawings. Later.

October 7, 1974

I was up until 4:00 a.m. getting the floor plan settled with Neal. I like it and am making a mimeo of it in 3/16" scale for blocking in the director's book. This method works well for me and allows me to know where everyone is at any given time. I have designated a color for each character and recorded their blocking patterns on the miniature floor plan. I have made color coded notes in the script that coincide with the floor plan to tell when the moves come and what the emotion line is.

I had classes in the morning and a production meeting all afternoon until 4:00 p.m. One simply cannot have too many production meetings. However, this only left me three hours to block Act I before rehearsal.

I did not get the blocking on the opening finished before rehearsal so I will block the first scene with Tom and George in a special rehearsal. Also we had to experiment with the last five pages of Act I. I think we have some really decent blocking for this act. I am very excited! I hope I sleep tonight.

October 8, 1974

I did not sleep last night. I wish I could occasionally turn this play off inside my head. At least I utilized the time. I finished the blocking for Act II at 5:48 this morning. It worked well with no changes this evening, although I am sure some of the blocking will be changed as we progress. I say "we" because it is my theory that a director and the actors of any play must together discover what they are trying to show an audience in their interpretation of a script.

There is still a lot of character work to be done with the actors, especially Tom and James.

October 9, 1974

Tonight I had class so we had a late afternoon rehearsal of the first seven pages of Act I. We got George and Tom blocked. Kent's character for Tom is beginning to come along.

Oh! I got some sleep last night. What a relief.

Most of the actors now need to get rid of their scripts and start working on the play. There is a transitional difference between the two. Lines are called for the first act by Friday.

Blocking is difficult for this show because the space is small and audience placement strange. The actor's placement is crucial within a six inch leeway because of sightlines. I will have to be careful of this. The blocking must be incredibly precise, but the movement should appear natural and unstudied.

October 10, 1974

Well, the damn thing's blocked! We blocked the last eight pages, then ran the whole show this evening. The blocking works, although I need to make revisions here and there. I made some tonight. The amazing thing about rehearsal was that some of the key moments and part of the characterizations are beginning to show through. I am so glad.

I must work with James more. Keegan has lots of habits we need to curtail.

October 11, 1974

Today I got all the leg work done on the film. It will be a 16mm bolex camera using 200 feet of black and white 4x320 A.S.A. film. Vince Swan will help me film it in the fieldhouse

gym. I am taking the publicity pictures myself. I hope this film is as effective as my vision. I have tossed out the idea of making it a dream sequence at the beginning and end of the play. It will merely be a film the Coach shows at the end of the play coinciding with the record. The film must be slow motion to keep the mood of the play. Not having the film as a dream sequence turns it into a mere reenforcement of the record. I hope this works and is worth it. I don't know.

Tonight's rehearsal is a work-run-through with lines due for Act I.

October 12, 1974

Last night's rehearsal went very well. The lines are in good shape. I am satisfied for now. We stopped a lot during Act I and I started to realize how some nice transitions might be created.

This is a dual-cinematic space (two proscenioums at right angles with a close proximity to the audience). I must be aware of the dynamic value of close-up subtleties.

Flash! I just had a thought. When Tom falls down the stairs he should lose consciousness, not trip.

Sorry. These things must be written down when they come. Now, where was I? Oh! Subtleties. Ah, yes.

That's why we need cinematic considerations in terms of directing this show. This is a matter of the actor feeling like he is in a close-up shot on camera (a matter of focus

for me). This will work for this show. See Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

The actors really got into the script for the first time last night. The emotionalism they fell into had some of the qualities I want for the production, although it was a little too self-indulgent. We must watch this and create our serious moments selectively. This is my task.

I told the actors to start working for the lightness in the script and on their own technical considerations. Example: how does he move, speak, think, feel? What's another way of saying this line?

Later today I must do some brain storming on the emotional line and moods I want to create from the script.

October 13, 1974

We shot the film today. I think it went very well. We have enough different shots so we have leeway in editing.

Actors here seem to know nothing about acting for film. Luckily, it's not the kind of film that requires acting. Vince Swan will be doing the editing. I want the cuts to come more and more rapidly as the film progresses. This should be interesting in contrast to the slow motion of the frames.

The rehearsal after the filming was pretty dead. We only went through Act II. The lines are getting into shape, but everyone was extremely tired.

October 14, 1974

Since this was a holiday (Columbus Day), we had rehearsal from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The lines should be nearly cold by tomorrow night.

I am going to make up a new rehearsal schedule tomorrow. I must decide how I am going to split up the scenes for rehearsal. A lot depends on the rest of the rehearsal. They can make this show a unique theatre experience or just a good show. Imagination is the key.

It is important that we work for lightness, especially during the first part of the play, and interspersed during that last half. We mustn't luxuriate in blatant emotionalism.

October 15, 1974

We had a great rehearsal tonight. The actors all had their lines down with the exception of Randy's (Coach) last two speeches.

Paul (Phil) had a breakthrough in his character. He found a laugh and a casualness that works well and sets up his serious moments.

Kent (Tom) also had a nice rehearsal. He is now creating some moments that remind me of Gordon Townsend (the best and most honest actor I know). If he can become more consistent throughout the show, he will give a stunning performance.

Dave (George), Keegan (James), and Randy (Coach) still have a ways to go, but they are very close. I am excited.

I work with Randy tomorrow afternoon. The rest of this week and next week is the time I have left to do individual work with each actor.

October 16, 1974

Since today is Wednesday, I have night classes, so I worked with Randy this afternoon on orchestrating his long speeches. I think he has the right idea now. We are going for a certain amount of senility in the Coach. He suddenly screams a line, angry for no reason. He has lapses of memory, for instance, tears easily. Yet he is crafty and calculating. A difficult part. The Coach must be a very complex man, or the play won't work.

October 17, 1974

Tonight we worked through Act I. We nailed down the blocking and emotional line. It went very well. I like the way Act I is shaping up.

After we finished working on the bulk of Act I with all the actors, I worked on the opening scene with Dave and Kent. It's coming along, but is too rushed and tense. I have to get them to be casual. Right now they are telegraphing all the heavy scenes that happen in the rest of the play. It will come.

October 18, 1974

We worked Act II this evening. Dave, John and Kent came

at 6:00 p.m., then John, Kent and Paul at 8:30 p.m. Act II is getting too heavy. I must find ways to vary the mood. Lightness! Work moments! Basically this was a good rehearsal, but Act II is more difficult than Act I.

Note: Act I is the same as the script. Act II is Act II and III in the script.

October 19, 1974

We had a run through and Frank Jacobson, my directing advisor, attended tonight. It went very well, basically. The actors are sharing with each other, but they are still making choices geared to proscenium theatre instead of film acting. Act II is still self-indulgent in terms of emotionalism. We have to choose our moments and lighten everything else up so our moments have some effect.

October 20, 1974

Note: The following are my notes from a drunk rehearsal at my house. The actors' instructions were to get loose, and improvise the play using as many or as few of their lines from the play as they wished.

Drunk Improv: Well, we're in the middle of this now. I am not drinking nor entering into the action.

They are sticking to the plot, but loosely. Almost all the lines are originals.

I think the value of this rehearsal is somewhere inside

the actor. It is not going to be of any technical value, but emotionally it might be.

There is a lot of unnecessary screaming in the improv. I think this reflects the actors' attitudes about the play. They like the heaviness. I will have to talk to the actors about letting those moments happen to them instead of anticipating them.

Randy, you are trying to convince them, not yourself (fine distinction).

Go for subtleties boys. Monday and Tuesday we will clarify which specific moments are heavy.

October 21, 1974

Tonight we took Act I apart and put it back together again. I changed a lot of things. Some of them were from Frank's suggestions. The whole thing hangs together now. Tempers got a little flustered tonight between Paul and John over the new blocking at the end of Act I. Actually I'm glad they did get angry. I think that scene can work now. Paul likes the new blocking better. John is uncomfortable. I think it works much better. John will get used to it.

I find Paul a very easy actor to work with. I don't know if his attitude is different this year, or if we just click together.

Dave is doing a lot of his own reblocking without checking with me. This is annoying. Sometimes he is right (about 50%),

but the other 50% wastes our time as I have to stop the show and put original blocking back in. We must talk.

October 22, 1974

A reblocking and reworking of Act II. Tonight should have been more grueling than Act I was last night, but it wasn't. We changed even more things, but it all came easier. Randy is beginning to get a feeling for the Coach. The manipulating, conniving quality is beginning to peek through. John is getting much better as is Paul and Kent. Dave needs a breakthrough. I think it is coming. If I can just find the right thing to say or do.

I still must rework a few areas:

1. Paul's hand raised to Randy
2. Kent's blocking before he is slapped
3. The end of Randy's last speech
4. Entire opening
5. The song

The part of Act II with just Phil, James and Tom on stage finally clicked tonight. They got the giggles and nearly lost control. If we achieve this state in performance, the scene may be the best in the play. This cannot be achieved technically. I am sure it will be a little different each night as the emotional line is more or less improvised each time we do it. Actually, I want the performance a little different each night so the life of the script will be fresh. Perhaps

a good way to attain this freshness will be to have actors change some of their deliveries of lines and emotional lines each night of performance.

October 23, 1974

We had a run through tonight with stops to check the new changes. I wanted to work on the five areas left over from last night, but we ran out of time because the set crew needed to work on stage.

Frank was there and gave us notes after the rehearsal. Many of them were things I've been working for all along. Frank had quite a few questions and I had all the answers. I suppose this means that I am reaching that point in the production when I have made most of my directorial choices. I now know for sure what I want from the production. Some believe that a director should make all of these choices before going into rehearsal. I do not.

October 24, 1974

We ran through the play this evening with a small audience. They laughed in a lot of places we hadn't anticipated. This made the rehearsal a very valuable experience for the actors. Everything is shaping up.

October 25, 1974

This afternoon I worked with Randy at his house. The technical crew needed the stage. We worked on the whole

script, but concentrated mainly on Randy's two long speeches at the end of the play. We now have them orchestrated and blocked (emotionally) line by line. I think this is set now.

October 26, 1974

What a day! Our costumer, Liz Poore, is frightened of costuming the show; so frightened in fact that she has done very little. I did not know this. Each time I have seen her, she said everything is going fine.

Anyway, last night I got a phone call from Stephanie (head costumer) and another from Paul (Phil). Paul's leather jacket which Stephanie and Liz bought together is two sizes too small for Paul. I told Stephanie that I would go to all the men's stores in the morning with Paul and Liz to find another coat that is cheaper and fits.

Stephanie has purchased black velvet for Paul's pants and silky cream satin for his shirt. These are not at all what I wanted but she had them cut out before I knew anything about it. This is poor communication at its worst, and is unforgiveable. I would like to make clear right now that I do not like this design at all, but did not have the option of having any say about it since the money was spent and the cloth cut. But I digress.

The jacket we had to find had to go with the pants and shirt somehow. This morning we went to literally every men's store in town and found two sports coats that would work well

with Paul's costume and character. One coat cost \$85.00 and the other \$57.00. Liz, Paul and I liked both of the jackets and were satisfied with them. We put both on lay-away since Stephanie had to approve one of them before it could be purchased.

This evening I learned that Stephanie had vetoed both jackets because they didn't look rich enough. I disagree. However, without talking to me again she had purchased more black velvet to make Paul's jacket. The pattern she is using has nearly the same cut and style as one of the jackets I laid away.

What has happened is that the costumer's advisor has totally designed at least one character's costume without ever seeing a rehearsal. She based her decision on Phil's character as she sees it (not as Paul or I see it) and, in effect, is interpreting that character for us. This is wrong and should not be allowed.

The two fellows editing film for me finally showed up today. They have not started editing the film yet. I gave them a shot by shot editing scenario two weeks ago. They say I am not going to get the film until Tuesday. We open Wednesday. They gave me some outtakes from the film to use for rehearsal until Tuesday.

The lights Rick and I settled on have to be totally changed in concept and reality. Right now they are very spotty and are unsatisfactory.

The outtakes of the film got stuck in the projector the moment Randy turned it on in rehearsal tonight. I am having second thoughts about this film.

The actors were great.

I am going through labor pains. It is hard to let go of the control of the show. Tomorrow is the last day to keep my fingers in, then the show belongs to the actors and stage manager who is Ken Bernstein. He is a jewel.

October 27, 1974

Today was our second technical rehearsal.

This morning we completely rehung and refocused the lights. They just weren't right last night. There were great splashes of hots and colds all over the stage. After rehanging and gelling this morning, one side of the stage was warm and one cold, so we alternated gels. The lights are pretty good now. This is a difficult space to light and we have a limited assortment of gels. The gels for this year have not arrived yet, so we have very few colors to choose from.

At any rate, we did not finish the lights until 6:00 p.m., so I let the actors go and we ran the show cue to cue until we got it right. I got home very late.

Tech work is still behind schedule so I helped work on the set until late in the evening. The costumes are not done either, and we don't get the film until Tuesday. I have never

in my life had this much trouble with the technical aspects of a show. This show should be easy. I don't know.

October 28, 1974

We had our first dress rehearsal tonight. The show went well, but the lights are still having problems. The design leaves a little to be desired, but the light cues are few and easy to perform. Yet many light cues were blown. I do not understand.

Randy's makeup still needs a little work. He is too pasty-looking and the latex I am using to age his skin texture is not adhering to his skin properly. I will swab his skin with alcohol tomorrow before applying the latex. This should help.

Paul's costume still isn't finished. I am assured that it will be done by tomorrow for the final dress rehearsal. This only gives Paul one night to get used to it before opening. I am not pleased, but I think Paul can handle it. He doesn't get too rattled by such things.

The set, props and actors are definitely ready for performance tomorrow, but I am a little apprehensive about lights and costumes in terms of design and execution.

Here are the notes from tonight's dress rehearsal:

<u>Opening Scene</u>	too slow; pick up cues and don't use so many dramatic pauses. There are now so
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many that they are not dramatic. They are ponderous and self-indulgent.

Dave turn away on line, "See I'm Polish . . ."

Dave louder on line, "Threw the thing down a mine shaft."

Randy during the "Hot time in the old town tonight" sequence, work for pain so that the big stomach pain at the end of the sequence doesn't seem contrived.

John you are a little too quiet on "This is ahead of my schedule." You must be louder on line, "George, shut up a minute, will you?"

Randy be afraid to move too fast when taking gun from George. He could pull the trigger. Try to really believe that the gun is loaded.

Lights fade up the house lights earlier at intermission.

Kent on line, "Beat that Jew," try it as if you were a cheer leader at a rally.

Kent

the line, "After listening to this for an hour," you have the meaning turned around because your word order is wrong. Check the script.

Randy

clearing your throat in the middle of the line is good. Keep it.

Paul

get the stool further down stage before you sit so Randy can walk behind you on his line, "It's up to you Phil."

Paul

while dialing the phone, use the time for by-play with James and especially the Coach. Pretend that Sharman hangs up on you in the middle of your last sentence.

Paul & Randy

don't get too physical on line, "Politics is not basketball."

Randy

wait to say "Don't move him," until James starts to move Tom.

Dave

be very loud on line, "I have a rage in me!" and on "I can't get drunk enough."

Dave

the word is not "pratend;" it is "pretend.

Dave the whole speech about your mongoloid son must be a little louder, but still low key. We can't hear you.

Dave on Tom's line, "The suspense is killing," show more anger on exit.

Paul, Kent, John Laugh after line: "We all have a pretty good idea."

Paul you dropped your line, "Rub the two of them together -"

Paul, John, Kent your timing on our improvised laughing scene is off. Try to get it back. I know this is difficult.

Paul and John The slap is now too big a thing. John, you are over-reacting.

Dave vomit in trophy out of desperation. You can't wait. At the moment, it looks a little too contrived.

Dave after your line, "I meant what I said," take next line to John.

John on your line, "Not me, not James," watch your speech pattern.

John leaning against the door on your line, "I'm going out there," is

good. Keep it in.

Kent on your line, "Too many injuries,"
what happened to the cigarette-
in-the-glass bit?

Kent be more broken up on your line,
"I've got a ticket somewhere."
Be aware of double meaning.

Randy place the record on the raised
landing where you can get it
easily at the end of the play.

Randy your last speech was very good.
Try to keep the feeling.

Lights you must black out and put special
on Coach simultaneously and in-
stantly. Then fade out on Coach,
count five and bring up tableau
special for a five count only.
Fade out for a five count then
bring up the preset and house at
the same time. I thought this was
set. What's the matter?

October 29, 1974

Final dress rehearsal. What a day!

I received the film at 3:00 p.m. It was two minutes and
fifty-one seconds long instead of one minute as I had asked.

Because of the film coming so late, I had to have the tape for the record recorded before the film was finished. The tape is, of course, one minute long. I spent two hours with the sound man redoing the tape so that sound and film are synchronized. Also the film is fast action instead of slow motion as I had stipulated.

The makeup worked very well. I've found the way to do Randy's makeup. It takes three hours, but is very effective. The other actors are able to apply their own makeup now. All I have to do is check them after they are finished to make sure everything is right.

All the actors were really fired up for this dress rehearsal. We went over last night's notes and were ready to go. There was a full house consisting of an invited audience and a critic from the Kaiman. We were ready, but Paul's jacket wasn't finished. Stephanie said it would be done in twenty-five minutes. We decided to hold the show so Paul could use the jacket once before opening night. An hour later we still didn't have it. Our full house was getting restless so we decided to start the show. By this time my actors were very nervous. They blew lines left and right and their timing was awful, but the audience seemed to enjoy the show and didn't notice the flaws. Paul will have to use his jacket for the first time opening night.

Technical aspects need to have better organization.

The film looked even worse than I thought it would. It is so long that it spoils the mood at the end of the play. Also the fast action movement makes the film very humorous which is not what I want. Frank and I discussed every possible way of making this film work. None of them were satisfactory, so I cut the film from the show (a wise decision).

The end of the show had to be reblocked immediately, as we open tomorrow. The actors now listen to the record and we see them relive that moment of championship each in his own way. Tom enters during the record and offers the trophy to the Coach. He is defeated. Tom will also be more offensive in his attack on the Coach before he leaves. This forces the Coach to kick him out which will aid the climax of the show.

After the end of the show was reblocked, I found that props still needed more photographs of basketball teams for the walls. I had to stay at the school until 2:30 a.m. developing pictures.

It is now 3:30 a.m. and I am home writing this. A bad dress rehearsal equals a great opening night. Right? I think it will be good. We shall see.

Mohammed Ali won his title back tonight. This is a good omen. He's my main man. So it goes.

At this point, my job as director is really over. Performance is for the audience and the actors, not the director.

I feel like I have given birth and can see the child, but can't have it. Strange.

The Performance

I did not take notes during the performances of That Championship Season. During the rehearsal period, the actors and I had discovered a number of ways to deliver any given line. Each performance night I instructed all the actors to change at least five different moments. I used this technique to keep the show fresh each night, and to keep the actors listening to each other. If I had had a less experienced cast, I would have told them what changes to make each night. Usually the actors discussed with me the changes they would make each night. They did not do this because I demanded it, but because they were excited about their own ideas.

As is usually the case, one particular performance stands out in my mind as being better than the rest. This was the performance done on Saturday, November 2, 1974. It is difficult to explain why that night was better. In a slice-of-life production as this was, it is important to remember that the production could not be successful on one actor's performance alone. I believe our best performance came about because the five actors were all of the same mind and attitude on that night. A director does not always have control of this aspect.

That Championship Season was held over for a second weekend. The proceeds from this production went to the student scholarship fund.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLAYWRIGHT AND HIS PLAY

Jason Miller wrote That Championship Season in 1970. Since this was his first major play of any note, there is very little written about him. This chapter deals with the man and his work as thoroughly as possible.

The following quotation describes Miller's personal qualities:

Jason Miller is quick, lithe, small-boned, black-haired, sharp-featured, intense, jaunty, thirty-three and the author of That Championship Season.¹²

Mr. Miller has had much more experience as an actor than as a playwright. In an interview, Miller says of himself:

I played my first part, when I was a high-school senior. I'm an actor, too, you know. I was Victoria's private secretary in 'Victoria Regina.' I've knocked around everywhere - the Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival, the Champlain Shakespeare Festival in Vermont, the Baltimore Center Stage, the Harke Theatre, at Catholic University, where I played Edmond in 'Long Day's Journey Into Night' with Helen Hayes, and in 'Juno and the Paycock' with Geraldine Fitzgerald. It's been a long road, I'm telling you.¹³

¹² _____, "On the Set," New Yorker, May 20, 1972, p. 32.

¹³ Ibid.

A playwright's experience in theatre has a large effect on the style of his plays. Thus, a playwright, whose previous contact with theatre has been of a technical nature, will probably write technically oriented plays. Miller's previous experience in theatre, as an actor, affects his style. The character rather than the lights, set, costumes, or makeup are foremost in his mind as he writes. In Miller's own words:

I always write for actors. I have them in mind. I move them around the stage in my mind all the time. Someday, I am going to direct, but not my own stuff. The characters are what are important to me. They're people. I want to write about people. I'm writing in 'Championship' about men going into their middle age with a sense of terror and defeat. They're desperately holding onto their youth. The only thing that holds them together is the memory of when they were together.¹⁴

Jason Miller tells of the circumstances under which That Championship Season was written. From his account, it is difficult to tell whether the circumstances affected the final outcome of the play. It is an interesting story, however, and may be of worth to the reader.

I wrote 'Championship' while playing one of the poker players in 'The Odd Couple' at the Windmill Dinner Theatre, in Fort Worth. I'd swim all morning, and write all afternoon. What else is there to do? I always have five sharp pencils to write with. I like to sharpen pencils. I finished the play just about the day we were heading back to New York, and I put all one hundred and fifty-three yellow fooscap pencilled pages of the

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 32-33.

manuscript inside a black folder. We started for the Dallas airport. Suddenly I had a feeling about my manuscript. We stopped the car and went through my baggage. No manuscript. 'We've got to drive back to that upstairs-downstairs-motel, swimming pool, quaint village like compound we just left,' I said. 'We'll miss the plane,' said my companions. 'There are other planes,' I said, and I talked them into turning around, and when we got to the motel there was no sign of the play, so we started out again for the airport. Suddenly the driver slammed on the brakes. 'There they are!' he cried, and he pointed to a beautiful cloud of what seemed like yellow sunflowers floating over a field. I had put the folder on top of the trunk of the car; it had set there for miles, and suddenly bounced off, and the pages were sent scattering into the field. We stopped the car and went into that lovely flat field and recaptured each and every one of the hundred and fifty-three pages. It was like picking strange flowers, blowing in the wind. I couldn't believe my luck, and I still can't. It has given me a special feeling for this play, you understand? That was two years ago. Broadway wanted it, but started to talk big stars, and changing it around, and this and that, and when A. J. Antoon, the director, said he would do it, and Papp said he would do it, I knew where it had to go. Antoon is impeccable. Papp gives us life. And the ensemble acting. Who says only the British can perform ensemble acting? This acting is perfect.¹⁵

There is little information about Jason Miller's childhood and early life. Indeed, there was only one reference.

I was an alter boy. I studied at St. Patrick's High School - a small school - and then went to the University of Scranton, a Jesuit academy. My mother taught retarded children in the public schools, and she's retired now. My father's an electrician. John and Mary Miller. I like them very much. The nuns were a big influence.

¹⁵Ibid.

They were some of the best teachers I've ever had. Especially Sister Celine. She taught debating, public speaking and rhetoric at St. Patrick's High, and belongs to the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The nuns were always entering me in elocution contests. Those nuns loved to win! I can remember when they would fall to the floor and pray for a Notre Dame victory. Sister Celine trained me in a piece called 'I speak for Democracy.'¹⁶

If one has read the play, he can readily see the strong influence of Miller's early life on the script. This influence, however, may not be on a conscious level. In the same interview Miller states:

Funny thing. Until I finished the first draft of 'That Championship Season' and read it over, I hadn't realized that all my characters are Catholics I know for myself that an Irish Catholic is a complex human being. I believe in God, but the institutions of churches give me trouble. I certainly don't like the English Mass. The old ritual was better.¹⁷

The characters in That Championship Season all seem to have a little of Jason Miller's personality, beliefs and background.

I believe that a director should not look to a playwright for his concept or approach to that playwright's script. If all directors did this, there would be little or no difference in the concept of all productions of any given script. Taking the concept from the playwright instead of the script implies

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

that each script need only be produced once. A director's approach to a play should come from what that script says to him. It is his uniqueness as an individual that produces a unique approach or concept. No two productions should ever be exactly alike.

The concept I used for That Championship Season was "a lie." That concept is personal and only has meaning for this particular production.

Only after deciding my approach to the show did I research what Jason Miller had to say about his play. We seem to have similar views of what this script has to say.

The best I could do with these people was to admit their mystery, try to catch their mystery. The mystery of man. They are all trapped. They can't express their individuality, they can't get out of themselves; they start out this door but they come back in again. They'll be back next year for another reunion. They'll come back to live out their myths. Perhaps all we really do is live out our myths.¹⁸

¹⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER V

INSTANT REPLAY

When a production is over, one goes through a sort of change of life. Hot flashes of elation suddenly turn to chills of depression, without warning. This emotional upheaval is the subconscious evaluating of one's performance. While this is a necessary process, it does not go far enough. One must also evaluate himself with his new brain. We must understand our actions on a conscious, concrete level. This chapter is an attempt to critique my production of That Championship Season in a lucid manner. I will try to achieve this through a question/answer process.

Direction

Question: Your concept for the production was "a lie." Do you still feel this was the right choice for the production?

Answer: Yes, I do.

Question: Could you be more specific please?

Answer: I suppose. I think this concept influenced the characters in the production more than the other areas. I believe it is essential to the subtext as well. If an audience does not notice false-

ness in each of the characters before the end of the play, the ultimate lie of the 1952 championship season cannot have the proper effect.

Question: What is that effect?

Answer: What?

Question: I said, "What is that effect?"

Answer: Oh. I think the effect should make the audience feel and realize the futility and falseness in the characters' entire lives, and so our own. This play is not about a basketball game. It is about living in the past, and a cessation of growth. The characters do not live in the present and so make the past grand and wonderful to compensate for the shabbiness of reality. We all do it and

Question: Yes, thank you. Let's move on to the blocking now. Do you feel it worked?

Answer: Yes. Considering

Question: Considering what?

Answer: Considering the fact that the Masquer Theatre has a peculiar audience arrangement. If two actors are conversing on that stage, more than likely they will not be open to all members of the audience. Actually, this became a boon since it forced me to keep the actors moving around the room quite a bit. This gave the show more action in a realistic sense, and made all the seats in the house good ones visually.

I was pleased with the blocking. It seemed to help the script, rather than hinder it.

Question: I see. There was to be a film in this production, but it wasn't there. Why?

Answer: The film was something that I was quite excited about at one time. It didn't come out the way I had envisioned it, however. The film was funny, and that was definitely the wrong emotion at that point in the production. So, I cut the film. After much soul searching, I have decided that the film, even done correctly, would still have been wrong in its conception. I think that during the record, the audience should be focused on the characters' reactions, not a film. The film was a mistake. So it goes.

Question: So it goes?

Answer: Yes. Just an expression.

Question: As a director, do you feel you were successful in your direction of this production?

Answer: Yes, I do - basically. The actors all seemed to enjoy the experience. According to them, and from my own observation, they all seemed to develop as actors during rehearsals. I think part of a director's job is to help an actor improve his art in general,

The audiences liked the show, and it seemed to have meaning for them. It was an honest production. Audiences can sense that. My peers in theatre thought the show was good. This means a great deal to me as theatre people are a tough audience.

There are a million ways to direct any show. This was one way that worked for That Championship Season. It could have been better. I hope I always feel that way after a production. That is the way one grows.

Makeup

Question: I understand that you designed the makeup for this production. Were you satisfied with the results?

Answer: Nearly so. I was satisfied with everything except the Coach. I used latex over his skin to age him realistically at close range. This worked well in itself. He looked great until he changed into his sweatshirt. The collar of his shirt, worn previously, would rub the latex on his neck and cause it to loosen and bubble. This bubbling could be seen when the sweatshirt was worn. The only way to fix this problem is to make foam latex pieces and glue them on. To do this, however, takes at least two months of prosthesis work. We did not have that much time. Also, it is quite costly. The other alternative is the obvious. If a character is sixty-five, cast

a sixty-five year old actor. I did not have that choice.

Question: So it goes?

Answer: Yes. So it goes. Thanks.

Question: Don't mention it.

Set

Question: Although you didn't design the set, could you give me your opinion of it?

Answer: Sure. The set offered me two levels to work on. Its floor plan was such that it offered the best sight lines possible in that space. It fit perfectly my conception of the Coach's house. I believe that this is the best conceived set for any play I have directed.

Question: I understand the walls were made of netting. Why?

Answer: I wanted walls one could see through, so the audience could see characters when they were out of the main room. If one can see a character when he is alone and private, as well as with others, he will know more about that character. This is a film editing technique, and is a vehicle for the concept of "a lie." I had originally conceived the walls as being constructed of scrim. The set designer laughingly suggested we use netting that had the same shape as a basketball net. "Yes!" I screamed

in a very serious vein.

Lighting

Question: How did you feel about the lights for this production?

Answer: The lighting left a little to be desired except for the specials. They worked well, but the general room lighting was not satisfactory. There were pools of cool light, splashes of warm light, and occasional pockets of gloom where very little light appeared at all. This was partially due to a small gel selection, but the light placement was mainly at fault. The Masquer Theatre is a difficult space to light, but it can be done. I would say that the lights and costumes were the weakest areas of the production.

Question: Could you say more about the costumes?

Answer: Well, yes I can. Except for the Coach and James, the costumes were not right at all. Phil, Tom and George were not as I had envisioned them. That is, they did not compliment the characters. These costumes did not ruin the show, nor did they enhance it.

Acting

Question: Yes, well I suppose. Could you give an appraisal

of the acting?

Answer: You mean now?

Question: Well, yes . . . Now!

Answer: Alright. The Coach was played by Randy Pugh. This is the most difficult part in the play. How does one portray a man that much older than himself and maintain the powerful charisma that the part demands? I thought that Randy handled the age very well by underplaying it, but lacked the power he should have had. This was the best job I have seen him do as an actor. The characterization was complete, but it lacked in dynamic possibilities.

Phil Romano, as portrayed by Paul Shapiro, was the finest characterization in the show. This was also the case in the Broadway production according to the reviews. I think this character is better written than the others, which accounts for part, but a small part, of Paul's success. Paul is by far the easiest actor I have ever worked with. He was thorough in his conception and execution of Phil. I have no criticism of his acting in this production. He achieved a full character.

George Sikowski was played by David MacIntyre. David's character work and emotional decisions were superb. His shortcomings as an actor are technical. He does not articulate very clearly, and sometimes

spoke so quietly that no one could hear him. Dave is a thinking actor which sometimes hampers more than helps him. He takes direction only after thinking about the suggestion for a while, which slows down the rehearsal process. My theory is that an actor should try anything a director suggests, then see what he thinks of it.

John Keegan probably progressed more than any of the other actors in his portrayal of James Daly. John had more bad acting habits than anyone I've ever seen at the beginning of the rehearsals. For a while, I had to make him keep his hands to his sides at all times and his body perfectly still when he wasn't walking. He tried very hard and was able to rid himself of an amazing amount of problems. This was his first serious role in a drama. I feel that John was still growing in terms of an actor and in his characterization when the show closed. I think, ideally, that no actor should ever stop growing within a role. Actors usually come to a point in a role when they settle and remain the same. It is a rare occurrence when an actor works throughout the performance as John did.

Tom Daly was portrayed by Kent Epler. He did a very fine job on this part, creating much of the

humor in the script and some very tender moments with the other actors. Kent is a very conscientious actor and is a joy to work with. He was a stabilizer for the cast. Kent's only shortcoming is his voice. He must learn to use his diaphragm to support his voice. He cannot achieve a high volume without cracking his voice and tightening his throat. This is a technical problem that is not too difficult to improve. I wish I had had more time to work with him. He is my kind of actor, and I am eager to work with him in the future.

In general, the actors were the best people I could have hoped for. They were wonderful to work with, and helped me as a director at least as much as I helped them as actors.

Replay

Question: Mr. Hayes, one last question . . .

Answer: Call me Gordon.

Question: Alright, Gordon. Is there anything you would do differently now that the show is over?

Answer: Oh, yes. Everything. I don't believe in doing anything the same way twice. How can one grow that way?

Question: Let me rephrase the question. Given the same concept and actors, what would you have done differ-

ently for this production?

Answer: Oh, I see. Let's see. I would definitely not have done the film. It could have been much better, but that wouldn't have saved it.

I would have liked to work out a lot more action in the hallways with solitary actors at different times. I think we could have said a lot more to the audience if this technique had been fully exploited. This was a problem of time. In general, I would have liked to have about six weeks of rehearsal instead of a little less than four. This is always a director's complaint, however, and so may be of little consequence. This is a type of script that one could work on for a year and still be developing new interpretations.

I would have liked the effect of wood spheres making up the wainscoating on the set. They would have tied in with the wall of net. Aside from that, the set was ideal.

I would have liked the lights better if they had created realistic lighting for the room, and would insist on this if I could do the show again. This is not really a change from what I wanted the first time though.

I think I would be more demanding of costumes if I had another chance. I would demand that the cos-

tumes be conceived in terms of the characters. Costumes and makeup are the actor's tools. A director owes it to his actors to see that they get the proper equipment.

As a director, I must learn to demand what I deem to be necessary for the success of a show. I do this now with actors. I must learn to have the same attitude toward designers.

Question: Well, thank you, Mr. Hayes.

Answer: Gordon.

Question: Ah, Gordon. Sorry.

Answer: That's alright.

Question: Gordon, now that the show is over and done, I suppose you're thinking about what to do next. Tell me, where do you go from here?

Answer: What?

Question: What's in the future for you?

Answer: I . . . uh, . . . I don't know.

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