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## A Directorial Approach to Brighton Beach Memoirs

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**A Directorial Approach To  
Brighton Beach Memoirs**

**A Master s Thesis**

**By  
Jesse Taylor Bean IU**

**M.F.A. Directing  
Fall 1992**

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Thesis Proposal

Chapter 1

Upon the recommendation of the Department of Performing Arts,  
this thesis is hereby accepted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements of the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Chapter 4

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## Chapter 1

### Neil Simon's Evolution As A Writer

Around the time I was researching for my thesis project Brighton Beach Memoirs, I was performing in the play Breakfast of Champions by Kurt Vonnegut. During the performance, the audience didn't respond in a way that my fellow cast members wanted. The material in the play was a bit dark and morbid in its content. It really wasn't a play for mass consumption. During intermission, one cast member said to the other "What do they expect, Neil Simon?" I stopped and thought "what a great starting point for my thesis" I asked them, "In the world of performance, with so many starving artists, why not make some money at what you do? At least this guy is making a wonderful living at his art." Yes, it's fine to make powerful, gut-wrenching art, but why not have the business sense to make a huge amount of money while you're at it? Deep dark art has its place, but it doesn't pay the bills like fun commercial art.

Clive Barnes from the article "Memories Is Simon's Best Play," had this to say about Brighton Beach Memoirs

Simon always pulls back from the jugular. He never pushes beyond pain. He always shrugs deprecatingly, makes a slight Jewish joke and hides his heart behind his well-tailored sleeve. A pity. A great playwright must be prepared for the final plunge even if it kills him and he sinks without a trace. Brighton Beach Memoirs settles too easily for anecdotes. This is going to be unfair, but unfair in the right direction. Simon too readily confused the *Reader's Digest* with literature, Norman Rockwell with Rembrandt. (401)

It can be argued that Neil Simon is a bit light in content and is dismissed by the critics but there is no arguing that he is the most successful commercial playwright and the wealthiest dramatist in recent history. At one point in 1966 after the opening of The Star-Spangled Girl, Neil Simon had the unheard-of distinction of having four Broadway productions running simultaneously. Three of these are among his best known works: Come Blow Your Horn, Barefoot In the Park and The Odd Couple. While the actors and armchair critics snub their noses, it's hard to argue with Simon's popularity.

Over the course of his writing career, Neil Simon has had the following plays produced on Broadway. His earlier plays were lighter and as his career advanced, his plays became more autobiographical.

In 1960 he produced Come Blow Your Horn; in 1963, Little Me and Barefoot in the Park; 1965, The Odd Couple; 1966 Sweet Charity and The Star Spangled Girl; 1968, Plaza Suite; 1969, Promises, Promises, (based on Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond's film, The Apartment) and Last of the Red-Hot Lovers; 1970 The Gingerbread Lady; 1971, The Prisoner of Second Avenue; 1972, The Sunshine Boys; 1973, an adaptation of Anton Chekhov's short stories under the title, The Good Doctor; 1974, an adaptation of the story of Job, God's Favorite; 1976, California Suite; 1977, Chapter Two; 1979, They're Playing Our Song; 1980, I Ought to be in Pictures; 1981, Fools; 1982, Brighton Beach Memoirs; 1984, Biloxi Blues; 1986, Broadway Bound, 1991, Lost in Yonkers and 1994, Laughter From the 42nd Floor.

In addition to writing for the stage, Neil Simon has written many movies that include; After the Fox, 1966; The Out-of-Towners, 1970; The Heartbreak Kid, 1972; Murder by Death, 1976; The Goodbye Girl, 1977; The Cheap Detective, 1978 and Seems Like Old Times, 1980. Simon has also adapted some of his plays into films. These include, Barefoot in the Park, The Odd Couple, Plaza Suite, The Last of the Red-Hot Lovers, The Prisoner of Second Avenue, The Sunshine Boys, California Suite, Chapter Two, Only When I Laugh, Brighton Beach Memoirs, Biloxi Blues, Broadway Bound and Lost In Yonkers.

John Simon had this to say about the advancement of Simon's exploration of depth in his plays. when reviewing Brighton Beach Memoirs:

Brighton Beach Memoirs , is Neil Simon's Long Day's Journey Into Night.

Simon is the world's richest playwright and even owns the Eugene O'Neill Theatre, but though you can buy the name, you cannot buy the genius. The first problem with "Memoirs" is that it has no intention of being truthful. Like all comedian's wanting to play Hamlet, he tries to write a serious play. You ask, why the comparison to O'Neill? Eugene is a budding playwright, there are money problems, there is depression and the threat of Hitler, the Father losing his job and getting a minor heart attack, people hurting each other's feelings and making up. The only thing it is missing is the honesty. (402)

It's easy for a critic to sit back and judge, but exploring how Neil Simon felt might shed some light on his style in this play or his style in general. Simon says to Elizabeth Bland from Time:

The memories in his plays are too personal to be brought out in public, too complex and above all too risky, too distant from the machine-gun wisecracks, that audiences expected of a Neil Simon play. I was afraid I'd kill the plays if I made them more serious. (72)



Marvin Neil Simon was born July fourth, 1927, in the Bronx, New York, the second of two sons of Irvine Simon, a garment salesman, and Mamie Simon. Growing up in the Bronx and in the Washington Heights area of Manhattan, he received the nickname "Doc" because of his ability to imitate his family doctor. His comic instincts formed early. "I was always being dragged out of the movies for laughing too loud"(Henry).

Simon's father periodically abandoned the family, forcing Mamie to support the children by working at Gimbel's department store and organizing poker games. When his parents finally divorced, Simon stayed with his relatives in Forest Hills, New York, attending Woodside High School where he and another Jewish student were ostracized until Simon became the centerfielder and star hitter for the baseball team. "The jokes still persisted for the other kid and I did nothing about it. I didn't know what to do and I felt terrible about it." (Henry).

During Simon's teenage years, his brother Danny encouraged him to write. The two sold material to stand-up comics and radio shows. Graduating from De Witt Clinton High School at the age of sixteen, in 1944, Simon studied engineering at New York University under the United States Army Air-Force Reserves program. He was sent to Biloxi, Mississippi for basic training and then was stationed at Lowry Field, Colorado, where he attended the University of Denver and served as sports editor of the base newspaper The Rev-Meter . Although he never finished college, Simon "taught himself to write comedy by reading the work of Robert Benchley and Ring Lardner." (Zimmerman).

Discharged from the army with the rank of corporal in 1946, Simon got a job in the mailroom at Warner Brothers through his brother Danny, who worked in the publicity department. Shortly thereafter, the Simon brothers applied to write for the noted humorist Goodman Ace at C.B.S. who added the pair, for fifty dollars a week, to his stable of young radio and television writers. Over the next ten years, the Simons contributed material to the Robert O. Lewis Radio Show , Victor Borge, Buddy Hackett, the Phil Silvers' Arrow Show and the Tallulah Bankhead Show on NBC-TV and the

Jackie Gleason and Red Buttons shows on CBS. With their weekly salaries rising to \$1600.00, the brothers were able to leave home and move into their own apartment. In 1952 and 1953 the brothers wrote sketches for the revues staged at Camp Tamiment a summer resort in Pennsylvania. (Hewes).

Danny Simon left the team to direct for television in 1956; Neil continued to write for programs such as the Sid Caesar Show, Phil Silvers' Sergeant Bilko and The Gary Moore Show. In spite of this success, Simon wanted to branch out into a more self-expressive medium. He told Terrance McNally, as accounted in the book Broadway Song & Story: Playwrights/Lyricists /Composers Discuss Their Hits :

Television meant doing the same thing for the rest of my life, writing what other people wanted me to write. I wanted more freedom of expression and you're never going to get that in television. Writing for the theatre you have no one but the audience and the critics to answer to.(25-29)

Neil Simon was now in the world where we know him best: The Theatre.

Simon wrote his first play Come Blow Your Horn while he was writing for The Gary Moore Show. He shaped it slowly. Simon told McNally, "It had five titles. I took it to maybe fifteen of the top Broadway producers of the day. They all liked it; all told me to fix this scene, that scene." (26) This was Neil Simon's first Broadway hit. Taking inspiration from life in the bachelor apartment that Simon once shared with his brother, the play was first performed at the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope Pennsylvania in August 1960. Substantially rewritten, it opened on Broadway at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre on February 22, 1961 and ran for two seasons. The reviews were mixed. Simon said "that the New York Times noted that the subject matter was thin, but it is smoothly plotted and deftly written," (Henry). Encouraged by its relative success, Simon started work on another play, Barefoot in the Park, which

deals with the troubles of a newlywed couple living in a fifth floor walk-up in New York; it opened on October 23 1963 at the Biltmore Theatre. It was an enormous hit and established Simon as a playwright. It ran 1,532 performances.

Following that success, Simon's work was so much in demand that, as reported by Tom Prideaux in Life April 9, "Paramount bought the rights to The Odd Couple, Simon's next play on the basis of a forty-word synopsis"(40). Simon sold the television rights to the play as well: a move that he has regretted and that has reportedly cost him over twenty million dollars that networks made from the popular television show starring Jack Klugman and Tony Randal. Based on a situation that actually happened to Simon's brother, The Odd Couple humorously depicts two divorced men who share an apartment only to discover that in living together, they had the same problems they encountered when they were married. Starring Walter Matthau and Art Carney, the play began a two year run at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre on March 10, 1965 and eventually won Simon his first Tony Award. Henry Hewes writing in the Saturday Review, found the play more substantial than Simon's previous works. "Simon has partially answered those critics who complain that his plays are entertaining but insubstantial by giving them a truer but still reasonably laugh strewn evening." (69).

When The Star Spangled girl opened on December 21, 1966 at the Plymouth Theatre, Neil Simon had the distinction of having four Broadway productions running simultaneously. The least successful of his plays in Simon's estimation, The Star Spangled Girl concerns two editors of a radical magazine who compete for the affections of a conservative southern belle. Reviews seemed to concur with Simon's estimation of this play. Emory Lewis writing in Cue December 31, said, "Perhaps this one is not quite in the same league with Simon's other efforts, but it is a divine modest comedy"(26). The play ran for 261 performances.

Simon regained his stride with Plaza Suite and Promises, Promises but attempted a less superficial tone in his next two plays. The Last of the Red Hot Lovers, a play which deals with a man who handles his mid-life crisis by having affairs and The Gingerbread Lady

paralleled the struggles of an alcoholic one-time singer to get back on her feet. Simon explained why he chose to depict more serious situations in an interview with Paul Zimmerman for Newsweek . " I used to ask myself, what is a funny situation? Now I ask, what is a sad situation and how can I tell it humorously?"

(47-50). His attempts at tragicomedy were not received well by Brendan Gill of the New Yorker :

Mr. Simon's clumsy grappings with Real Life are being saluted as signs of newfound compassion and a new breadth of vision on the part of the playwright. They are nothing of the sort. (22-23).

This did set the stage, thirteen years later, for Simon's more serious work in Brighton Beach Memoirs . Simon was successful in writing a more dramatic piece with The Prisoner of Second Avenue which opened on November 11, 1971. This work deals with the harshness of New York life which drives a recently fired advertising executive to a nervous breakdown. This play revealed a marked change in Simon's work. Walter Kerr in his review for the New York Times explains:

He has taken the trouble to trouble his people, tease the laughs to see what real woes lie beneath them. He has made a magnificent effort to part company with the mechanical, and his overall success stands as handsome proof that humor and honesty can be got in bed together (402).

During the time he wrote The Sunshine Boys, his first wife Joan was dying of cancer. This led him to write God's Favorite after his wife died, a pivotal point for Simon because he was so overwhelmed by life that he was forced to deal realistically with subjects. Life couldn't be side-tracked by a joke. His world was crashing down around him. God's Favorite is a telling of the Job story utilizing a Jewish Millionaire with a nerve-wracking family. It was not well received by the public or critics and closed after 119 performances. Simon recalled his situation to Lawrence Linderman in an interview for Playboy, "I wanted to release some of my anguish over my wife's death. I was in the middle of the ocean looking for a log to hang on to and the play was the log I grabbed" (28-29). Simon entered analysis and continued therapy during other critical points in his life. Simon's other attempt at serious autobiographical material was Chapter Two a play which examines the guilt he felt over marrying actress Marsha Mason after his first wife died. The critics were not pleased. John Simon wrote in the Hudson Review:

Chapter Two is heralded as a deepening of Simon's art. The characters in Simon are interchangeable because with minor differences, they are all Neil Simon: accumulations of wisecracks, machines that chop down life to one-liners and humanoid contraptions, miserable for the sake of being comically miserable (78-80).

In review after review, Simon has been criticized for not showing real feelings; What he does show is real emotion based on his reactions to a situation. Like Simon, most of his characters avoid the truth or unpleasantness by cracking a joke or ignoring the situation. Therefore, Simon does show his inner nature to his audiences. People who don't know Simon, dismiss him as light. Some insight into the way he deals with critical situations is through the character Eugene in Brighton Beach Memoirs. In an attempt to ease the pain of a difficult situation, Eugene resorts to jokes and wisecracks.

## EUGENE

"It was the first day in my life I didn't get blamed for what just happened. I felt real sorry for everybody, but as long as I wasn't to blame, I didn't feel *that* bad about things"(87).

In 1983, Simon did achieve a new level of sophistication with the play Brighton Beach Memoirs. The play opened at the Alvin Theatre on March 27 and sparked a critical reexamination of Simon's work. The critics were split, some hailing him as a playwright writing with deep undercurrents and others charging him with writing another gleaming mini-tragedy. The play explores the adolescence of Eugene Morris Jerome, a character similar to Simon, who grows up in a troubled Brooklyn household. The play details the troubles which face the Jerome family when the matriarch's sister Blanche, whose husband died of cancer, moves into the Jerome family with her two daughters. Eugene speaks directly to the audience and serves as the play's narrator. He keeps a diary in which he enters his observations about his home so he can eventually use them to be a writer. Eugene's family, mother Kate, brother Stan and father Jack already live in a cramped house which Simon recalls in a Time article describing Brooklyn in 1927. "People next to the park who got the breeze were considered wealthy. All our rooms faced walls or the backs of houses"(74). The living situation in the play Brighton Beach Memoirs is cramped to a greater extent when Blanche's family moves into the house. This sets the stage for a play that has many conflicts, which contrasts with some of Simon's better known plays. Simon told Terrance McNally;

There was sort of a breakthrough for me in Brighton Beach Memoirs.

I never tried to write a tapestry play before. Most of my plays were confrontations between two people and the other people were peripheral. In doing Brighton Beach, I said, this play is about

all these characters and I will tell each of their stories (66).

The real story is a bit reversed. Simon actually lived with his relatives after his father Irvine, left the family. Simon and his brother had to go and live with their aunt. This was the foundation for the play Brighton Beach Memoirs.

The play is set in Brighton Beach, New York in 1937. The audience meets Eugene Morris Jerome tossing a baseball on the side of his house. He wants to be either a baseball player or a writer. He lives with his mother Kate who is the leader of the household, his father Jack, who cuts material for raincoats during the day and sells party supplies during the evening to make ends meet. His older brother Stan works in a hat shop and serves as Eugene's mentor for life's mysteries. Blanche is Kate's helpless sister who has bad eyes and asthma. She doesn't work outside the home. She stays home and sews for money. Laurie is Blanche's youngest daughter. She has a heart condition and doesn't do much work. She studies and reads during most of her free time. Nora is Laurie's older sister. She is young and perky. Eugene is infatuated with her.

The story starts out with Eugene introducing the family and informing the audience that he is writing all the family's conversations and events down in a diary that he plans someday to turn into a great story. Stan, his brother comes home and tells Eugene that he is going to be fired for standing up for the rights of a fellow worker. The boss will fire him if he doesn't write a letter of apology by the next morning. He is in a bind and needs to talk to his dad Jack. Nora comes home from dancing class and says she may have the opportunity of dancing in a Broadway show. This concerns Blanche who tells her daughter that they need to talk it over with Jack. Nora storms out wishing her father was still alive. A weary Jack comes home and says his night job, the party supply company, is going out of business leaving him without a night job. The tension is now set for the dinner table where Stan and Nora both need to speak with Jack. The dinner is a circus as Stan and Nora both compete to tell Jack their stories. Meanwhile, Eugene is dropping his

napkin in order to see up Nora's skirt, gagging on liver and doing impromptu radio sketches. After dinner, Jack talks to Nora about making the right choice regarding school. She doesn't like his advice and storms out. Meanwhile, Eugene is questioning Stan about masturbation. Stan gives Eugene a talk about growing up as a young man. Here, Eugene openly expresses his lust for his cousin Nora. In the interim, Blanche informs her sister that she is going out with Mr. Murphy, an Irishman from across the street. Kate is upset about this because he, to Kate, is a drunk. Stan tells Jack about his problem at work. Jack is enraged and demands that Stan write a letter of apology. Stan reminds Jack that he once told Stan that he should always stand up for his principles. They agree that he made the right decision, but Stan does need his job so the family can survive. Stan then gets blackmailed into telling the story of how he saw Nora naked so Eugene will help him with the letter of apology. Stan tells the story in great detail, ending Act One.



In the second act the reader finds out that Jack has had a heart attack and is ordered by the doctor to stay home. Blanche is getting ready for her date with Mr. Murphy much to Kate's objections. Kate, though, is being very generous as the hostess, cleaning the house, dressing up and providing refreshments for the guest. She also is very sweet to her sister, giving Blanche her pearls to wear on the date. Nora storms out without seeing her mother leave for the date. Stan comes home and tells Eugene that in an attempt to make some extra money for the family, he lost money playing poker at work. Stan has made up his mind that he is going into the army. Kate finds out about the money Stan lost. Mr. Murphy's mother sends over a note saying that Mr. Murphy can't go out with Blanche because he was drunk and crashed his car. With the thought of Jack dying and leaving her to support the family, Stan losing his money and Nora being a problem, Kate explodes and unleashes years of built up resentment towards Blanche for having been treated better. Blanche decides to leave. Jack steps in and tells them to, " get it out in the open for once and resolve the problem." (86). Nora comes home and she and Blanche have an extensive discussion about how Blanche is going to be less helpless. They make up. Kate comes down and tells Blanche that she doesn't want her to leave. Stan comes back from the army office. He didn't join because he felt like he was abandoning his family. He apologizes to Jack. Everything is calm, until moments before the play ending, they get a letter from their relatives in Poland saying they are coming to America and they need a space to live. Stan gives Eugene a picture of a naked girl. All is good and the lights fade.

Simon's plays have always been somewhat autobiographical, but never in as much depth as with the Brighton Beach trilogy. Simon went on to write Biloxi Blues, which was more favorably received than Brighton Beach Memoirs. Simon was praised for his willingness to sacrifice laughter for character development. The play, which opened on March 28, 1985 at the Neil Simon Theatre, traces the experiences of Eugene Morris Jerome in army training camp where he encounters anti-Semitism and sexual coming of age.

Eugene again uses the audience as his confidante as he documents the events that happen in his life while in training. Broadway Bound takes the reader to the point in Eugene and Stan's lives (essentially Neil and Danny's lives) where they get their first job writing for a radio show. The play also deals with the harsh break-up of Eugene's parents. This was Simon's most difficult play to produce and watch. "I don't know that this was the most difficult play to write, but it was the most difficult to watch, because it cut so much deeper. (Henry)

It appears that Simon writes to exorcise his demons. Why did Neil Simon start writing, more serious plays? Judging from the course of his life, he was merely mirroring his emotional state. At the beginning of his career, Simon was a younger more carefree individual. He was newly married. His works, Come Blow Your Horn and Barefoot in the Park have the signature of this emotional state. Later during the Chapter Two era, he wrote to ease his anger and resentment toward the death of his wife. The Brighton Beach Memoirs trilogy shows the world a more mature man reflecting on his childhood years without the gloss of trademark snappy one-liners.

As a director, I found it extremely useful to read the other plays in the trilogy and to know Simon's life story. Reading his quotes, letters, articles and reflections, I could make the connection between a line from the play and an element from his life. Simon has Eugene tell the audience that his Uncle Dave died of cancer and how horribly it can affect a family.(13) Why did he pick cancer? Perhaps it because his first wife died of cancer. It helped to read Broadway Bound because I got to see that eventually Blanche and Nora both went on to marry into money. In Brighton Beach, both characters are presented as selfish and weak; this was really emphasized when they displayed the same traits in Broadway Bound. There were other character elements I used from the trilogy that helped me in directing Brighton Beach. I attempted to bring out the underlying tension between the women and give the actors motivation for the resentment between Kate and Blanche as they battle over their younger days. Seeing the relationship between Stan and Eugene evolve was also beneficial. Stan grew to be a bit more nasty and

resentful towards Eugene. (The case was the same with Danny and Neil Simon.) In Brighton Beach there was a hint of marital infidelity between Eugene's parents Kate and Jack. In Broadway Bound, the tension was obvious. I was lucky to have the opportunity to direct the play many years after Brighton Beach Memoirs was first published. By reading the trilogy, I saw how the characters turned out years later. This helped me to trace character patterns, motives and drives to see if their chief characteristics stayed with them. Researching this allowed me to move to the next section of my analysis, the given circumstances

## Chapter 2

### **An Exploration Of The World Of Neil Simon's Brighton Beach Memoirs**

In his book Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style, Francis Hodge discusses the importance of the director, actor and designer knowing "the world" of the play. The concept of the given circumstances is only one aspect of the text the artist must examine which gives clues about the world of the play, the environment that is established by the playwright. The environment comprises a major influence on the inhabitants of the world. The environment also serves as a starting point for the action of the play. Conflict is the catalyst for action; action is what makes the story. Conflict can be generated when characters move into a foreign environment and are faced with a conflict of the environment just because it is alien to them. But how does a director, or any other artist determine where the given circumstances are located? The given circumstances are in the text of the play; the words and actions of the characters. The given circumstances are the geographical location and climate, social, political, religious and economic environment of the characters in the play. They also contain the previous action. This action is any action that is executed offstage but later described by a character. The artist finds this material by studying the text. The following are the given circumstances for the play Brighton Beach Memoirs.

The geographic location for the play Brighton Beach Memoirs is Brighton Beach, New York, 1937 as Eugene states on the first page of the play. This is important and reveals a great deal about how these people grew up. When researching a location the reader can't just say "New York" and assume it's all the same place. Manhattan, Brighton Beach and the country-side of New York are all different. Brighton Beach is different from the city because it is more residential . Manhattan is more isolated in terms of living spaces and people live in townhouses and apartments, where as in the countryside of New York the people live in homes. This geographical element does affect the living environment.

The following is a series of references from the text Brighton Beach Memoirs that show the geographic location. Eugene discloses his desire to play for his native team, the Yankees (10-11). On page eleven he actually gives the location of the house. From Eugene's comments about baseball season and his homework, the audience can assume that it's September. The climate is wet due to the sea-side moisture. This is a problem for Eugene's aunt Blanche because she has asthma. The moisture is bad for that condition. Other than that, the weather really doesn't seem to affect the characters in the play. It would seem as if the neighborhood would be a little stuffy with all the houses so close together, but nobody complains about this. Kate says the family has lived in the house for seven years (13). The houses are "flats" and are close together as Jack says "when you live in a cold water flat on Delancy Street, bankruptcy is the one thing God spares you" (34).

The characters live in a culturally mixed neighborhood as revealed when Laurie asks if their neighbors are Russian (12). Kate makes numerous comments about Mr. Murphy, Blanche's potential date, being Irish. This upsets her because Eugene and Stan used to get beaten up by the Irish kids. (45) The hostility that Kate feels is central to her character. The other people in the play seem to get along with the mixed nationalities in the neighborhood. It appears that most of the people stay within the confines of their own homes. No other characters outside the family with the exception of Mr. Murphy are mentioned in great detail.

The physical living environment is cramped. Here, Eugene tells the story of Blanche and her children moving in with Eugene's family which resulted in dividing the house up into sections, making it even smaller (13). As a result, Stan and Eugene have to share a room as do Laurie and Nora. The house is limited in space and, as a result, it is a bit like a pressure cooker.

It's 5:30 just before dinner as Nora comes in and talks about her afternoon dance class. It is a work week as evidenced by the fact that Laurie is studying, Kate making dinner and Jack and Stan coming home from work. It's Wednesday. It is known because Eugene talks about listening to the Wednesday night radio hour that night (42).

The economic environment often affects the characters relationships and their attitude to the environment in a play. More often than not, there are many levels of economic backgrounds in a play, all of which must be noted. The economic environment in Brighton Beach can be broken down into three areas, including those who bring in the bulk of the money into the house, the secondary workers who make money through self-employment like sewing, and household workers who cook clean and keep the house organized.

The providers include Jack and Stanley. Jack supplies the majority of the income for the house cutting raincoats for a factory during the day and selling party favors at night. Jack says "he made an extra twenty-five dollars per week on his side job but it wasn't enough to pay the bills for the family" (22). It is not stated how much he makes during the day as a raincoat cutter. Stanley works in a hat shop. He didn't go to college because he needed to work to help the family. His job earns him seventeen dollars a week(40). They make up the total income in the house; Blanche does some sewing but the pay is minimal. Blanche along with Kate, is a member of the third economic level. They take care of the house cleaning and the meals and run a fairly efficient household.

As for the children, Nora doesn't work but she takes dancing lessons. Laurie doesn't work. Eugene does all the work that involves taking out the trash, going to the store and running errands, but he doesn't have an outside job. Eugene is upset because he hasn't had shoes for over a year but Nora gets dancing lessons (35). He feels that it is unfair that Nora gets frivolous lessons and he doesn't get shoes.

The political environment is the power structure inherent in the lives of the characters. Some political facts relate directly to how the government deals with its people; others trace the power structure within a group of people. In the play Brighton Beach Memoirs, both types of political situations have an effect on the lives of the characters. Jack tells his boys there's going to be a war: "World War II and we're not over the first one"(101). At this time, Hitler was gaining power and the United States was about to intervene in the conflict. The Jewish population was being persecuted in Poland. After Stan almost joins the army, Jack tells him that "my brother was nineteen years old and was killed the second week overseas" (101). Jack fears that the boys may get called for duty and cautions their eagerness to enlist. Jack had a brother who died in the first war and knows the pain and strain it puts on a family.

The other political environment is the intrinsic within the familial relationships. The first evidence of conflict is between Eugene and Laurie. Laurie doesn't have to do any of the work in the house due to her heart flutter. As a result, whenever she wants to aggravate Eugene or Nora, she reminds Kate or Blanche of a chore Eugene and Nora have to do. There is an instance in which Laurie has to set the table but she doesn't really want to do it, so she has a heart flutter. As a result, Eugene has to set the table.

There are also politics between Eugene and Stan. On several occasions, Stan has to reveal information about naked girls and sex to Eugene before he will help Stan out of a troubling situation. A significant example occurs when Stan has to write a letter of apology to his boss. Stan asks Eugene for help but Eugene won't help Stan until Stan describes his encounter with seeing Nora naked. This causes tension, arguments and almost a fist fight. Stan, however, acquiesces and Eugene wins his political battle(63).

Nora uses politics a bit when it comes to her deceased father. She is forced to ask the advice from Jack regarding her conflict of leaving school to dance professionally. Blanche can't handle the situation so she makes Nora ask her uncle. When Nora doesn't like the advice she receives, she tells Blanche that Jack is not her father and she doesn't have to listen to him (56).



Kate and Blanche have a battle over Blanche having received better treatment when they were children. It seems that Kate always had to do the work in the house when they were younger. Kate is still doing the work in the house and she resents it. She explodes late in the play and the ladies have a soul-searching confrontation(84). These instances, coupled with the tension of the economic environment, makes for some intense political conflict between all the characters.

The social environment of a play is important because it delineates the status of the characters in relationship to the world. Jack is the axis point of the social structure in the house since all of the major decisions revolve around him. Kate, on the other hand, is the leader of the household environment. Her pride in keeping a clean house is evident throughout the play. Her commanding attitude towards her house is evident when she gets aggravated with Eugene for leaving his skates and other sports equipment scattered all over the premises.

Dinner seems to be an important time for the family. Jack says "it's the time for the family to get together to share and discuss their problems"(38). Simon puts the scene in the play not only because it is funny but because it demonstrates a point about how the family members watch out for one another's well being. Another example of this care and concern is evidenced by the support that the family gave to Blanche by taking in her family when she was in financial trouble.

The family in the play never really has contact with the outside world. In reference to the Murphy's across the street., Kate is quoted as saying, "Stay on your own side of the street, that's what they have gutters for"(40). Blanche wants to go out with Mr. Murphy, an idea Kate finds appalling because he drinks and is Irish. There is no reference as to why she doesn't like the Irish other than when she says that Eugene and Stan used to get beaten up by Irish thugs. It appears that she wants to keep to her own kind because it is safer.

Jack and Kate don't really have a social life outside of the house. This may be due to money problems and because Jack works so many hours. The big event each year for the couple is Jack's company party. This year they cannot go to the party due to Jack's illness.

Embodying the values of a positive work ethic and instilling a sense of discipline, Kate and Jack are excellent role models. As a result, their children are well-behaved. Among the children, Stan seems to be a major influence in Eugene's life. Eugene seems to get most of his information about growing up from Stan. Blanche on the other hand is not as strong of a role model as Kate and Jack. Her girls

seem to run Blanche's life, demanding dancing lessons and extra attention. As a result, her relationship with Nora is tempestuous.

The social environment is warm in the house. The structure of the people's lives are fairly well established, as they need to be living in a cramped environment.

■ The religious environment is just as important as the others for a variety of reasons. One is for the religion itself, the other is for a lack of religion. It's amazing what people will do in the name of religion or in reaction to religion. This is another factor that needs to be noted as a director builds the world of the play. It's also important to note the lack of religion in a story. In Brighton Beach Memoirs, religion plays a role of overseer of all actions.

■ The family is Jewish. Eugene talks about a Jewish Medieval torture of eating liver and cabbage (20). Eugene is discussing how his Uncle Dave died, he whispers the word "cancer" (20). Eugene's parents believe that if God hears them saying something terrible, He will strike them down with it: A common belief for the period. People who take Jesus as their savior know that their sins will be forgiven; the Jewish religion doesn't accept Jesus as the Messiah so they think God punishes on the spot instead of giving a chance for forgiveness. Other than these few references the Jewish religion is not mentioned: It is not an area of the character's lives that Simon chose to explore. God doesn't seem too merciful in the eyes of the characters. Here are a few examples of how God is viewed in the play. Kate tells Blanche, "that if God wanted both of you, you'd be laying next to Dave in the grave" (54). She says this in response to Blanche's question about why she was left alone. Kate tells Jack to pray at the temple, but Jack replies "there are men who have been at that temple for years and haven't had any prayers answered" (33). There seems to be a question in Jack's mind about his fate and the truth of hope and faith.

■ On several occasions, specifically Blanche, invokes the name of God as someone who is watching her, "I'm not perfect, God knows," or "doing God knows what," sometimes she cries out to "Oh God Nora" or "I pray to God" (94-96). Even when she says she displays emotional strength, she cries to "God." This seems to reinforce the ideas that Blanche is unable to live alone.

■ This information reflects "the world" or the environment in which the action takes place. The next part of the given circumstances is the previous action.

**Previous Action**

The previous action in a play is extremely important to anybody involved in the production. The previous action is anything that is immediately relevant to the plot development that is said or done offstage or before the play starts. This information is important because it helps to answer questions regarding character motivations and provides the necessary exposition. The sections are broken down by acts and are indicated by page number and the relevant information.

**Act I**

Pg. 8 Eugene always plays ball when Laurie is studying. Laurie always studies.

Pg. 9 Kate always tells Eugene to pick up his "things" from around the house.

Pg. 12 Kate says that she and Blanche always did the work and their brothers were lazy . She also talks about how her mother was getting ready for the Germans to invade her house. Her mother said "the house would be spotless and they would have respect for the Jews."

Pg. 13 Blanche hints that she was over at the Murphy's house for tea.

Pg. 13 Eugene tells the audience Aunt Blanche's story. The story details how her husband died from cancer, how the house was divided up into sections to accommodate the family and how Blanche and her daughters had to move into the house.

Pg. 15 Eugene talks about Laurie's heart condition which forces him to do most of the work.

Pg. 16 Nora comes home and tell her story about being approached by a Broadway producer to audition for a Broadway play.

Pg. 18 Nora reveals how many hours she spends on subways and how many hours Blanche sews so she can have dancing lessons.

Pg. 20 Kate sends Eugene to the store for the exact amount of ingredients for the dish she is making. She never buys in large quantities. As a result, Eugene is always going to the store.

Pg. 21-22 Laurie and Nora discuss their Dad and how sharply he dressed and how they miss him.

Pg. 24-27 Stan tells the story of how he stood up for a fellow worker on the job and how he got fired as a result.

Pg. 31 Jack works in the evenings selling party favors after cutting raincoats all day. The party favor business closed and Jack was let go.

Pg. 33 Nora has a date with Larry Clurman

Pg. 35 Jack asks why Blanche never goes out.

Pg. 36 Kate condemns Mr. Murphy for being drunk in his own doorway.

Pg. 38 Eugene reveals that Stan taught him how to drop his napkin under the table in order to look under ladies skirts.

Pg. 47 Jack had four brothers in his family and his father didn't know their names.

Pg. 48 Eugene discusses his wet dream with Stanley.

Pg. 52 Stanley talks about seeing Nora naked

Pg. 53 Kate reveals how the family goes to Dave's grave every year.

Pg. 54 Kate says the Irish kids beat up on Stan and Eugene.

Pg. 55 Blanche reveals that she went on a date with Mr. Murphy to the beach.

**Act II**

Pg. 65 Eugene reveals that Jack had a heart attack on the subway. He was driving cabs to make extra money. The police had to carry him home. The doctor orders him to stay out of work for two to three weeks.

Pg. 66. Eugene is mad at Nora because she's been snotty to everybody. She eats in her room and has been going out with Larry Clurman every night. Kate is in a dither because Blanche is going out with Murphy.

Pg. 69 Stan lost money playing poker.

Pg. 70 Stan said he lost money in the past when in reality he gave it to a prostitute.

Pg. 73 Jack danced with another woman at the company dance last year and Kate won't let him forget it.

Pg. 74 Nora goes to the cemetery with Larry to see her dad.

Pg. 82 Mr. Murphy was in a car accident due to his drinking. He is leaving to move into a hospital to get treatment.

Pg. 85 Jack reveals that he too never exchanged words with the Murphy's for three years.

Pg. 92 Eugene explains how he told his parents about Stanley leaving and they had little reaction.

Pg. 95 Nora wished she could have more attention than Laurie. At times she wished that she would get crippled so she could get the attention.

Pg. 99 Eugene said Aunt Blanche was staying, Nora was in a better mood and things were grand. He later said Stan didn't come home, Mom told Dad about Stan losing the money and how Dad got really upset. Stan did eventually come home.

Pg. 99 Stan told Eugene about going to the recruiter but that he couldn't enlist and let Pop down.

Pg. 101 Jack talks about the army and his brother going off to war and why they didn't take Jack.

Pg. 102 Jack reveals to Stan that he too lost money gambling when he was younger.

Pg. 103 Jack tells Stan that Eugene gave a great speech revealing how bad Stan felt about gambling.

Pg. 107 Jack gets a letter from his family in Poland stating that they are free and are coming to America.



## **Dramatic Action**

The following phrases are titles for each French Scene. Each French Scene in the script analysis of Brighton Beach Memoirs is given a nominative phrase as the title of the scene. This a metaphor for the action.

### **Title Of Units**

1. The Pitch
2. The Displaying
3. The Spat
4. The Paranoia
5. The Repayment
6. Chapter Two
7. The Salespitch
8. Kate's Logic
9. The Drooling
10. The Memory
11. The Stand
12. The Kiss-up
13. The Fainting
14. The Stabilizing Factor
15. The Firing
16. The Other Man
17. The Shoes
18. The Search For Blanche's Date.
19. The Bargain
20. The Dinner
21. The Raise
22. Dancing Plea
23. The Liver War
24. Revealing the Story to Dad
25. Nora and Jack's Talk
26. Jack's Past
27. The Brotherly Advise
28. Nora's Naked
29. Dave

30. The First Word of Murphy and Blanche
31. Blasting The Irish
32. The Interview
33. Kate's Protection of Blanche
34. Blanche's Decision
35. The Cookie
36. The Crapper
37. The Story
38. The Update
39. The Principle Debate
40. Nora's Tits
41. The Review of Past Events
42. Stan's Second Set-up
43. Laurie's Pampering
44. Stan's Gambling
45. The Pro
46. Playing Father
47. Jack's Resistance
48. The Other Woman
49. Nora's Pouting
50. Blanche's Pre-date Jitters
51. Contemplating Suffering
52. The Fretting of Blanche
53. Stan's Exposure
54. Kate's Perception
55. The Children
56. Laurie's Cookies
57. The Dampening
58. The Clash
59. The Explosives
60. Jack's Knowledge
61. Blanche's Plan to Exit
62. Jack's Intervention
63. The Scattering
64. Stan's Army Plans
65. Eugene Alone

66. Kate's Closet
67. The Awkward Moment
68. Floating Stan's Departure
69. Blanche's Assault
70. The Pre-Fight
71. Putting The Foot Down
72. The Eruption
73. The Wakening
74. Kate's Plea
75. The Wrap-up
76. Stan's Return
77. Stan's Explanation
78. Jack's Admittance
79. Kate's Weakness
80. Stan's Game
81. Eugene's Reward and Passage
82. The Escape

### Summary Of The Dramatic Action

The following section is a summary of the action in each unit of the play using present-tense verbs. The action is for the titled units listed above in Title of Unit section. The following are abbreviations for the following character's names.

K- Kate, B- Blanche, E-Eugene, S-Stan, J-Jack, L-Laurie, N-Nora

### Act I Dramatic Action

1. E announces, K blurts, B flutters, L tattles.
2. E displays, B and K cushion, L preens, K thunders, E jumps and mocks, K swats and E flees.
3. K scours and fusses, L probes, B defends
4. E mimics K jabs
5. B frets, Kate urges
6. E moans and elevates
7. N flutters, E gasps, N blurts and babbles-L trips, N pleads, B titters, N sobs, E confesses.
8. K orders, E whines
9. L spies, N fusses
10. L and N glide and plot
11. S blurts, E wiggles and gasps.
12. S butters, K jogs and grabs
13. E barfs, B gasps, K fusses, K urges.
14. J lumbers, E scampers, N pushes, B delays.
15. K doctors, J scoffs
16. K flips, J moans
17. E begs, K squashes, J whirls
18. J and K debate
19. S bargains, N storms
20. All zoom , E exhales and cowers
21. J demands, S spits
22. L blurts N roars
23. E and K battle
24. S solicits J plops, K clears
25. N demands, B intercepts, N storms, J rescues, B frets, K nurtures
26. J coaxes, N purrs

27. E oozes, S lectures
28. S jabs, E shrouds
29. B sighs, K soothes
30. K proposes, B dodges
31. K blasts, B unmask
32. K interrogates, B peeps, E slithers
33. K hovers over B
34. N storms and forces, B rises, N lashes and flees
35. K lassos, E squirms, K squashes
36. L solicits, N spears
37. S blurts, J erupts
38. E illustrates
39. J exhales, S spews, J challenges
40. E snoops, S lures, E negotiates, S caves.

**Act II Dramatic Action**

41. L and K fidget, E deflates
42. S pulls, E devours
43. K pampers L, squeaks, K berates, E cowers and smirks.
44. E gawks, S spews
45. E begs, S leaks
46. S scolds and demands, E recoils but is pummeled
47. J lumbers. K frets, L wiggles
48. K interrogates, J shrugs
49. N pouts and storms, K pleads
50. B frets, J bellows, K presents, all debate, B deflates
51. E whines, L taunts, E springs, B fumes, K paces.
52. B sobs, K mothers
53. K snaps, S hesitates, K demands, S blurts, K staggers
54. B brightens, K shadows
55. K cracks, B staggers
56. L peeps, K and B pound
57. E sighs
58. B mutters, K unleashes, B blocks, K spits, B flees then confronts
59. K torches, B probes, K vents
60. J injects, K snarls, B inhales
61. B summons, J commands, K snips
62. J asserts and lectures, K and B freeze, B firms, chokes and marches
63. J coaxes, K storms
64. S sweats and retreats, E begs
65. E collapses
66. J frets, K dismisses
67. E stitches, L babbles
68. E deflates, K shields
69. B reaches, N hardens
70. B launches, N assaults, B stomps
71. B firms, N slices, B smacks, N cracks, B forces, N breaks
72. B invites N embraces
73. K eases, B opens, both gel
74. K stretches and nurtures, B resists and shines

75. E erects, K directs, E smirks
76. S pushes, E snaps, bites and marvels, K inspects and caresses
77. K treads, S eases
78. J reflects, S pipes, J warns, S soaks
79. K mothers, S soothes
80. E oozes. S rewards, S teases
81. S baits and E bites
82. J dances and all embrace.

## Characters

The following section is an examination of each character's main goal or goals in the play Brighton Beach Memoirs.

Characters seeking goals provides conflict which leads to action. The questions asked in the following pages address what the characters want, how far will they go to obtain the goal and what stops them from obtaining the goal. In addition, a description of each character's rhythms, physical appearance and a list of adjectives will be included.

### EUGENE

#### DESIRE

It seems that Eugene wants acceptance from the people around him. He is always attempting to get attention from Stan, his mother and his father. In one humorous scene, after Stan runs away and Nora stays out all night, Eugene, desperate to talk to someone in the vacant house, talks to Laurie.

Eugene wants to explore his biological urges that most normal adolescents experience. He is focused on seeing a naked girl. He specifically wants to see his cousin Nora naked but, at this time in his life, any girl will do. He explores this by constantly hounding his brother to discuss the "facts of life" with him.

As any young person, Eugene has the desire to explore the possibilities of his life. All children dream of being "somebody" in the world. Eugene wants to be a baseball player and writer. He explores these goals through role playing events where he performs skits as a famous radio announcer, sports star or host of a mystery show.

### WILL

Eugene is fifteen years old. Young people have certain impulses which don't allow them to stop and make sound decisions. The adolescent, for the most part, makes decisions based on instinct and drive. They are infants in rapidly growing bodies who grab whatever they want. Eugene misbehaves or role plays in an attempt to gain the attention of his family. The examples of this are evident from the start of the play. In the opening scene, Eugene is "playing" a sports



announcer and baseball player all in one activity. He bounces the ball off the house although his mother screams for him to stop and he plays the game at a volume that attracts the neighbors in an effort to gain attention. Eugene's desire to get attention is obvious when his father and brother come home from work.

In both cases, he rushes to their sides to hear about their day. The reader can see this trait too in his conversations with his mother. Eugene is always leaving skates and shoes around the house even though his mother tells him not to, in an effort to get attention, good or bad, from his mother. At dinner he makes every attempt to be the center of attention from playing with his dinner to playing the mystery sports announcer.

In his quest to be a writer, he practices writing and keeps a journal. We find him in pursuit of his baseball dream as he plays ball against the house. As far as girls are concerned, he does anything he can ranging from dropping his napkin under the table at dinner so he can see up Nora's skirt to bargaining with Stan so he can get details about sex ranging from masturbation to vivid descriptions of Nora's naked body; in exchange, Eugene writes an apology letter to Stan's boss so he can get his job back.

#### MORAL STANCE

Eugene is crafty when it comes to getting what he wants. He is driven by his own sense of right and wrong which is something he is still developing. Usually, violent threats must be made in order to make him behave. For example, as he's walking into the kitchen, Kate tells him not to take a cookie from the cookie jar until he finishes his dinner. When Eugene comes out of the kitchen, he has taken a cookie. Kate knows this because she heard the cookie jar move and asks Eugene to put the cookie down. Eugene denies that he has a cookie. Kate has to scream violently at Eugene to get him to return the treat. Eugene pushes Stan in the same manner. He won't stop bothering Stan about girls or gambling or smoking until Stan harshly orders Eugene to stop. Eugene is driven by his instincts, resulting in a tendency to not think about his actions. Like an animal, he needs to be jarred before the point sinks into his head. It

takes most animals a few unpleasant experiences to realize that certain actions may cause pain. His sense of right and wrong comes from the positive and negative responses he receives from the people who surround him. Eugene uses Stan and others to get what he wants. On several occasions, Eugene refuses to help Stan out of a troubling situation until he is given advice about the facts of life. Eugene is dealing with a loss of innocence. He is being attacked by new stimuli and craves the chance to experience them. There seems to be very few rules when it comes to the exploration of his biological drives.

#### DECORUM

Eugene is very lanky. He is comfortable in his environment, which accounts for why he leaves his toys around the house. He has the eyes and ears of the audience and is the grand tour master of his world. In this role he is very responsible and uses the audience as a form of therapy for his problems. Physically, he leads with his head. His rhythm is very erratic. The image of Eugene resembles a large lumbering golden retriever puppy that when asked to chase the ball, moves at a rapid pace to fetch it. But Eugene does have the sense to back off when the ball is thrown in the street and a truck is moving at him.

#### SUMMARY LIST OF ADJECTIVES

Sarcastic, Eager, Curious, Horny, Perceptive, Persistent, Argumentative, Manipulative, Greedy, Selfish.

**STAN****DESIRE**

Stan's desire is to work hard and stand up for his principles. This stems from his father Jack telling Stan when he was younger to "always stand up for your principles"(60). In his dealings with others Stan wants to make sure that right and wrong are clearly defined. One way he does this is by helping to protect people when they are persecuted. At Stan's place of employment, he stands up for a fellow employee named Andrew who has to pay for some hats he accidentally damaged. Stan doesn't think Andrew was to blame for the damaged hats. He goes as far as standing up to the boss in front of the other workers and as a result, loses his job. He is overly concerned to please his father. Most of his actions are motivated by what his father will think of him. Stan is attempting to be a man and help provide for his family. In his quest, he makes mistakes such as gambling in an attempt to earn more income for the family and spending money on a prostitute; Therefore, the audience usually sees Stan attempting to get out of his problems.

**WILL**

He has trouble making the right decisions about his problems. When he saw that the man in the storeroom was not being treated fairly, Stan spoke up for him. He was able to carry through with his desire to do the right thing. He does have trouble when it comes to making the choice to apologize to his boss. Jack needs to help him make the rational decision about the situation. In several instances he lets his passion for doing what is right get in the way of his thought process. In his efforts to conform to a societal vision of masculinity associated with being a man: taking a call girl, smoking, gambling. However, when it is time to make an adult decision, he flees from the situation. So Stan attempts to "act" like a man but he is still captured in an adolescent's body. He is midway between Jack's mentality and Eugene's mentality.

### MORAL STANCE

What keeps Stan honest is his fear of what his father will think of him. His own values stop him from going too far to get what he wants. On every occasion when he gets in trouble, he is worried about what his father will think of him, but this doesn't keep him from committing the infraction. It seems as if he is making honest mistakes that are related to growing up.

### DECORUM

He is scrappy. Physically, he leads with his chest. His rhythm is more sedate than Eugene at times, but he still tends to make rash decisions. He is more like a bulky bear. His rhythm fluctuates between rapid and calm.

### ADJECTIVES

Paranoid, sacrificing, dedicated, gullible, determined, hard-working, curious, naive, volatile, insecure, selfish.

## KATE DESIRE

Kate wants to keep the family together. She does this by carrying the emotional, physical and psychological burdens for all the people in her house. She has done this all her life, dating back to when she and Blanche were living at home. Kate had to do all the work in the house while Blanche got to wear the nice dresses and go out all the time. This pattern continues in the present world of the play. Kate and Jack have one big event that they go to each year: Jack's company dance. This year, they are not going because Jack in an attempt to support the family is sick from working too many hours. The night of the dance is the night Blanche is going out with Mr. Murphy. Kate, again, has to sit back and watch Blanche go out and have fun while she is stuck at home taking care of people.

Kate does the majority of the house work. It seems as if Kate is not allowed to see much more of life. She, at this point in her life, is responsible for taking care of people. Thus, Kate is forced to do what she has to do versus what she wants to do. Kate wants Blanche to move out of the house, so Kate may resume a semi-normal life. This is apparent during the argument Kate and Blanche have one evening when Blanche says she is going to leave and Kate makes no attempt to stop her. It's interesting to discover in Simon's third play in the trilogy, Broadway Bound, that Kate had been a dancer but was burned in a fire on the set of one of her shows. This is not mentioned in Brighton Beach. It does help explain the frustrated energy that Kate radiates.

## WILL

She swallows her pride, sacrifices privacy, money and shoulders the burden to keep her family together. She eventually cracks under the threat of Jack dying. This event sends her over the edge emotionally and all her feelings about Blanche and their childhood spew out. Early in the play, Kate reveals a desire to have Blanche out of the house. The reference is subtle. Blanche, in Act One, has an asthma attack and Nora tells her she needs to move to a dryer environment. What's interesting is that Kate doesn't object to the

statement; instead, she agrees. This is an early clue that Kate wants Blanche out.

#### MORAL STANCE

Threats and guilt are her primary means of obtaining her goals from her immediate family. Her responsibility to the family keeps her from lashing out at Blanche for troubling her life.

#### DECORUM

She is very aggressive and vocal. Her rhythm is very erratic. Her heart is her center of balance. She goes on instinct. She is very expressive with her hands. Her stance is firm but there is a gentle weakness that only comes out when she is alone and broken down.

#### ADJECTIVES

Nervous, loud, fluttery, manipulative, paranoid, hard working, determined, nurturing, protective, aggressive

## JACK DESIRE

Jack wants to work to maintain a safe living environment for his family. This is exemplified by all of the hours Jack spends working to support the family. While Jack wants peace in his life, he is the person to whom the family turns when they are in trouble. Jack becomes involved in everybody's crisis; from Nora's dancing school to Stan's problem at work and Stan's gambling to eventually breaking up the argument between Kate and Blanche are all examples of how he is the one that ultimately solves the problem.

## WILL

To obtain his desire he works two jobs, allows his sister-in-law to move in, and divides his house into uncomfortable sections. To solve problems, he takes time after working two jobs to listen and offer advice to the family.

## MORAL STANCE

He hides the truth from people to protect them. He's like the leader of an army camp who can't tell the troops that there is trouble on the horizon. When he and Kate are discussing the money problems in the house, Kate starts talking loudly. He asks her to quiet down so the people in his family won't hear that there are financial difficulties. He does this because he doesn't want them to worry. He also shoulders the burden for the family. He feels if the family knew about all the problems, the spirit of the house would be broken. He takes the brunt of the pressure by listening to everybody's problems. He believes in doing what is right standing up for his principles.

## DECORUM

Jack lumbers. He is like a beaten down smoke stack. He is still puffing and at times he erupts.

## ADJECTIVES

Blunt, scrappy, sarcastic, caring, volatile, nurturing, demanding, weathered



**BLANCHE****DESIRE**

Initially, it seems as if Blanche wants not to be a burden to the family. She constantly fusses about how she doesn't want to use too much electricity while she sews. She states at the beginning of the play that she "owes Jack and Kate too much as it is" (19). Blanche wants a place of her own but she is afraid of moving. Due to the fact that she never had to work a day in her life because her husband provided for her financially, Blanche doesn't really know how to provide for herself. The problem is that she is not forced to find a place of her own because Jack and Kate take care of her. She also wants to be a strong role model for her children. At first she isn't very good at this. Nora won't listen to her attempts to talk her out of going to dancing school. Laurie restrains her every day with her "condition," forcing Blanche to do work that Laurie could do.

**WILL**

Her first attempt at independence is dating Mr. Murphy. In the back of her mind, she hopes to escape with him. She is nervous about the date. (Later in Broadway Bound, Simon's third work in the trilogy, she does marry a rich man) But here again, she is relying on another person to help her. It's not until the end of the play that she is faces up to her fears of not being self-sufficient and her inability to make strong decisions; at this point, she starts to solve her problems. She does this by making a statement saying she is going to find a job and buy a house.

**MORAL STANCE**

She is riddled by guilt and fear. She does have an ounce of courage that sprouts when she goes against Kate's wishes and dates Mr. Murphy. This event escalates and provides her with the courage to confront Kate and Nora. At the beginning of the play, she has little courage, but after her fight with Kate she gains confidence and courage.

## DECORUM

She seems very planted. She has a lower center of gravity. She takes small strides like a duck .

## ADJECTIVES

Sheltered, frightened, fidgety, passively aggressive, stubborn, paranoid, spoiled, selfish, compacted.

**NORA****DESIRE**

Nora, like the rest of the children, wants to escape the cramped environment of the house. She wants to gain her independence by auditioning for a famous dance choreographer who is directing a musical on Broadway. The problem is that she would have to miss school to perform in the show. She wants to do this not only for her own self-satisfaction but as a chance to get her own family out of her Aunt and Uncle's house. In a scene in Brighton Beach Memoirs she and her sister Laurie reminisce about their father and fantasize about moving out of the house and living in a big house like the characters they watch in the movies. What she ultimately wants is the same amount of attention that her mother gives Laurie. This is revealed in the argument between Nora and Blanche. Nora wishes that sometime something horrible would happen to her, that she'd be hurt so maybe she could crawl in bed with her mother on a cold rainy night like Laurie.

**WILL**

When she doesn't get what she wants she has a fit. When she doesn't like the advice her Uncle Jack gives her, she says she's not going to listen, cries and runs to her room. She uses the tactic of guilt effectively. After the discussion with Jack, Nora doesn't talk to Blanche, thus greatly upsetting her mother. To make Blanche feel really bad, she skips Blanche's departure on the date with Mr. Murphy. This makes Blanche feel miserable and Nora knows it.

**MORAL STANCE**

Nora pushes until someone seriously confronts her with her actions. In one of the final scenes of the play Blanche confronts Nora about her recent attitude problem. They argue about dancing school until it's finally revealed that Nora just wants the same amount of affection and attention that Laurie receives. It takes Blanche's pressure for Nora to admit to her true feelings.

## DECORUM

Nora is a live wire. At any moment, she could spin and zap another character.

## ADJECTIVES

Selfish, giddy, bubbly, snotty, sweet, abusive, uncontrolled, bitter, frustrated, trapped, dreamy, manipulative.

**LAURIE****DESIRE**

When the audience first meets Laurie, it's obvious what she wants. One of her first lines is one that will get Eugene in trouble. Eugene is bouncing a ball against the house and Kate tells him to stop. Laurie is quick to add that " Eugene always does this when I'm studying" (8). She says this while she is sitting on the couch reading a book. This is the first image the audience sees of Laurie and is something she does throughout the play: not working and getting people in trouble. Laurie has a flutter in her heart that keeps her from doing any work. Some of those directions about not working come from the doctor but the majority of them come from the overprotective nature of Blanche and Kate. Laurie is content to be pampered. Laurie also loves to get Eugene and Nora in trouble. Not major trouble, but she loves to be the one who tells on Eugene for leaving his roller skate out on the floor.

**WILL**

When Laurie is in a situation that she is not able to control, she quickly uses her fluttering heart as an excuse not to work. It always works.

**MORAL STANCE**

Laurie knows what it takes to get what she wants. She is not vicious; it's just that she hasn't been forced to know anything else. Like an infant, she learned that when she cried she got fed or held. Now she does it to get out of work. Whenever she is faced with work, she gets a flutter. The revealing quality about Laurie is that whenever she is away from her mother and aunt, she runs and plays just fine.

## DECORUM

Laurie is like a mouse with pig-tails. She moves her feet really fast and she twitches her nose like a mouse. She is always in other people's business.

## ADJECTIVES

Childish, manipulative, nosy, aggressive, sweet, mousy, whiny, bright.

## Dialogue

Another area that needs to be addressed when analyzing a script is the language or dialogue of the play. This analysis includes the phrases and choice of words, the sentence structure, imagery and the structure of the dialogue as they relate to defining the world of the play. One thing that helps define the world of the play is the lack of swearing: A use of language the environment doesn't encourage. The only exceptions to this are Stan and Jack. Jack swears on several occasions in front of the family. He gets away with it because he is the head of the household. Stan swears around Eugene but not around anybody else. There is a scene in which Stan, tells Eugene "not to cuss and end up like those guys on the boardwalk" (50) The only time Simon has Eugene swear is when he is violently mad at Stan and Simon chose "FUCK," which is, in some people's opinion, arguably one of the most offensive words in the English language. Stan learns to swear from his father and Eugene learns it from Stan.

In the play Brighton Beach Memoirs, the structure of the dialogue is focused around Eugene's speeches. Eugene starts out at the beginning of the play telling the reader that the story they are about to read is his view of his family. He establishes a relationship between the reader that allows him to step away from the action and comment on it without the other family members being aware. Information about the date, time and location of the play is revealed when Eugene states,

What I'm telling you are my secret memoirs.....It's called the, "The Unbelievable, Fantastic and Private thoughts of I, Eugene Morris Jerome, in this, the fifteenth year of his life, in the year nineteen hundred and thirty seven, in the community of Brighton Beach, Borough of Brooklyn, Kings County, City of New York, Empire state of the American nation (11)

Simon uses Eugene to give himself the opportunity to make social commentary as he sees it necessary.

Eugene has divided the play into chapters. This is a clever and interesting way of giving exposition. Each major unit of the play is a chapter in his journal. In the beginning, he starts out discussing the structure of his memoirs which serves as the exposition to this particular world. He doesn't come back and indicate a chapter notation until he says "Chapter Seven, The Infamous Dinner" (38) This section is brought to the attention of the reader because it is a pivotal point in sending the play's major conflicts into motion. Basically, each unit is a chapter in his memoirs. He breaks the fourth wall to tell us what chapter he's in, reminding the reader that this is his interpretation of his family and not to forget the rules he set up in the beginning. At the end he concludes the play with his march into manhood after seeing "The Golden Palace of The Himalayas"(107). With this device set up Eugene has complete control over what information is related.

The pace and volume of the dialogue is fast and loud. Kate, Jack, Stan and Eugene all have sharp tongues. From the start of the play , Kate and Eugene's banter over "the roller skate" in the kitchen This is a sharp exchange:

KATE

How many times have I told you not to leave your things in the house?

EUGENE

A hundred and nine.

KATE

What?

EUGENE

You said yesterday, "I told you a hundred and nine times not to leave your things around the house"(10).



Eugene is not satisfied unless he has the last word. When Eugene talks to Stan the exchanges are fast, but Eugene often echoes Stan's speeches as demonstrated here:

STAN

Me and my boss had other things to talk about.  
I'm in big trouble Eugene. I mean really big trouble.

EUGENE

This really shocked me. Because Stan is the kind of guy who could talk his way out of anything. What kind of trouble?

STAN

I got fired.

EUGENE

FIRED?.....You mean for good?

STAN

You don't get fired temporarily. It's permanent. It's a lifetime firing.

EUGENE

Why? What happened?

STAN

It was on account of Andrew, the colored guy who sweeps up. Well, he was cleaning the floor in the stockroom and knocks a can of linseed oil over with the broom and ruined some hats. It wasn't his fault. He didn't put the hats there right?

EUGENE

Right (24)

This is a model which reflects the structure of most of Stan and Eugene's exchanges. The case is the different with Stan and Kate as they exchange playful dialogue:

STAN

Hey, I got a letter from Roseland Weiner. Remember her? She moved to Manhattan. They live up on Central Park West.

KATE

Why not? Her father's a gangster, her mother's worse. I don't get a kiss "Hello?"

STAN

Nope, I was going to save it up and give you a giant one for Christmas.

KATE

We don't have Christmas. I'll take it now, thank you (28).

When Jack deals with Stan, Jack usually pries the answers out of Stan as evidenced here:

JACK

How long have you been working there now?

STAN

Where?

JACK

At Stroheim's

STAN

At Stroheim's? Let me see....Part-time a year and a half before I graduated high school. And a year since then.

JACK

So what's that?

STAN

Two and a half years, counting part-time.

JACK

And he likes you?

STAN

Who?

JACK

Mr. Stroheim.

STAN

Yeah. Usually he likes me. Sometimes I'm not sure (39).

Jack has to play the detective on several occasions as he tries to solve the family's problems. His exchanges don't seem to move as fast as Kate, Stan and Eugene's, because his responsibility to support the clan is the greatest, therefore, slowing him down.

Blanches immediate family is different. The exchanges with her girls are more protective and cautious. Early in the play, Blanche is watching out for her youngest daughter Laurie's health:

LAURIE

Mom, can I have some lemonade?

BLANCHE

It'll spoil your dinner, darling.

KATE

A small glass wouldn't hurt.

BLANCHE

All right angel, in a minute (11).

When Nora comes in to tell the family her news about the dancing audition, Blanche is again protective:

NORA

Sit down Mom, because I don't want you fainting on the floor.

KATE

Sit down Blanche.

LAURIE

Mom, sit down.

NORA

You too Aunt Kate. Okay. Is everybody ready?

LAURIE

Stop dragging it out, the suspense is killing me.

BLANCHE

Don't say things like that Laurie (16).

The girls in return try to be protective but as highlighted in this scene their plans to help are hard to keep:

NORA

The first on who makes enough money promises not to spend it on herself, but save it all to get a house for you me and Mom. That means every penny we get from now on, we save for the house. We can't buy anything. No lipstick or magazines or nail polish or bubble gum. Nothing.....Is it a pack?

LAURIE

What about movies?

NORA

Movies too.

LAURIE

Starting when?

NORA

Starting now.

LAURIE

Can't we start Sunday? I wanted to see *The Thin Man*.

NORA

Who's in it?

LAURIE

William Powell and Myrna Loy.

NORA

OK, starting Sunday.....I'll go with you Saturday (22).

The brothers and sisters seem to have a fluid chemistry together, but when the cousins speak, the exchange is fragmented and grinding as mulled by Stan and Nora:

STAN

I need a favor. Real Bad. You're the only one who can help me.

NORA

What is it?

STAN

Well, when Pop comes home he doesn't pay any attention to me and Eugene. He's different with you. He's always interested in what you have to say.

NORA

Really? I hope so.

STAN

Oh sure, you never noticed that?

NORA

Not really. What's the favor?

STAN

This may sound dumb, but at dinner, do you think you could steer the conversation in a certain direction?

NORA

What direction?

STAN

Well, something like how much you admire people who stand up for their principles.

NORA

What people?

STAN

Any people. Principles is the important word. If you could work it in three or four times, I'd appreciate it.

NORA

Three or four times? (36).

The conversation is even more painful between Laurie and Eugene as revealed in the following exchange:

LAURIE

None of this would have ever happened if my father was alive.

EUGENE

How did you feel when he died?

LAURIE

I don't remember. I cried a lot because I saw my mother crying.

EUGENE

I would hate it if my father died. Especially with Stanley gone. We'd probably have to move out of this house.

LAURIE

Well...then you and your mother could come and live with us.

EUGENE

So, if we all end up living together, what's the point of breaking up now?

LAURIE

I don't know, I have to finish reading my book.

EUGENE

You don't get too far talking to Laurie (90).

These examples aside, a majority of the dialogue and action within the house is fast paced and rapid much like the people that inhabit it.

The imagery of the play is used heavily when the characters are talking about the previous action. The imagery for the actual exchange of dialogue is not as strong. But, when Simon does use it,

he is extremely detailed as Nora discusses a moment with her father with striking clarity,

NORA

When I was six or seven, he always brought me home a little surprise. Like a Hershey or a top. He'd tell me to go get in his coat pocket. So I'd run to the closet and put my hand in and it felt as big as a tent. I wanted to crawl in there and go to sleep. And there were all these terrific things in there, like Juicy Fruit gum or Spearmint Life Savers and bits of cellophane and crumbled pieces of tobacco and movie stubs and nickels and pennies and rubber bands and paper clips and his gray suede gloves that he wore in the winter time (22).

When Eugene talks about his wet dream, he is very vivid about the experience he had as he gushes the story to Stan:

EUGENE

I had this dream last night. It was about this girl. I can't tell you her name but she's gorgeous. We were kissing hard and rubbing up against each other and I felt this tremendous buildup coming like at the end of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. And suddenly there was an explosion. Like a dam broke and everything rushed and flowed out to sea. It was the greatest feeling I ever had in my life. And when I woke up, I was...(49).

The most vivid descriptive passage is Stan's description of Nora's soft, firm breasts:

STAN

Her breasts were gorgeous. Like two peaches hanging on the vine waiting to be plucked.....Maybe nectarines. Like two nectarines, all soft and pink and shining in the morning sun (64).



The other images are of war. The oppression and pressure that the Jewish people faced in Europe is similar to the confined pressure that the people in the house are feeling. Granted the people in the Jerome household were in no way persecuted like the people in Europe, but the fact that they were segregated to a certain area, packed in small living areas, and living on a limited income was similar to the European condition. Again, the families weren't persecuted, but that may have been Simon's way of showing how the Jews were treated by Hitler before and during the war. It's also used as an example of what real pain is like and how the problems in the Jerome household are minuscule compared to the atrocities committed in Europe.

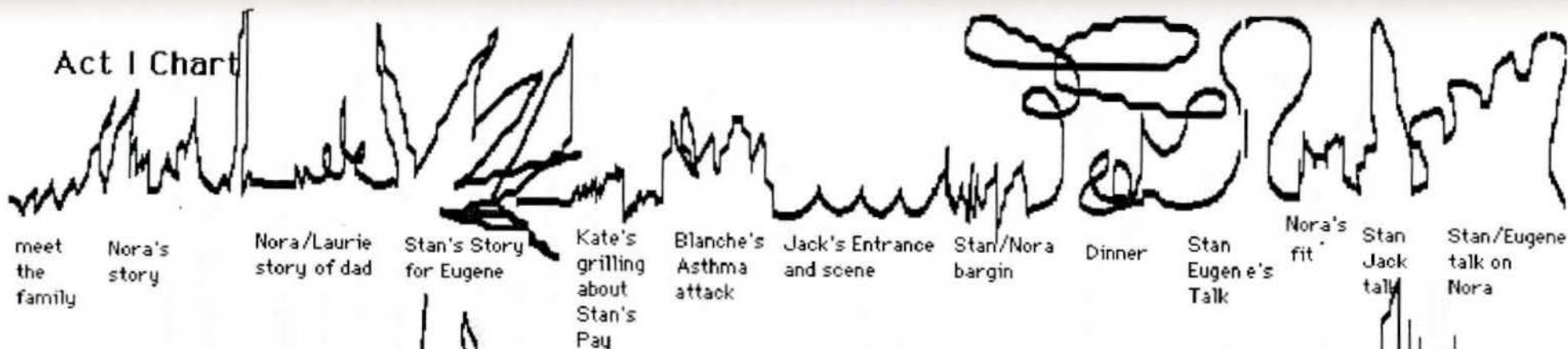
The phrases and slang are not really dated. The vulgar slang in the play "Wack-Off," "Fuck" and "Shit" are all well used today. Eugene in telling the audience where the play takes place, makes references to sports figures, Ruffing, Mel Ott, Sid Luckman and Lou Gerhig; this reflects the era in which the play takes place. (8, 23, 45).

## IDEA

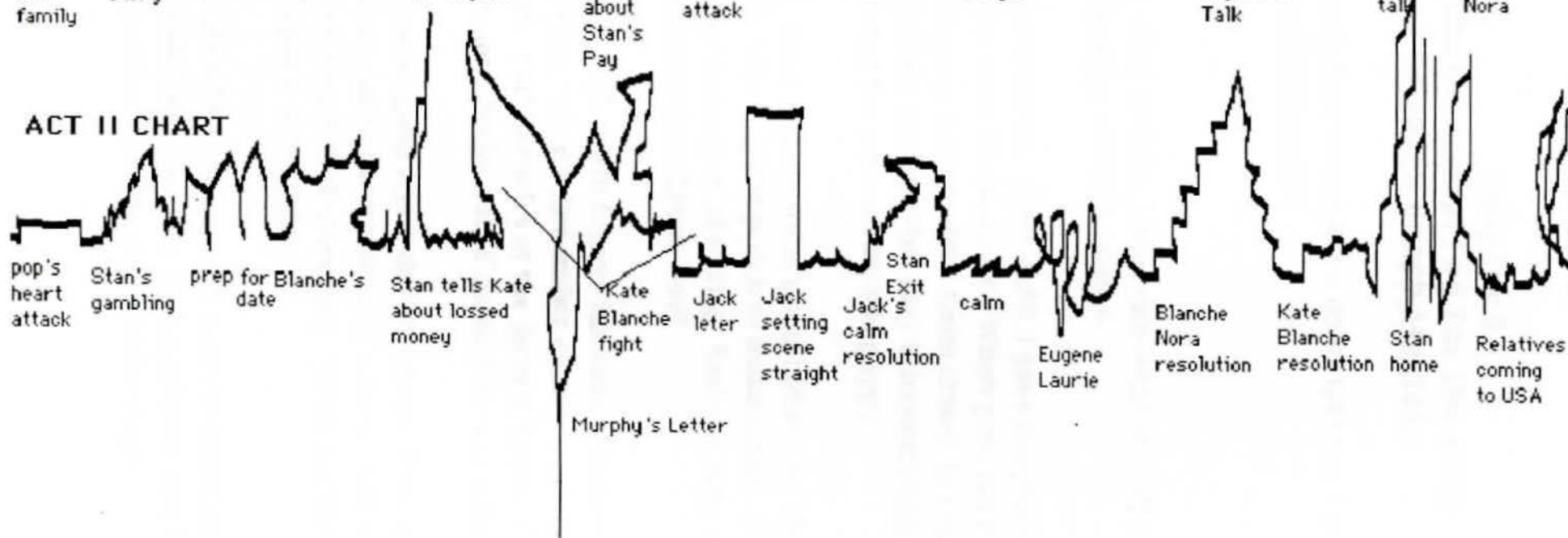
The title of the play informs the audience that they are going to read about moments in a person's life. In Brighton Beach Memories, Neil Simon casts Eugene Jerome as the vehicle by which to tell a story about Simon's childhood. Eugene breaks the fourth wall in the play and invites the audience in to observe his world. According to Webster's Dictionary "Memoir" means, "a narrative composed from personal experience." The reader knows that Neil Simon wrote the play and with nominal research, it is easy to discover that Simon is from Brighton Beach New York, so there is a good chance that the play may be about his life. If the reader doesn't know this fact about his life he or she could deduce that the play was a memory play taken from someone's personal experience.

Simon teaches the reader a few valuable lessons about life and its pitfalls. Specifically, Simon shows the reader that family, no matter how angry individual members may get at one another, must stick together. This is especially true in the case of Eugene and Stan. Even while they have their fights, Simon still shows the mutual admiration that the brothers have for each other. The household that Simon illuminates in the play Brighton Beach Memoirs is very warm. This must stem from a similar experience he had growing up. Simon also focuses the reader on integrity and honesty. Several of the characters from Stan to Kate have to be honest, swallow their pride, attempt to get along, and survive the troubled times. Simon also shows through the character of Kate the negative aspects of keeping emotions locked away for years. When Kate reveals her true feelings about her and Blanche's life, it is grisly. Overall, this play was a deeply emotional experience to produce. As a director, I had to be honest with the simplicity of the characters and story in order to portray a family thrown in the midst of turmoil only surviving on the intense grip they had on the bond and unity of the family. My hope was to produce a subtle, humorous, heartwarming slice of American theatre.

## Act I Chart



## ACT II CHART



This chart is the play Brighton Beach Memoirs broken down into French Scenes. French Scenes are noted by the entrance of a new character or a change in action or intent on the part of a character. The waves and pulses represent the beat or rhythm of the scene.

### Chapter 3

## The Rehearsal Log For The Play

### Brighton Beach Memoirs

#### Journal Entry

The following section are uncensored notes taken as I directed the play Brighton Beach Memories .

September

3- Blocked Act I. 7:30 to 9:30. Great cast-went smooth. Space is too fucking small. Blocking will be adjusted.

4- Much easier this evening. 6:30 -8:30. I gave general blocking in a couple scenes. Most were blocked out . When girls ran it they had trouble with making up movements. Calm down!! It's early. We stayed and blocked the scenes. This play is loooonnnngggggg! We are going to have to keep the pace up on this puppy.

7- Run Blocking. came in gave some notes before the show. The blocking went OK. We need the porch to make sense. We stopped a few times to change and adjust blocking. Really boring evening. Why did I have rehearsal on Labor Day?

8 Worked section I. Began with improvisational situations based on situations in the play. I don't remember exactly what they were. Worked really well. Did charades at the Jerome home. Good growth out of actors. We need books out of hand. Pace was a little slow.

9- Worked E-S scenes- good scene development. They are a bit nervous and rushed due to the number of scenes. Still with books in hands but doing a nice job of discovering. Aaron has breath support problems. Brian's pitch is too high.

10-Asked Reeder about Aaron's breath support problems. We attempted to animate him. I sat him in the balcony and had him perform the scene with a cast member on the stage.

11-Scott is making some improvements. We viewed the movie, Radio Days to give them a flavor of the "Jewish Setting" It helped. Lines were due. Some problems but it's early.

14-Warm-up Improv- Worked page twenty-seven through forty-eight.. There are still some line problems. It will come together. I am having trouble motivating myself. I seem to be getting depressed about school. It's driving me nuts. Energy of show was low tonight. This is a serious play that's really not that funny.

15- Warm-up tonight was "Fuck that shit." This is a game that helps the actor's relieve their tension. The game works like this. One cast member yells out something that pissed them off today and the other cast members all yell, "We're at rehearsal, Fuck that shit!" It helped to release the tension Improv was Eugene hiding the liver. They are having problems with concentration?? Nerves are getting the best of these people. There are no connections.  
Run act II after break. We ran act II to work on lines.

16- Lines are due for act II. We will run one time for lines then go back and work the act.

Notes-Second time was slow. Pacing is a problem. They are still thinking about lines. Nora/Blanche scene went well. Kate is having line problems.

Work E+S scene in addition to him leaving. Work beginning of the act.

17- Worked with Scott and Aaron on vocal problems. They went to opposite ends of the house and ran their scenes. Worked on character motivation with Scott.

Worked E+S scenes. They are still uptight. Aaron really beats himself up over things. later the scene really expanded. They are making connections and progress.

18- Run through- 6:40-7:44- I took notes. There was a problem with listening.

Act II 7:50-8:50

21- Polish Act I. We ran the act and I took notes. Later we ran the act again.

22- Warm up was people in corners giving lines.  
Ran act and went back to work the sections that were sloppy.

23-We started working the backstage routines for the show. I wanted them to rehearse the backstage conduct as they would on performance nights. I found that the actor's needed the group warm-up to get fired up. I find as a director that the group has to be unified or the production doesn't work. Maybe it's the nature of my job, but the people get really tight when they are in my shows. Maybe it's because I'm a director who practices his craft?

25- RAN THE SHOW. It was under two hours. Great.

## Chapter 4

### Directing Neil Simon's Play Brighton Beach Memoirs : A Retrospective Look At The Event

"The entire production had a sense of playfulness about it. The cast was alive from the moment the lights glowed."

Allen Logan. President -Logan Investigations

"I found the characters to be very selfish.....That's a good sign, when a director can bring that out on top of the humor."

Dan Swinford.....Owner Vivian Vineyards.

Based on the comments I received after the two week run of the play Brighton Beach Memoirs , I think it's safe to say that the production was a success and turned a profit for the production company. I would like to take a moment to step back to examine my work. In this retrospective journey, I will focus on the rehearsal process, the overall performance and each actor.

As a director for the stage, I found the work going into the production was the most important part of the process. The material I used from Francis Hodge's book Play Directing: Analysis , Communication, and Style was extremely useful. I can't go into a directing assignment without doing a complete analysis. I'd feel unprepared, naked, weapon-less. The process fleshes out and answers most of the questions necessary to gain a vision of the production. It doesn't answer all the questions. Some of the unanswered questions are discovered during the enlightening experience of the rehearsal process. The process was very positive from the start because I was organized and knew what I wanted from the start.

The audition process was long. I chose monologues as a means of auditioning. Looking back, I wish I would have held cold readings. Monologues are nice because it allows actors to come in prepared with their best work, but I would have rather had them read from the text. I like to hear the words come out of the mouth of the actor as I visually match it up with what they are doing physically. I had the actor's do a cold reading when I directed The Diviners for Lindenwood College. Looking back at the two styles, I prefer the cold readings. But hey, this is education: A time to learn. I'm not at all displeased with my cast, I just discovered the method I prefer.

Once cast, the people were responsive from the start. We had a great amount of work to accomplish and they were very enthusiastic about it. What I did try to focus on from the beginning was a sense of community with the cast members. One of the first things we did early on in the process was to watch a movie called Avalon. I did this for several reasons. One, was to give a cast that consisted mainly of twenty to twenty-seven year old Midwestern kids an idea of what New York Jews were like in the 1930's. What we found, in the viewing, was loud, aggressive and paranoid people. It also allowed me to look at the cast together, without the frustration that sometimes comes from early rehearsals. They were just people hanging out. I wanted to get to know them. I'd also, without letting them know, get them together in a small space. The result was wonderful. We were all crammed in a small trailer to view the movie. The cast members were very comfortable sitting and lounging on and around each other. Later in the rehearsal process, when we discussed the cramped size of the house and the fact that nobody had any privacy, I had them recall that evening in the trailer and had them draw a comparison between the two spaces.



After the movie, I had the two Jewish cast members who were from the area that is replicated in the play discuss the sights, sounds, feel and smells of New York. We found out that many of the folks shout because they live near the mass transit tracks and the mass transit vehicles frequently pass by. They also made several references to the fact that the area is pretty dirty, run-down and filled with crime. Jack makes the same comment to Nora:

NORA

Can we walk down the block?

JACK

Sure. Well take a look at the ocean. My father always used to say, "Throw your problems to the sea and the answer will wash back up on shore."

NORA

Did they?

JACK

Not in Brighton Beach. Orange Peels and watermelon pits (48).

It appears that the feeling was the same back then .

We found out from the ethnically diverse cast members that the Jews and Irish were forced to live together in the thirties because society sectioned them off into ghetto areas. The tension grew. The Irish didn't care for the Jews because of the smells that came from the house. The Jews often said the Irish were mad because they were oppressed by the British. This information helped the cast members a great deal.

Directors in educational and community theatre who are disorganized are in the wrong field. In most cases lack of space, budget, company member's accelerated schedules, result in limited rehearsal time. The play has to open on schedule. As a result, choices have to be made. The director needs to have an idea of what the vision is behind the play. Having a specific rehearsal schedule, obviously taking uncontrollable situations into account, is necessary for an efficient use of the rehearsal time. Therefore, the schedule should be made out not to waste people's time. Calling an actor in for one scene that is not worked until the end of the evening is the act of a selfish, disorganized director. As the leader one can't say "just bring some work and I'll get to you." If the actor is getting paid, then by all means they are at the disposal of the company (as far as the union allows). With that in mind, the rehearsal process for Brighton Beach Memoirs, was really smooth. The cast knew up front what was expected of them as far as rehearsal dates, lines, meeting etc. On the other side, I made every effort to make a schedule that made the best use of the cast's time. As a result, the rehearsal process was very enjoyable.

I tried to start off every rehearsal with an improvisational exercise that related to the tone of the scene that was to be rehearsed. The improvisational work paid off well. During the technical rehearsals and the run of the play the whole cast would do a group improv that was related to an event not seen on stage, like "What Nora would say to Laurie after Nora saw Eugene defecating.". The cast was hungry for the situation each night.

Typically, the rehearsals were smooth. The cast started off with warm-ups. Somebody from the group would instinctively take charge of the warm-up, which consisted of physical and vocal warm-ups. In the educational setting, I like to start warm-ups together for several reasons. First, some new actors may not know the value or even how to warm-up. Instead of having them stand in a corner and watch a more experienced actor make noises and chant and shake their legs into a spasm, and be totally confused, I try to have the older actors lead and explain what's going on. Eventually we stopped having group warm-ups because the actor needs eventually to take it

upon himself to develop his or her own style. The other reason I wanted to have group warm-ups is so the actors know that I expect them to be warmed-up and ready for rehearsals and performances. Actors think they can just walk in, "turn on" and act. They don't realize that they can't take half the rehearsal evening or the first act of the play to finally get warmed-up .

After the warm-up we'd do the improvisation exercise. Usually, it was something funny like, "Blanche's deepest sexual fantasy," or Laurie catching Eugene in the bathroom or Eugene hiding his liver so nobody can find it. It was something to get the cast's energy flowing.

When they were fired-up and ready, I'd have them go through the scene to get used to the words and rhythms. Then we'd go back and discuss the motives and drives of the scene. We'd then run it and I'd stop it on occasion to ask questions about the relationship. We'd then just run it to allow the actors to play with the scene. I'd take notes and have them do it again. At the end, we would leave the scene on a good note. The actor never walked out frustrated. If they had problems with something like lines or motivation or energy, we'd discuss it and come to a conclusion about the problem . I'd send the actor home with a problem to solve. The next time, the actor came in and had the problem rectified.

Once the books were out of hand, we worked on rhythms of the scene, pacing of the scene, and the mechanics of the scene. I really started focusing on volume and projection. The biggest problem toward the end was realism. I had to believe that the actors believed in what they were doing. If an actor said or did something that looked staged, we'd change it.

When the choice, had been made, it was simply a matter of the show taking on its own shape and form. It needed to gel and flow smoothly like a fungus in a pond. The production, like the actors and technicians that created the world, is a living creature and it must be treated as such.

The run of the play, aside from Thursday night when Justin attempted to set the stage on fire , was fine. I was very happy with the cast's work, but I feel the need to point out a few areas that I

needed to work on a little harder. I did attempt to solve these problems, but I wasn't as successful as I wanted.

I felt Brian played Eugene somewhat whiny. Eugene is smarter than Brian played him. Aaron was a little too laid back for Stan. His volume and energy were sometimes too sedate. Scott had some projection problems and didn't look that old. Laurie was fine except that she too played Laurie not as bright as I wanted. She played the dippy little sister vs. the smart little schemer. Nicole overplayed Nora on some of her scenes. Sarah, did seem to play it safe with her interpretation of Blanche. She played the same older lady she's played for years. Jennifer was really good.

Again, this is being very critical. The process was a very fine experience. The chance to run the show in a college program doesn't happen all the time. It was a great experience.

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## Appendices

## RIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS

Neil Simon  
Lindenwood College Theatre Department

**B**righton Beach Memoirs is the only Neil Simon play I've seen that I like. Simon is a master craftsman of gags and of superficial situation comedy. But in this piece about his adolescence in Brooklyn during the Depression, both Simon and his characters are honest and, at moments, genuinely moving.

The students in Lindenwood College's recent production all displayed an impressive command of the technique Simon requires. Two of them, Jennifer Jonassen and Scott Elgart, surprised with subtly real portraits of a middle-aged father and mother, and Aaron Black grew in depth as the older brother. Director Jesse Bean cast well throughout. If some of his actors sometimes rushed a little, at least the basic rhythms were sound, as was the flow of life Bean and his colleagues pictured among these decent, struggling people.



# BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS

by  
Neil Simon

## CAST

(in order of appearance)

Eugene..... Brian Peters  
Blanche..... Sarah Yunker  
Kate..... Jennifer Jonassen  
Laurie..... Christine Angelo  
Nora..... Nicole Schlueter  
Stanley..... Aaron Black  
Jack..... Scott Elgart

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

### ACT I

Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, New York  
September, 1937—6:30 p.m.

### ACT II

Wednesday, a week later  
About 6:45 in the evening

There will be a fifteen minute intermission between acts.

## ARTISTIC STAFF

Director..... Jesse Bean  
Scenic Designer..... Donnell Walsh  
Costume Designer..... Niki Juncker  
Lighting Designer..... S. Kimo-James Munson  
Producer..... Bryan C. Reeder  
Stage Manager..... Sarah Evans  
Interpreters for the hearing impaired..... Mary Lueke  
Loretta Durham

## TECHNICAL STAFF

Technical Director..... Donnell Walsh  
Assistant Stage Manager..... Justin Thurman  
Crew Chief (Electric)..... S. Kimo-James Munson  
Crew Chief (Scenic)..... David Lampe  
Master Carpenters..... Brian Peters  
Robert Kantz  
Scenic Carpenters & Painters..... Shawn Telkamp, Jennifer Davis,  
Wade Owens, Maria Romaine, Brian Lemons,  
Sarah Underwood, Casey Gryder, Jason Wiley, Bill Grafeman,  
Tyler Duenow, Sarah Yunker, Diane Hartke  
Master Electrician..... Ryan Winkels  
Electrician..... Jeff St. Germain  
Costume Construction Crew..... Kim Allen, Angela Bowman, Marci Franklin,  
Jennifer Hoefakker, Nia Hudnut, Joey Landwehr,  
Beverly Myatt, Danielle Smith, Melfreya Barnes, Anita Dupree  
Wardrobe Mistress..... Nia Hudnut  
Property Masters..... Aaron Black  
Brian Peters  
Property Production..... Sarah Underwood  
Sarah Yunker  
Jennifer Davis  
Property Runners..... Sarah Underwood  
Jennifer Davis  
Program Cover/Poster Art..... Aaron Black  
Program Production..... Neal Aaron Brown  
Box Office Manager..... Karin Hansen  
Box Office Staff..... Teresa Butkiewicz, Valarie Heck,  
Susan Lammers, Joey Landwehr,  
Nicole Shlueter, Jennifer Soltysiak  
Light Board Operator..... Jodi Ensor  
Sound Board Operator..... Kari Stopp



BACKERS  
Ann C. Knichel

PATRONS  
James A. Ricketts  
Kathy Williamson

SPECIAL THANKS

Arrow Rock Lyceum Theatre  
Jennifer Jonassen  
Scott Elgart  
Scott DeBroux  
Jeanne Malpiedi

BENEFACTORS  
Jack & Jacqueline  
Cooney  
Elizabeth M. Rauch

The Lindenwood College Theatre Department presents

**D**OWNSTAGE THEATRE

*Women and Wallace* and *Line* two student-directed one-act plays to be presented on October 21-24 at 7:30 p.m. in the Downstage Theatre (Room 101 of the Fine Arts Building).

*Crimes of the Heart* by Beth Henley presented by the St. Charles Theatre Guild on November 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21 at 8:00 p.m.

**J**ELKYL THEATRE

*THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD*  
a musical by Rupert Holmes

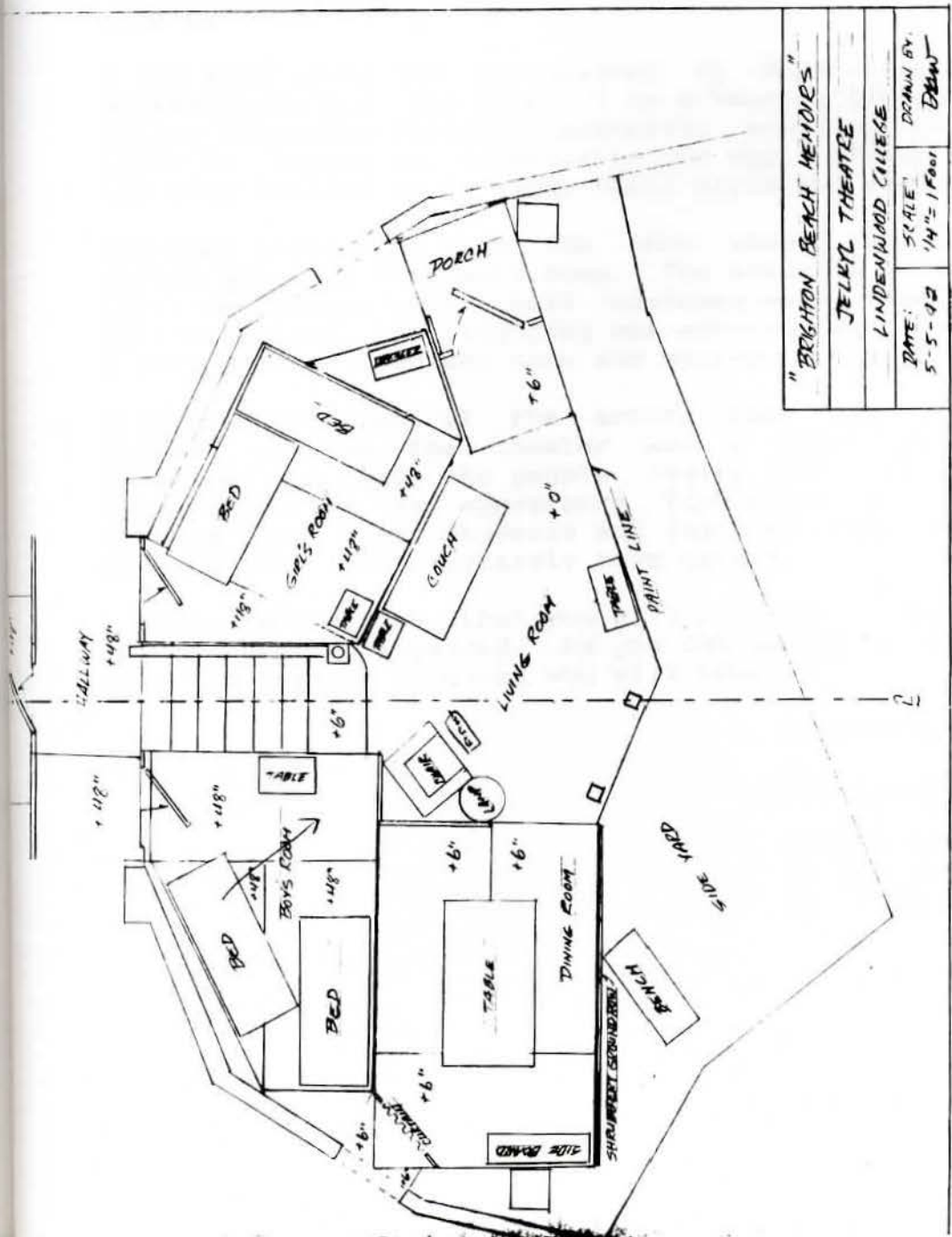
December 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12 at 8:00 p.m.  
December 5, 6, 12, 13 at 2:00 p.m.

The Tony Award-winning Musical, Best Book, and Best Score of 1985, *Drood* is Broadway's wildly warm-hearted free-for-all. Its rollicking spirit, broad theatrical style, vibrant score and audience involvement make it the perfect holiday outing. Join us and help us solve "whodunit?" and discover why *Drood* is called "the solve-it-yourself Broadway musical."

Discount season tickets for the remainder of the 1992-93 mainstage season may be obtained by calling the theatre office at 949-4966.



October 1, 2\*, 3 & 8, 9, 10  
\*for the hearing impaired



October 6, 1992

Mr. Jesse Bean, Director  
Lindenwood College Theater Department  
Lindenwood College  
209 S. Kingshighway  
St. Charles, MO

Dear Sir:

I would like to take an opportunity to congratulate you and your staff on the production of "Brighton Beach Memoirs". I attended the Friday evening performance on October 2nd because it was sign interpreted.

I was told about the performance by Mary Luebke, one of the interpreters for the play. I am a hearing student at Florissant Valley Community College, presently studying sign language in order to become an interpreter one day. Having interpreters at the play enabled me to study their style and execution.

Everyone associated with the show should be commended. The entire show was very well done. The actors & actresses presented their characters well, their costumes were timely, the set was well-organized, the lighting was executed according to dialogue. I very much enjoyed the show and wanted to let you know.

Also, the pictures of the actors that you displayed in the hallway outside the theater was a great idea. It gave me a chance to see what the people really look like, and some were very different in appearance from their character! I enjoyed reading about these students and learning what their field(s) of studies are. They certainly have talent.

I hope, in addition, that you will continue to offer interpreters for the hearing impaired. As you can see by my letter, it's not only the hearing impaired who will benefit.

Sincerely,

*Doreen Lawman*

Doreen Lawman  
45 Shadow Ridge Drive  
St. Peters, MO 63376

*Brighton*  
*Beach*  
*Memoirs*

**Contains**

**Mature Situations.**

Rehearsal Schedule for Brighton Beach Memories

Section I 7-23 65-68 90-98 98-106  
Section II 59-64 23-27 48-53 68-71 87-89  
Section III 27-48 53-59 72-87

September

Th-3-Block Act I  
F-4-Block Act II  
M-7-Run Review Blocking  
Tu-8-Section I  
W-9-Section II  
Th-10-Section III  
F-11-Act I run Lines  
M-14-Section III  
Tu-15--Section I Nichole absent  
W-16-Run Act II lines  
Th-17-Section II  
F 18-Run  
M 21-Polish Act I  
Tu 22- Polish Act II  
W-23-Run  
Th-24 Run Nichole absent  
F-25 Run  
Sat-26 Tech TBA  
Su-27 Tech TBA  
M- 28 Tech TBA  
Tu-29 Tech TBA  
W- 30 Tech TBA

October

Th-1 Open  
F-2 Run  
Sat-3 Run  
M-5 Rest  
Tu 6-Rest  
W-7 Brush-up  
Th-8 Open  
F-9 Run  
Sat-10 Closing- Strike Following- All must attend

Rehearsals begin at 6:30. Times on the Technical rehearsals will be announced in the next week.