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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

THE UGLINESS OF GORGEOUSNESS: AN EXPLORATION
OF THE OBSESSION OF BEAUTY IN NEIL LABUTE'S
REASONS TO BE PRETTY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Asédo Wilson

College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Theatre Arts and Dance
Theatre Education

December, 2012

This Thesis by: Asédo Wilson

Entitled: *The Ugliness of Gorgeousness: An Exploration of the Obsession of Beauty in Neil LaBute's reasons to be pretty*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts,
in College of Performing and Visual Arts in School of Theatre Arts and Dance,
Program of Theatre Educator Intensive

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ABSTRACT

Wilson, Asédo. *The Ugliness of Gorgeousness: An Exploration of the Obsession of the Beauty in Neil LaBute's reasons to be pretty*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2012.

This thesis is the culmination of the two-year process of researching, conceptualizing, organizing, rehearsing, directing and producing Neil LaBute's *reasons to be pretty* with theatre students from the University of Northern Colorado. The show was performed in March of 2012. The guiding questions for this project included: Why is it important to analyze a character's internal and external qualities? How can one develop a strong ensemble? What is the role of the media in society's perception of beauty? How can a successful production with rehearsal limitations be produced? What is it about this material that will keep the actors and the audience engaged? How can one ensure that the audience understands the message of the story? The dramaturgical protocol, prospectus, and prompt book are the support materials for this project. The rehearsal journal and conclusion of this thesis offers an insight of the production process. This thesis details the processes and research utilized to create a powerful evening of theatre.

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Neil LaBute

Profiles Theatre

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Goal of Thesis

We all have our own opinions of what beauty is. And we are all capable of doing nasty things in order to obtain it. We don't understand why we aren't satisfied with what we've got, and sometimes curse and swear and lie and do hateful things in order to obtain our desires. It's not pretty, and we don't like to admit it. But to overcome our insecurities, we also have to look at ourselves and ask why we do what we do in order to obtain beauty. (Richardson 6)

The obsession with external beauty is just as intriguing as preoccupations with money, sports, politics, celebrity divorce, celebrity scandal, and reality television.

Television shows such as *TMZ*, *E News*, and *Access Hollywood* constantly display “the [hottest] actor” wearing “the hottest clothes” and starring in “the hottest movie,” as they are posing for the cover of “the hottest issue” of a magazine. As author, Ann Beuf, stated, “America worships beauty” (6).

The combination of the Internet, television, and social networks plays an influential role in terms of how people view themselves and each other. These force viewers to acknowledge beauty as an exclusive attribute whose privileged owners are placed on a pedestal, and not as an intrinsic trait that is a part of an individual. The focus of the media is generated towards how beautiful everyone should be, but “everyone” does not include the people who are spectators of the media. Additionally, the only people that are considered beautiful are the people the media say are beautiful and the individuals who emulate them.

In her book, *Beauty Is the Beast: Appearance-Impaired Children in America*, author Ann Beuf addresses the concept of beauty:

The culture stresses highly idealized images of both male and female attractiveness and urges the common citizen to conform to them. The smooth skin, silky hair, straight noses, and dazzling smiles of models in the media set a narrow standard to which all must try to conform. (6)

Recently a teenage girl in Denver, Colorado posted a video on *YouTube* asking viewers if she was pretty or ugly. According to Candace Smith from ABC's *Good Morning America*, she did this because she was called ugly at school. The video led to more harsh comments such as, "Bitch you only want compliments, attention whore, omg you were ugly and you still are, no offense, I'm not hating just saying and your voice is annoying." It appears that individuals who do not fit within society's concept of beauty, or who are not willing to conform to these concepts, are considered unattractive.

Playwright Neil LaBute wrote a series of plays known as the *Beauty Plays*, dark comedies that address our society's obsession with body image and appearance. Each play confirms the notion that "people do extreme things in the name of beauty" (Etkoff 6). *The Shape of Things*, the first in the series, concerns a man whose girlfriend coerces him to improve his character and appearance via cosmetic surgery so that he becomes a "perfect" specimen. The second installment, *Fat Pig*, addresses how society views a relationship between a svelte male and an overweight female. The final installment, *Reasons to Be Pretty*, involves a male protagonist, Greg, who refers to the new woman at work as "pretty" and to his own girlfriend Steph as "regular." Using these labels ultimately damages their relationship and creates major life changes for the characters involved.

Physical appearance and beauty are the themes and motifs of *Reasons to Be Pretty*. In the preface LaBute describes the play as “a story about, our country’s (and by extension the world’s) obsession with physical beauty” (xi). Furthermore, “We want to know what we really look like, what people really think of us; if we are pretty enough, good enough, the best” (xi). Society is preoccupied with this notion. The characters are four working class individuals, living in working class neighborhoods, who are settled in their lives; they would not be on a magazine cover for their beauty. In reference to his girlfriend, Greg says to a friend, “Yeah well, Steph hasn’t got a face like that girl’s—maybe her face is just regular—but I wouldn’t trade her for a million bucks” (16). LaBute’s play addresses head-on the issues that many human beings face regarding beauty. At the same time, it is not written to vindicate the male idea of what determines beauty. This is a contemporary story, with characters that are “real,” against a backdrop of what American culture experiences on a day-to-day basis.

This is a play that provides an excellent opportunity to publicly make a comment on society’s obsession with beauty. A good production should leave the audience wondering how society’s obsession with beauty dictates human behavior and interaction. In order to create an entertaining evening for the audience and still fully appreciate the issues raised within the plot, the director must engage in close reading and analysis of relevant materials, interviews, discussions, as well as communicate his conclusions with designers, actors and, ultimately, the audience. The goal of this thesis is to examine the process by which a director approaches a provocative script, to create a production that stimulates, entertains, and provokes thought.

Purpose of Study

I want the audience to walk away questioning their own perceptions of beauty. I want them to ask if they have ever done something ugly in order to get what they wanted. And if so did their actions or words tarnish the beauty of what they obtained? The audience should be able to relate to the characters, because like them, we are all on a quest for beauty, and we can choose the way in which we go obtaining it. This play holds a mirror to us. We must examine our own qualities, pretty or ugly, in order to understand ourselves and one another. (Richardson 6)

LaBute addresses how two simple words—“regular” and “pretty”—can be damaging. Within the context of the play, “regular” is also known as normal, plain, average, simple, commonplace, boring, uninteresting, and dull. “Pretty” is considered to be a conventional form of beauty, but it is in competition with “gorgeous,” “hot,” and “stunning.” These are forms of beauty that are popular among the masses in American society. Dramaturg, Jolene Richardson noted, “Whether we like it or not, we live in a world in which we are bombarded with images of ourselves. Brush your teeth, wash your hands, walk past a store window and there you are, staring back at your physical self anyway” (3). The concept of becoming intoxicated with appearance is an unshakeable part of our culture. Author Nancy Etcoff concludes,

Appearance is the most public part of the self. It is our sacrament, the visible self that the world assumes to be a mirror of the invisible inner self . . . beauty has consequences that we cannot erase by denial. Beauty will continue to operate outside jurisdiction, in the lawless world of human attraction. (6)

Since its stage debut in 2008, *Reasons* has become popular among theater companies in the United States, Australia, and London. This accessible show deals with important issues, yet it features characters that are easily identifiable. As reviewer, Becca Martin, observed, “Admit it: You’ve been one of these people.” Although the play was originally published in 2008, not much has changed in society over the last few years. American culture is still obsessed with how they look, how that should look, who is hot,

and who is not. Media and advertising reflect this obsession, leaving room for manipulation of one's self-esteem. In the final monologue from the 2008 script, Greg sermonizes:

. . . we can't stop staring at movies and TV shows and *tons* of magazines...all of 'em saying that beauty is this big deal. It isn't! It's *so* not-some girl has a pretty face and we fall over ourselves giving her flowers and modeling contracts and working so hard to get into those panties of hers. (LaBute 126)

Each character in this play is manipulated by society's ideas of beauty, which is no different from what is happening in the world today. The manipulation of beauty by society is not a recent development, as author, Raquel L. Scherr, explains,

Helen was the personification of beauty for the Greeks, and her legend was shaped and reshaped to reflect that culture's attitude toward beauty, so Marilyn Monroe, during her life and even more since her death has become our mental representative of beauty; and we have shaped her to answer our needs. (117)

As a writer, LaBute recognizes that human torment is a cornerstone of drama.

Like the previous installments of the *Beauty Plays*, human torment is applied to his characters, thus bringing them to life. The author unveils that, "like most of us, the characters in his plays are concerned with appearances" (McLafferty 75). The purpose of this study is to show that a theatre production is capable of entertaining and enlightening audiences who are crippled by their beliefs of beauty and self-esteem.

Significance of Study

In addition to the theme of American fixation with physical and external beauty, there are also other themes that are addressed in this play. LaBute confides:

. . . it's the first coming of age story I've written. A boy grows up and becomes a man. I suppose every writer has one of those stories to tell, and this one is mine. It also concerns a very blue—collar side of the work population, like the friends and family I grew up with. I know what a dead—end job is like. I know exactly what it's like to be eating your lunch at 3:00 a.m. and feeling like life as you know is now officially over. (xii)

What makes this significant is that the audience should be able to relate to the characters in LaBute's work. Character identification engages the audience. Creating characters that are "real" and "identifiable" is what leads to an enriching entertainment experience. In order to ensure that there is "something for everyone" it is the responsibility of the director and actors to make sure more than one message is conveyed in a production.

The dialogue utilized in this play is loud, brash, obnoxious, and unsympathetic. It is an observation of human nature, a commentary on America's view of relationships, friendship, trust, morals, and, of course, appearances. This confirms that "knowledge is power, the more we know about human nature, the better hope we have of addressing inequalities and of changing ourselves" (Etcoff 241). The play provides an opportunity for the director and actors to gain additional knowledge regarding human nature and its role during the rehearsal process.

The role of the director, in general according to author, Jon Jory, is as follows:

The director delivers the story of the play clearly, evocatively, and emotionally to the audience using theatrical means. The director assists the actor in framing character and relationship so that the narrative points are made. The director reveals meanings in the text based in the author's intent and his or her own response to the play. The director melds the visual world of the play and the intended meaning to give the audience a complete experience. The director assures a creative atmosphere for the work and manages time to create the best result. (15)

Ideally, this method should be utilized for all productions. *Reasons to Be Pretty*, demands what Jory describes, since it is a character driven piece. The focus is not so much on how to develop a show while teaching students various warm up activities and improvisation,

but more importantly it should be on the director's process of presenting a story of "really flawed people under a microscope in order to see the immorality, the amorality that surrounds us" (Istel 40).

From an acting standpoint, this is an opportunity for the artists to build their "acting muscles." The intensity of this show requires that participants perform using the most challenging aspects of their capabilities. From an educational standpoint for the actor, Jory emphasizes that this show

... teaches you to pace yourself, to seek variety, to accept yourself as interesting, to build the character's arc and to deal with an emotional range no small part however interesting can match. A large part develops your analytical skills and your technique and training. (198)

As the director and actors work with each other via their respective duties, the result is a well thought out, conceptualized and entertaining show, allowing everyone to benefit from their collaborative efforts.

Review of Literature

The common denominator that *Reasons to Be Pretty* shares with *The Shape of Things* and *Fat Pig* is that LaBute "establishes a more rhetorical theatre, a unique mix of the modern morality play and postmodern deconstruction" (Mendall 1). Presenting this play informs the audience that within a contemporary setting, LaBute has the ability to utilize the past and present aesthetics of theatre to educate and entertain.

The first version opened Off-Broadway in 2008. In a *YouTube* interview, director Terry Kinney's explanation of his concept is that "the central character is a gentler person ... he devotes himself to try to become a better person." This parallels what LaBute closes with in the preface: "The future is now. It's time to grow up and be strong.

Tomorrow may be too late” (xii). This idea is related to an underlying concept in the show—being able to grow up and break free from the usual day-to-day routine.

When the play first opened, critics considered it a “kinder, gentler LaBute.” The play still contained what LaBute is known for writing about: “sex, power, dependency, love” (Jones). The play’s concept is still consistent with what critic Ben Brantley referred to as “a glaring judgmental vision of the ways men and women (especially men) use and hurt one another.”

A revised edition of the show opened on Broadway in 2009. The updated version retained all physical, psychological and verbal abuse. The elimination of the “self-discovery” monologues contained in the original script did not affect the show’s pace. Comparing the two productions, Brantley, further noted that, “even more than when I saw it last June, “reasons” flows with the compelling naturalness of overheard conversation.” The show was a critical success; yet, it closed within three months of opening.

In 2011, Profiles Theater in Chicago added *Reasons to Be Pretty* to its performance series. In this version, the show opened with a monologue from Greg. This monologue only exists in the Chicago version of the play. It established what actor Darrell Cox referred to as “continuity.” The opening set the tone for the entire play as a subtle “moment before,” as Greg “introduced” what was about to happen: “I work graveyard and overtime, I had a long week and when I got home Steph was lying in wait like a panther or some animal on the discovery channel.” Although the individual character monologues were eliminated, Greg’s closing monologue remained intact. His

monologues bookended the show, and shifted the focus of the story to Greg. This was not a disappointment, as Greg's closing monologue provides closure for himself and the audience.

This production influenced the 2012 University of Northern Colorado version. Located in Greeley, Colorado, UNC provided the venue for the show to fulfill the project requirement of this graduate thesis. Due to the language and subject matter, only college students were allowed to audition and perform this work. The version that was utilized for this production was the Broadway script. Fortunately, abandoning the original Off-Broadway script did not hinder the UNC production. The individual monologues were used as a part of table work, the meeting with the director and cast in which dialogue and characters are analyzed. The resulting information from this meeting assists with the actor's "homework."

In addition, for an exercise during rehearsals, the actors read their monologues as they were originally placed in the first version of the script. This was necessary so the actors had an understanding about the concept and layers of the play. If the actors were able to incorporate some of the characteristics from these monologues, then the audience might experience the material more deeply. Ideally, a combination of all three versions would have resulted in a great experience. Due to copyright laws there was a legal obligation to remain true to the published script

Various reviews from the *New York Times*, *Time*, and the *Chicago Tribune* were useful since writers Ben Brantley, Jumana Farouky and Chris Jones are familiar with LaBute's stage work. They were capable of discussing LaBute subjectively, while easily making comparisons to his previous works. Additional reviews from periodicals such as

the *Houston Press* and Northwest Arkansas *NWA Online* resorted to paraphrasing LaBute's preface and the plot summary from the back of the hard copy of the script. What is valuable is that LaBute has a distinct style of writing. As a writer, LaBute, "wants us to consider our own behavior, to question whether our own attitudes and actions differ from those characters we are watching and judging" (Mendell 87). This is also evident in other LaBute works such as the plays *Autobahn* and *The Mercy Seat*, and the films *In the Company of Men*, *Nurse Betty*, and *Death at a Funeral*. This information was beneficial to the study of LaBute's style; each story revolves around the conflict and obsession with appearances. These themes are also explained in a study guide compiled by Paragon Theatre in Denver noting, "In our jobs, in our appearances, and in our relationships, we can go to cruel extremes in pursuit of the perfect reason to be pretty" (Richardson 3).

In January 2011, attending *An Evening with Neil LaBute* at Profiles Theater in Chicago proved valuable. During the question and answer session, I asked LaBute why his stories revolve around dysfunctional relationships. His response was "happy relationship equals shitty show, I look for conflict, I don't mean to repeat myself—well I do . . ." Earlier in the evening, LaBute and other members of Profiles Theatre read various pieces that all revolved around some type of conflict. The conflict usually revolved around material that could cause some audiences to raise eyebrows. For example, the first piece read by LaBute focused on a man who is reflecting on how he had been having an affair with his best friend's mother since they were teenagers. Another focused on a same-sex couple in a restaurant, where one was not comfortable displaying his sexuality with his partner in public. Regardless of the subject matter of

these readings, it became apparent that the material was not only thought provoking and engaging, but also a reminder that no matter what LaBute writes, there is going to be conflict—and that it is not appealing. This reaffirmed that LaBute has the ability to “hold a mirror to his audience as well as to his characters and asks us to scrutinize ourselves” (Mendell 87).

Methodology

Rereading the play before the audition process was beneficial in becoming reacquainted with the characters and the story. After rediscovering that there are several major conflicts within this play, it became important to choose one as the focal point. The audience should not ask, “What was the show about?” after an hour and forty-five minute performance.

The audition process was a great experience. The actors were required to perform a one-minute contemporary monologue. A list of talented actors to choose from emerged. For callbacks, scenes were chosen that required the actors to abandon their comfort zone—scenes where the actors are forced to listen to each other; such as, the confrontation between Greg and Steph in scene five at the food court when she verbally assaults all of his flaws, and Kent’s confession in scene four when it is discovered that he is having an affair. Actors were needed who were not fearful of the material. Fortunately, everyone called back brought a human quality to the characters, which was required. This production was to be an exercise in learning about human nature between people who are at the “end of the road.” Listening is an important part of acting, and many of the lines in this play overlap. Casting actors that listened to each other was imperative.

After the cast was selected, a read through was held. This was important not only for the actors, since they may not have read the entire play, but also for the director to hear the story again. The rehearsal schedule was simple. The first two days were read through days, and the month of February was devoted to a unit per day. A unit is a smaller section of the play that is deconstructed and then reconstructed for performance. The play is divided into eight scenes, so the units were created based on the individual scenes. Rehearsals in March were devoted to the first four units one day, and the second four the next day.

The approach to each rehearsal was to run through the scene without stopping. Then there was a discussion about what happens in the scene. After rehearsing the opening scene, a discussion of tempo and dynamics took place. Tempo and dynamics in theatre breathe life into a production. Dialogue has a speed and sound that must be varied to keep the audience engaged. The stage directions for the scene are as follows: “Lights burst on. At home. Two people in their bedroom, already deep in the middle of it. A nice little fight. Wham” (LaBute 5)!

Within a scene there needs to be dramatic levels, and there must be wins and losses. The levels are the peaks and valleys of the scene. Acting is more than repeating the memorized words; each word must have its own character and shape. For reference, watching this scene on *YouTube* was beneficial. Unfortunately, the *YouTube* performance did not reflect anything except screaming and yelling. It was suggested to the actors that they think of the fight and the previous argument within context of the scene, as in what was the fight earlier that guided the characters to this point. In order to raise the stakes in

this scene, as well as the rest of the play, the cast was constantly reminded that each scene needs a winner. There must be a victory; it is up to the actor to score the winning point.

After speaking with an actor at Profiles Theatre following *An Evening with Neil LaBute*, he replied, “Neil wrote the song, I just soloed over the chord changes.” This forced a revisit of the script and more focus was placed on orchestrating it from a musical standpoint. Directors are orchestrators “hearing” the different melodies that are in any great piece of work. During the first section of rehearsals, the cast performed the scenes as much as possible, to establish the feel of the mood, tempo, and color of the play. Through this repetitive process, it makes memorization much easier.

Additionally, the cast received a rough draft of the dramaturgical protocol from this thesis, along with a copy of the individual character monologues edited from the original Off-Broadway production. An effort was made to avoid force-feeding character research. The director’s vision can also greatly assist actors; the only things that should not be force fed to actors are character objectives, choices, and line deliveries.

This show has spectacle, nevertheless, the spectacle is not visual; it is verbal. Keeping that in mind, the technical concept was simple; set construction was not necessary, and locating essential props was a simple task. The show’s run took place at the 221-seat Hensel-Phelps Theatre located in downtown Greeley, Colorado—an intimate setting for an intimate show. Jason Evenson, the technical services coordinator, was gracious to provide a lighting designer and operator for the show. The lighting required establishing mood, as certain scenes needed to look harsh, thus providing a visual depth to the actors. In the opening scene where Steph castigates Greg, the lighting not only

reflected the time of day, it also reflected the necessary dark mood. For the final scene where Greg admits he is still in love with Steph, the lighting was brighter, thus indicating hope.

Rehearsals began February 1, and the show opened on March 30, running for three performances. The biggest obstacle during the process was scheduling. Another production, spring break, and various outside commitments created the challenge of leading short, thorough rehearsals. Rehearsals for UNC's production of *Ragtime* began on January 9, which I participated in along with three of the actors in *Reasons*. Rehearsals were scheduled at 4:30-6:00 pm in a classroom Monday through Friday to accommodate the schedule for *Ragtime*. During the run of *Ragtime* there were no *Reasons* rehearsals due to makeup and costume call times. Beginning in March, *Reasons* rehearsals ran from 7:00-9:00 pm up through the dress rehearsal at the performance venue. Rehearsal props and the furniture in the classroom were utilized as the set pieces.

Putting together a production in a short amount of time is a challenge. It is also a challenge for a director to look at the rehearsal process from a scholar's point of view. What is measurable? How does a director communicate with actors as questions are researched that need answers? Author, John Carroll, stated, "The case study is useful when, as is usual in drama, the researcher is interested in, and deeply involved in, the structures, processes and outcomes of a project" (Taylor 77). This experience was viewed as a case study, in production and the collaborative process. These components determined the success of a production.

Although theatre is the combination of production, process, and collaboration, it also includes words, power, visuals, and performance. Great theatre should encourage

audiences to generate discussion. Great plays should encourage actors to share and perform the words of the playwright so that the world can participate. Great directors should encourage their actors and crew to continue to reach beyond their limits during the rehearsal process and continue to reach when there is an audience in the theatre. Theatre is responsible for communication and disagreement. Communication leads to assessment and re-assessment of what has taken place on stage and during rehearsals. Disagreement is usually looked upon as a negative term in the world of theatre; though, two opposing sides can result in creating a powerful solution.

CHAPTER II

DRAMATURGICAL PROTOCOL

Glossed Playscript

All pages below refer to Neil LaBute's *Reasons to Be Pretty, a Play*.

Bibliographic Information:

LaBute, Neil. *Reasons to Be Pretty: a Play*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2008.

Print.

First Responses

Pluses

1. This is a fairly well known play, which is currently in production in various theatre companies across the country. Neil LaBute is recognized as a popular playwright therefore the recognition from audiences should encourage attendance.
2. Quick costume or set changes are not required.
3. The cast consists of only four people; there are no more than three actors onstage at one time.
4. This is a realistic love story, one to which audiences can identify and relate.
5. This is an excellent play to perform in the round, or in a small space.
6. This is LaBute's most thoughtful work thus far, in contrast to his previous works that portrays males as misogynist and calculating.
7. All four characters take the reader and the audience along for the journey.

8. The script is a verbal rollercoaster.
9. All actors that perform in this show will be able to make an emotional connection to their character. There is not a single moment when one wonders about each character's purpose.
10. Interracial casting does not affect the story.

Minuses

1. Steph's opening rant is humorous at times, but the actor could fall into the trap of "acting" angry, instead of utilizing subtext. This trap may cause problems for the other actors as well who may rely on the choice of utilizing the same acting tactics throughout the show. The last thing an audience wants to hear is two hours of screaming and yelling.
2. The characters are stereotypical: the jock, the pseudo-jock, and the blondes.
3. All profanity must contain subtext. There is an art to using strong language, and the actors must be aware of this fact. If they do not utilize subtext, then the result is characters simply swearing for two hours.
4. Audiences may be offended by the language and subject matter of the show.
5. There are two different versions of the play.
6. The script is not appropriate for high school students, even though there are certain aspects with which teenagers are able to identify.
7. There is little background information regarding the previous relationships of the characters.
8. The play begins without any warning or exposition.

9. The opening scene is difficult to build from. It begins in the middle of the climactic moment.

Questions

1. What is Kent and Steph's history?
2. What is the cliffhanger before intermission?
3. Is Steph regretting her decision when she runs into Greg at the restaurant at the beginning of act two?
4. Is Greg waiting for his date or is he just saying that so Steph will be jealous?
5. When Greg tells Carly to go home during lunch to surprise Kent, is he setting up Kent?
6. Is Greg seeking revenge against Carly?
7. Does Carly think Steph is pretty?
8. Does social status affect the characters' behavior?
9. How does education play a role in each of the character's lives?
10. Who determines if someone is "pretty" or "regular"?
11. Are Greg and Steph still in love at the conclusion of the show?

Clues

1. Judging by Kent's behavior, it is no surprise that he is having an affair.
2. Steph has never been referred to as beautiful. There is no thorough analysis of her looks.
3. No one is happy with his or her current station in life.
4. Greg and Kent are not as good of friends as they think they are.
5. Couples that work together are more likely to have problems outside of work.

6. Both couples have “settled” when the play begins.
7. There is a feeling of entrapment in the first five scenes.

Imagery

1. Wilted flowers
2. Gray skies
3. Thunderstorms
4. Night
5. A new life
6. Sunlight
7. Soldiers at war
8. Animals in the wild

Concretes

1. Few people are happy with the way they look.
2. The truth hurts.
3. Becoming a part of a relationship does not solve anything if there are problems underneath the surface.
4. Social class and educational background can affect one’s position in life.
5. Adults act like teenagers, more often than not.
6. What people think they want in life may not be what they want after all.
7. Many people are slaves to mirrors and any other surface that has a reflection.
8. The media plays a large role in how people visualize themselves and others.
9. What some may view as “regular,” others may find perfect.
10. Couples can usually tell when their relationship is at a breaking point.

Supplements to the Playscript/Areas of Inquiry

Source Studies

We see others for who they are – physically at least – and yet we never see ourselves outright, always catching a glance off a lake’s placid surface. But we want more. We want to know what we really look like, what people really think of us; if we’re pretty enough, good enough, the best. We are creatures of desire—we want all the time. It’s endless, how much we crave things—compliments and cars and lotto tickets (because if we win we’ll have a lot of money, and then we can get more stuff) – and so we work and spend time away from our loved ones, always telling ourselves that this is the way of the world and everybody does it and my kids want it, and so life slips away. (LaBute ix)

1. The recognizable themes of this play are obsession, misunderstanding of beauty, and wanting what is unattainable. Two characters obsessed with beauty are Steph and Kent. Steph is obsessed by the fascination of beauty. Reassessing her thoughts on beauty, Steph reflects, “I really do feel that, that I’m not this person who gets off on looks or the more, like, physical side of men but when it’s the other way around . . . it just totally hurts if you find out he’s not all into your face . . . ” (33). Kent’s obsession is the image of Crystal, a co-worker, “And she is fine . . . twenty-three . . . amazing to the touch . . . a gymnast or one of those cheerleaders . . . ” (60).
2. The misunderstanding lies within Steph and Kent’s idea of beauty: Is there anything of substance to a person who looks like a cheerleader or a gymnast? Is someone who is not into physical appearance considered abnormal? LaBute mentions the want of material items and there are other types of “wants.” Greg wants Steph to realize that he does love her and did not mean what he said to Kent. Steph wants to be accepted for who she is more than what she looks like, or “should” look like. Kent wants to remain with Carly but still continue with

Crystal, a co-worker who is “hot.” Carly wants to be appreciated for who she is and not because she is considered attractive.

3. All four characters feel the disappointment of “settling” with their lives and their significant others, signaling that they all “want” to escape the working class world of which they are a part.
4. Steph’s moving out of the apartment serves as the catalyst for change. Greg realizes that even though he still has feelings for Steph, he sees that it is time for him to move forward. Kent has accepted the fact that he has “a job in some warehouse and a limited number of skills and a Chevrolet that I’d like to take a blow torch to . . .” (65). The changes that he faces are the pregnancy of his wife Carly, and the end of his friendship with Greg. Carly is wondering what will happen if her daughter inherits her looks and what that might mean. She has two jobs, but she may not be willing to accept change until after the arrival of the baby. For now, she has some time to think.

This is the third installment of LaBute’s *Beauty Plays*. Not only has LaBute successfully opened up a discussion concerning what motivates society, he is also able to apply his knowledge to a work that requires others to think about how they perceive themselves, and their fellow man.

Glossary

(Definitions are provided by the *Merriam Webster Unabridged Dictionary*)

1. *du jour* – made for a particular day, use of an item not specified on the regular menu (12)
2. *loon* – a crazy person (14).

3. *carob* – pod of the carob tree or its sweet pulp having a flavor similar to chocolate (20).
4. *sonar* – a method or device for detecting and locating objects especially underwater by means of sound waves sent out to be reflected by the objects (22).
5. *pallet(s)* – a portable platform for handling, storing, or moving materials and packages (as in warehouses, factories or vehicles) (28).
6. *careen(ing)* – to sway from side to side (39).
7. *crimp* – to be an inhibiting or restraining influence (54).
8. *obtuse* – lacking sharpness or quickness of sensibility or intellect (73).
9. *coolie* – an unskilled laborer or porter usually in or from the Far East hired for low or subsistence wages (98).

Geographical Reference And Place Names



Fig. 1. Map of Schaumburg, IL. *city-data.com*. City-Data, n.d. Web. 2 March 2012.

I suppose every writer has one of those stories to tell, and this one is mine. It also concerns a very blue-collar side of the work population, like the friends and family I grew up with. I know exactly what it's like to be eating your lunch at 3:00 a.m. and feeling like life as you know it is now officially over... The worst day I've had writing is better than the best day I ever had working in a factory, and the people who do it, year after year, because that's life, and food and rent and child support must be paid, have my respect. (LaBute xii)

The storyline is set in “the outlying suburbs” outside of Chicago. Schaumburg, Illinois, is an outlying suburb of Chicago with a decent blue-collar population. This play can be set anywhere, but it must include the working class aspect of the characters. The fact that they are working class citizens adds to their desperation.



Fig. 2. Food Court. *Edge.gannon.edu*. Gannon University, n.d. Web. 2 March 2012.
“I’m right here. No, down past the Panda Express...no I’m already *in* the food court” (LaBute 36).

When Greg and Steph meet again in scene three, the location is at a food court. Steph takes the opportunity to say mean and hurtful things to Greg as a rebuttal to his comment in the first scene. The food court is a busy area during lunchtime, so Steph wants to make sure she gets her point across in front of an audience.



Fig.3. Bar and dining area. *tripadvisor.com*. Trip Advisor, n.d. 2 March 2012.
“I don’t know why we never came here as a couple” (71). “S just a bar, right? The got *Budweiser* all over town so...” (78).

At the beginning of scene five, Greg bumps into Steph at a restaurant while he is waiting for friends at the bar. After an awkward exchange, Steph reveals that she is on a date. This is the type of place that Greg took Steph earlier in their relationship. Greg mentions, “. . . remember that crazy little, what do they call it, fondue restaurant...everybody running around in whatevertheycallem? Lederhosen or something like that...the Cheddar Hut” (71).



Fig.4. A warehouse storeroom. www.bls.gov. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d. Web. 2 March 2012. “Fine. We need to get back, anyway-got like, *thirty* pallets of cereal backed up” (28).

Greg and Kent work in a warehouse. It appears that they work at a Costco/Wal-Mart/Target type of store. They work the midnight shift and unload shipments. Not only will the location of the story affect the characters’ outlooks, the work environment affects their attitudes as well. They are constantly loading and unloading in a building without windows; therefore, it is impossible to tell what time of the day it is without looking at a clock.



Fig. 5. O'Neill Park baseball field, Bloomington, IL. *isucclubbaseball.com*. Illinois State Club Baseball, n.d. Web. 2 March 2012. "You got me out in *right* field. How good do I gotta be" (21)?

Greg and Kent spend their downtime playing softball in the company league.

Kent lives for softball, even though the company has not won a trophy since "eighty-six or something" (21). The ball field is where the altercation between Greg and Kent takes place.

Pronunciations

This contemporary play is set in the present, yet there may be some difficulty pronouncing the following words:

1. Verbatim is \vər-ˈbā-təm\
2. Jour is \ˈzhür\
3. Carob is \ˈker-əb, ˈka-rəb\
4. Pallet is \ˈpa-lət\

Literary Allusions

Throughout the play Greg reads the following: *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, *Rip Van Winkle* by Washington Irving, *The Birthmark* by Nathaniel Hawthorne,

and *The Raven* by Edgar Allen Poe. There are parallels between these literary works and the characters in *reasons to be pretty*. *Gulliver's Travels* is described as:

Swift's most famous work. . . . It tells the story of Lemuel Gulliver, who sets sail after business fails. After he shipwrecks, he awakes bound by tiny people holding him still with hundreds of tiny threads. The inhabitants of this land, Lilliputians eventually warm to Gulliver and even use his size to assist in fighting a war. But when Gulliver puts out a fire with his urine, he finds himself condemned and he escapes back to his home in England. Two months later, he sails again, this time landing in Brobdingnag, a land populated by giants. Gulliver finds himself disgusted with the giants, as all their ordinary flaws are magnified to him and even the naked women disgust him. (Richardson 16)

For the last four years, Greg has been held down by hundreds of tiny threads. He has been held down by a job he dislikes, been held down by a friend who has not grown up, and been held down by a four-year relationship that has evaporated. It is during the course of the play that Greg is exposed to everyone's "ordinary flaws": Kent's infidelity, Carly's insecurities, and Steph's inability to communicate.

In *Rip Van Winkle* "it is noticeable that much of the story focuses on 'nagging' women and the husband's desire to escape" (16). From Kent's standpoint, he feels that Carly nags him every time she comes to visit during his lunch break. While she is pregnant, he is being "nagged" by the fact that his wife no longer looks like the "trophy" he married. He escapes by having an affair with Crystal, a co-worker.

The Birthmark is a commentary on the message of the show. The author "seems to make the point that physical perfection is not only unattainable, it is foolhardy and dangerous to even strive for it" (15). This is one of the most important themes of the show: the idea that people should learn to love who they are. Peer pressure and media images should not determine self-worth.

The Raven is used to establish a connection between Greg and the narrator of the poem. Each line of text functions as Greg's "forgotten lore" (14). As he reads, he lets go of his lost love, Steph, but it also implies that he has lost himself as well somewhere during their relationship. The more Greg reads, the more he is able to find a way out of his own darkness.

References to the Natural World of the Play

The following references to nature are found in the script: fish, beauty, nuts, seeds, nature, flowers, backyard, God, Grand Canyon, buffaloes, lake, grass, cow, and dog.

References to the Social/Political/Ideological Worlds of the Play

1. GREG. "Said she was pretty and I agreed and that was all" (15).
2. GREG. "Yeah well, maybe Steph hasn't got the face like that girl's – maybe her face is just regular – but I wouldn't trade her for a million bucks" (16).
3. KENT. "I don't see you see you doing cardio work or, like lifting...athletes get away with that shit because they're always active, chipping away at their bodies" (20).
4. KENT. "Damn, she's good looking! What? I'm just saying. She's a fox. . ." (21).
5. STEPH. "[. . .] and even if I was, ugly, I'm saying, even if I was not cute or close to that, unattractive by world standards, don't I wanna be with someone that finds me beautiful" (32)?
6. GREG. "I just wanna go home...just go back to the house and climb into bed with you, say 'I'm sorry' again if you want me to...have your back against me and I can feel your heart beat . . ." (43).
7. STEPH. "Why, so you don't gotta look at my face" (43)?

8. STEPH. "I don't like your eyes . . . they're small and piggish . . ." (46).
9. STEPH. "Your nose . . . it's you mom's so I should be kind . . . your nostrils make me sick . . . your teeth are ok . . . your mouth is wide and your lips are way too thin to be sexy . . . your feet are the worse . . . sometimes you smell . . ." (47).
10. STEPH. "I could feel all that and still love you. It's possible" (49).
11. STEPH. "To hurt you, I wrote it down and I read it aloud. But it's not true. No. And what you said about me-even though it's just the one thing-it's completely and for all-time's sake true. You meant it"(50).
12. KENT. "[. . .] you think she looks good in those dress clothes you should see her in a pair of shorts . . . some girls like that . . . the whole competition thing" (59).
13. STEPH. "I'm trying to look pretty, all right?! I'm trying to make myself feel better . . . so yeah I'm wearing a skirt tonight so that I feel a little sexier or cuter or, you know . . ." (74).
14. GREG. "You can walk out on me for . . . for some perceived slight that I did you, some horrible judgment I made about your womanhood . . ." (77).
15. CARLY. "I'm very attractive. I am. I've always been that way but it's no great big deal to me-if anything it's worked against me for most of my life" (93).
16. KENT. "Your ex is an ugly piece of shit. Real fucking Alpo eater that I never understood your interest in . . ." (106).
17. STEPH. "Good! That girl deserves a big ass for once . . ." (113).
18. GREG. "[. . .] we keep buying the swimsuit issue . . . bikini posters . . . imagining that women like that'll find us attractive . . ." (126).

The Author and His World

I don't think that my work will change your life. I think that at its best, it will raise new questions, give you an alternative view of something and perhaps over time might lead you to greater understanding about something. But in terms of changing someone's opinion, that's a tall order and I don't see how, in an hour and a half or two hours, that's likely to happen. (Neil LaBute)

Biography and History

Neil Labute was born March 19, 1963, in Detroit, Michigan, and was raised in Spokane, Washington. He attended college at Brigham Young University where he produced plays that pushed the envelope at the conservative institution, some of which were canceled after the first performance due to the content of the material. Ironically, this would be the same school where he premiered his play, *In the Company of Men*, in 1993, which received an award from the Association of Mormon Letters. He later pursued his graduate studies at the University of Kansas, New York University, and the Royal Academy of London. LaBute also spent time teaching drama at Indiana-Purdue University in Fort Wayne, Indiana while working on the film adaptation of *In the Company of Men*, his film directorial debut. The film became a critical success resulting in the follow up feature, *Your Friends and Neighbors*. In 2000, he directed the film *Nurse Betty*, which was his most successful movie at that point, resulting in a Golden Globe Best Actress Award for Renée Zellweger. Also that same year, he directed the short film *Tumble*. In 2001, his play *bash: latterday plays* aired on the Showtime cable network, and was followed by the theatrical releases *Possession* (2002), *The Shape of Things* (2003), *The Wicker Man* (2006), *Lakeview Terrace* (2008), and *Death at a Funeral* (2010). With the exception of *Death of a Funeral*, *Lakeview Terrace*, and *Nurse Betty*, LaBute was involved as the writer of these projects. Even though he stepped into the world of filmmaking in 1997, he continued to write new material including plays such as

The Distance From Here, *The Mercy Seat*, *Merge* (2003), *Fat Pig* (2004), *Autobahn*, *This Is How It Goes* (2005), *Some Girl(s)* (2006), *Wrecks and Other Plays* (2007) and *Reasons to Be Pretty* (2008), which resulted in LaBute's first Broadway play and Tony nomination.

LaBute became part of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints while attending BYU. In a 2005 *Time Magazine* article, he explains his reasons for joining:

I was young and searching for things in my life – education, meaning – which opened me up to whatever came my way. I was around the religion, its members and its doctrine all the time. I investigated it and ultimately found it was something that I needed in general. But as I became more involved in the specifics, I became less interested in it as a guiding force in my life. (Farouky)

He resigned his membership in 2004 as a result of “a falling out.” His affiliation is interesting, simply based on the subject matter of some of his plays, and, of course, the language he employs. It is easy to assume that he was not Mormon when examining his body of work. What makes LaBute fascinating is that he “has proven that he has his hand on the pulse of everyday people (not heroes or villains), just people who sound and behave often horribly for no reason, and you cringe all the more because you know and identify with them” (Youssef). In 2012 LaBute joined the Profiles Theatre company in Chicago as a resident artist.

Author Commentary on *Reasons to Be Pretty*

In plays such as *The Shape of Things* and *Fat Pig*, LaBute's work has boldly addressed the issue of what is aesthetically acceptable in society. In the preface to *Reasons to Be Pretty*, he suggests that the reader “name the asshole who first invented mirrors” (LaBute ix). He later discusses that, yes, he could look it up on Google or Wikipedia, but as he put it, “I haven't bottomed out that far as a writer (or a human

being) quite yet” (ix). Further along, he sheds light on the play’s subject matter by explaining that the “play talks about our country’s (and by extension, the world’s) obsession with physical beauty, but it’s really the first coming-of-age story I’ve written” (xii). The heart of the preface and play is discussed in this excerpt:

Those damn mirrors are of absolutely no use to us, in the end. They tell us exactly what we wish to hear-everything, in fact, but the truth. What is it to be “pretty”? It’s not beautiful, and it’s certainly not ugly. Why do we care about it so much? Why do we get so caught up in what other people think? Probably for the same reasons we use Google...because we’re deathly afraid of being singled out for being anything but normal. We go to high school for three, four years, but it colors our entire lives-we continue to live some version of its schedules and cliques for the rest of our natural days. In school we were all desperate to fit in and yet desperate to stand out; the rest of life is merely a variation of all that. It’s a deadly game of push and pull. (x-xi)

The significance of the preface is that LaBute questions the idea of the mirror and its invention. After reading or watching the play, one is drawn back to the mirror to look at him or herself and think, “Am I like that?”

The World of the Author and Playscript

In an interview with Jumana Farouky from Time, LaBute refers to himself as “a people person,” after which he laughs. It is possible that “he knows how absurd it is for him, the bad boy of American theater, to speak in sunny, New Age banalities” (Farouky). Those familiar with LaBute’s work know that he will not “pull any punches.” The reader begins to recognize his world. In fact, when he commented on his own work he declared, “My plays are polarizing. People love them or loathe them” (Farouky). He sums up, “You’re not coming to the theater just to see two boring hours of somebody’s life. I’m giving you the highlights” (Farouky).

Some of the issues addressed in LaBute's plays and films cover, "a smorgasbord of perversions: infidelity, infanticide, rape, homophobia, racism, sexism, fatism and just plain cruelty" (Farouky). Actor Aaron Eckhart, whom LaBute met at BYU and who has starred in several of LaBute's productions, offers this insight, "I read his plays and I laugh and say, 'Neil, you can't say this, and I certainly won't say it myself, because I'll never work again.' Next thing you know, the plays are running in New York and London and they're selling out" (Farouky). Despite how Eckhart feels, the following excerpt reveals why LaBute is intriguing regardless of what is considered acceptable:

Life is hard-it's a bitch (as many bumper stickers are happy to point out for us). I suppose that's why I like the person who spends more time working than on Facebook, the person who gets out there and lives his life rather than blogging about it or staring at the mirror wondering about anything so damn so inconsequential as looks or hair or yesterday. (LaBute xii)

In essence, he believes that one cannot write about the world if they do not play an active role in society. He presents characters against a backdrop that illuminate what is current.

LaBute represents an author and *our* world.

World of the Play

Connections

The following introduces a quote from the play, followed by my personal connection.

1. STEPH. "Do not walk out of here when we're fighting or I swear to God I'll . . . you better stay around and argue this shit out . . ." (8).

There was a great deal of fighting in my previous relationship. When the fight escalated to the point of silliness, I left to collect my thoughts. Then later I received a lecture about how this was a passive way to deal with an argument. In her eyes, it was not fair that I retreat to my "personal haven." My rationale for leaving is that I wanted

to cool off before I said something rash like “shut up bitch,” “I wish I didn’t meet you,” “I hate you,” and so on. Usually the fights ended over something trivial, like buying the wrong hand soap, crumbs on the counter, how much butter I put on my toast, my reluctance to get a haircut, work related issues, and other people’s relationships. These altercations took place either before I headed to work, when I came home from work, before I went to rehearsal, or before either one of us went out of town. Concerning one argument in particular, I walked out and she screamed, “If you don’t stay here and finish then don’t plan on coming home tonight!” This particular quote hit home. During this moment, Greg wants Steph to calm down, and he understands that the best thing to do is leave before he does something that could cause emotional harm.

2. CARLY. “Why would you ever say a thing like that about . . . and particularly a person you supposedly like care” (12).

At this moment, a friend offers her two cents about the altercation, even though she has only heard one side of the story. This is an aspect of human nature I have accepted after many years: there is always a villain in any relationship. This is frustrating because both parties are not accountable for their actions; only one the “hero.” It takes two people to have an argument, but like a sporting event, someone has to dominate.

3. GREG. “I don’t get you, I really don’t . . .” (44).

I have made this comment to several women I have dated; or I say, “She doesn’t get me.” On my ex’s first birthday away from home, her behavior was erratic. I picked her up from work, and she started yelling at me, “Where are you going? What are

you doing? Turn down the radio when I'm talking to you." Later, I was supposed to call after I got dressed for dinner; but, I was running late and forgot. I heard about this for the rest of the night. My explanation did not change anything. This was supposed to be an enjoyable evening, but it was more like an exercise in torture. During dinner, I thought, "I don't get you, I really don't . . ."

4. STEPH. "I've made this over the last however long . . . I dunno, since I left, and it covers all of your shit" (46).

After the breakup, my ex asked, "Would you like a list of things you need to work on for your future relationships?" Usually, I received a similar list the day after a regular argument. In this case, I was not interested since we were no longer together. This parallels the food court scene between Steph and Greg.

5. STEPH. "I'm taking the bedroom TV. I bought it with my own money and so I'm taking it" (51).

This line was uttered to me during a discussion over who takes what furniture after the break up: "I'm taking this, and this is mine. You can have the couch; I don't want it. Everything in the kitchen is mine."

6. GREG. "Stephanie, drop it! For once just shut up and fucking let it go . . . you can't just turn it off and on, all right, however you're feeling about a person . . . you can swear at me and, hit me-whatever the hell suits you, you just go ahead and do, that's always been the way with you-but you're not gonna be able to make up with me anytime you want . . ." (77)

I was flying back into town. After landing, the phone rang, and I heard, "Hurry up, I'm sick. I feel like I have to vomit and it's cold." I calmly explained that I just landed

and that I cannot exactly rush off the plane and plow through everybody. Her response was, “How about you say yes, I’ll be right there, instead of arguing with me.” Needless to say, this was upsetting. I did not say anything during the drive back. In the elevator, she asked me if I was mad. I replied yes, and explained that I was getting sick, lost my voice, and mentioned how her behavior was childish and inconsiderate. The next day I made a point of saying something that I should have addressed earlier on, and that was, “You cannot blow up at someone, say things that are rude, and one hour later act like it didn’t happen.” Like Steph, she had a pattern of “turning it on and off.”

7. GREG. “. . . I liked you . . . obviously even loved you in my way, but I was just drifting . . . the four years we spent together probably could’ve gone on another four or ended in a month and I’d’ve been fine either way . . . we were just getting by on fumes at that point” (121).

To summarize, this is how I felt about the aforementioned relationship. I was mentally finished over a year before the split. I wanted to work things out, but I gave up because it was not worth the effort. I am sure that there were reasons for not wanting to continue. I was in a position that did not permit me to be the person I am. We lasted on fumes for over a year.

Relevance of this Work to a Contemporary Audience

Materialism, media, and advertising are the driving forces of the play. Published in 2008, *Reasons to Be Pretty* still reflects society’s views on someone’s looks, and not much has changed in the last four years; society is still obsessed with appearance. Media and advertising reflect this obsession, and manipulate those who buy into their scheme

through television, the Internet, and magazines. The characters in the play are manipulated by their thoughts of beauty. Materialism does not only mean the actual material items needed to survive, but it also applies to those who view people as objects. Kent's behavior shows that he desires a girl that looks like a cheerleader, gymnast, or trophy wife. Kent has a trophy wife, which indeed sends the message, "Look what I have, you will be happier if you get one of these." Although he sends this message to Greg, he obviously is not happy since he is having an affair with a co-worker. Audience members may see themselves in these characters, which is one reason the story is relevant. LaBute's work is a love story; it is a story of love neglected and misunderstood. In the preface, he questions whether or not if we as human beings "really need to see ourselves that clearly?" (LaBute ix). In order to answer this question the audience must be willing to surrender to the journey of the story. In doing so, theatre patrons will recognize the connections between society's view on beauty and the lives of the characters.

Production Updates

It was unnecessary to update the production as the setting was present day, 2012.

Other Explorations

The author addresses the theme of appearance and looks in two previous plays, *Fat Pig* and *The Shape of Things*. Both contain characters that feel like they are not attractive enough to be seen with their significant other in public. They do not believe they have control over how they are perceived, and allow others to judge them, which results in unhappy relationships.

The following quotes from brainy quote.com address the conflicted idea of beauty:

1. “There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion”
(Sir Francis Bacon).
2. “If there’s anything good about me I’m the only one who knows” (The White Stripes).
3. “If a girl isn’t pretty like a Miss Atlantic City all she gets in life is pity and a pat”
(*Funny Girl*).
4. “Does no one see the beauty that surrounds them” (Earth, Wind and Fire).
5. “No one ever told me I was pretty when I was a little girl. All little girls should be told they're pretty, even if they aren't” (Marilyn Monroe).
6. “A great social success is a pretty girl who plays her cards as carefully as if she were plain” (F. Scott Fitzgerald).
7. “There is not one female comic who was beautiful as a little girl.” (Joan Rivers).
8. “The first girl you go to bed with is always pretty” (Walter Matthau).
9. “Let us leave pretty women to men devoid of imagination” (Marcel Proust).
10. “It has always been difficult to get Big Bird to be very pretty. Big Bird in England is much more gorgeous” (Jim Henson).

Production History

Premiere Productions

1. Lucille Lortel Theater (New York, NY), June 2—July 5 2008 (World Premiere).
Produced by the Manhattan Class Company (MCC). Directed by Terry Kinney
(Winner of Favorite New off-Broadway play from *broadway.com*). Cast: Greg—

Thomas Sadoski, Steph—Allison Pill, Kent—Pablo Schreiber, Carly—Piper Perabo.

2. Lyceum Theater (New York, NY), April 2—June 14 2009 (Broadway Debut for Writer Neil LaBute). Produced by Gary Goddard Entertainment/Jam Theatricals. Directed by Terry Kinney (3 Tony nominations, Theater Award winner (Play Actress), 2009 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding play, Outstanding Actor, and Outstanding Director of a Play). Cast: Greg—Thomas Sadoski, Steph—Marin Ireland (Theater Award Winner), Kent—Steven Pasquale, Carly—Piper Perabo.

Additional Productions

1. 2009: GableStage Theater (Florida).
2. 2010: Pinch N Ouch Theater (Atlanta), Stray Cat Theater (Tempe), Wyly Theater (Dallas), Phoenix Theater (Indianapolis), San Jose Stage (San Jose), ArtsWest (Seattle), The Studio Theater (Washington D.C.).
2011: Profiles Theater (Chicago), Paragon Theatre (Denver), TheatreSquared (Fayetteville), Coho Theater (Portland), SpeakEasy Stage Company (Boston), Guthrie Theatre (Minneapolis), Almedia Theatre (London), Jobsite Theater (Tampa), Walking Shadow Productions (Minneapolis).
4. 2012: Square Peg Productions (Melbourne), New Edge Cliff (Cincinnati), Kennedy Theater (Honolulu).

The popularity of this play shows that the theater world is still interested in a story “about people being drawn to the superficial, and how we all get seduced by the surface-and how that can be a thorny path” (Pellman). As previously mentioned, *reasons to be pretty* is the third part of Neil LaBute’s *Beauty Trilogy* following *The Shape of Things* and *Fat Pig*.

Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* remarked that the off Broadway version was a “superbly acted production” and noticed that, “Neil LaBute, the harsh and unforgiving chronicler of men’s darkest impulses, is making nice.”

Comparing *reasons* to LaBute’s previous work, Brantley concludes,

Mr. LaBute’s earlier works, (*bash*, *The Mercy Seat*) and screenplays (*In the Company of Men*, *Your Friends and Neighbors*) have been shaped by a glaring judgmental vision of ways men and women (especially men) use and hurt one another. If there was comic glee in these pieces, there was also puritanical contempt.

Shortly after the limited run, it was announced that *reasons* would open on Broadway, with some changes. New actors, Ireland and Pasquale, were added to the cast, and the author prepared a new draft of the script. In the original play, each character speaks a monologue at various intervals in the show, in which he or she discusses how physical attractiveness has influenced his or her life. The monologues were eliminated for the Lyceum performances to direct more focus on Greg. This change allowed the audience to better understand the world of the protagonist. In a *YouTube* interview,

LaBute commented on this process,

I took as many ideas as I could from the critics and audience members and particularly from the cast. Because the cast are the ones that have been out there every night and I said “How many nights a week did this joke work?” So I’m very open to the material to make it be true. (LaBute)

Writer, Richard Zoglin, discusses the state of Broadway at the time *Reasons to Be Pretty* premiered:

Looking for one place that seems to be surviving the economic crisis quite nicely? Try Broadway. After a bleak January, during which nearly a dozen shows closed (including former hits like *Hairspray* and *Spring Awakening*), things are looking improbably bright on Broadway this spring, at least judging by the number of openings. No fewer than 20 new shows will have premiered between the first of March and the end of April, bringing the total number of new productions for the 2008-09 season to 43 – more than in either of the past two seasons. It’s probably too much to expect Broadway Theater to reflect our current economic troubles,

but there's something particularly rarefied and irrelevant about the plays arriving this spring. Most are short (waiting out an intermission is apparently too much to ask of an audience these days); slight and largely oblivious to much that is happening in the world outside the theater.

The appeal of the show is that “it portrays characters that actually seem part of the world that the rest of us live in” (Zoglin). Brantley, who also reviewed the off-Broadway production, noticed that, “Mr. LaBute has exchanged misanthropy for empathy, reaping unexpected dividends.” He also compared the two actors that portrayed Steph:

Ms. Ireland is less a powerhouse of rage than Ms. Pill was, and this turns out to work to the play’s advantage. Steph seems vulnerable in a way she didn’t before. You understand the protectiveness as well as the exasperation she inspires in Greg; *Reasons* is a real love story now, and its final scene is a gentle heartbreaker.

Michael Kuchwara called LaBute’s play, “his most compassionate, appealing work to date . . . unquestionably it’s a highlight of the season.” David Rooney in *Variety* remarked:

As its title suggests, *reasons to be pretty* deals to some extent with a culture in thrall to physical beauty. However, the real subject of this taut, unexpectedly affecting drama is a man forced to take a long, hard look at himself after a flippant comment about his girlfriend's appearance kills their relationship. Nobody's going to call Neil LaBute a redemptive playwright, and even in this reflective mood, he's not exactly forgiving about men's failings and women's weaknesses. But there's compassion and even tenderness running through this play that make it one of his best.

It appears that the show had all the potential to become a huge hit, nevertheless its Broadway run was marred by poor attendance; the cast performed to a 30% filled house during the first month. The show closed a week after the Tony Awards and the consensus among audiences is that “it was frankly more comfortable on the small off-Broadway stage” (Zoglin).

The many productions are a testament to LaBute’s notoriety, and there are more scheduled for 2012. Already there are several clips of drama students on *YouTube*

performing monologues and scenes from this particular play. It appears that the run on Broadway did not affect the popularity of the production; it is possible Broadway audiences are not ready for the “bad boy”—LaBute—of American theater.

Out of all of the productions so far, the most important is the off-Broadway version that was released as a book in 2008; this is also the version that served as LaBute’s “golden ticket” to Broadway. What makes this version relevant is that the author left room for adjustments to the script. Despite the changes, the script must continue to possess the intensity that keeps the story moving. The most important aspect of all the productions is that the actors successfully tell the story of the failed relationships. Future productions will hopefully assist in making this show a contemporary classic, and it is up to all of the artists involved to maintain the integrity of LaBute’s work.

Problems—Perceived and Otherwise

Problematic Moments or Scenes

The play begins with a bang and then levels off. There is not an intermission although some productions have taken the liberty to add one. During scene five, in which Steph and Greg see each other for the first time since the food court argument, it appears that Steph is still somewhat distant towards Greg. It is not quite clear if she ever loved him at all. The relationship between Carly and Greg appears to be antagonistic throughout the play, but there are some moments during the final scene when they warm up to each other. The entire play reads like a lengthy shouting match—which is the writer’s style. The downside is that, this work in the wrong hands could result in one

long, loud, onstage argument. Regardless of the negative situations that occur, there is love in the play and it must be brought to the audience's attention as a necessary contrast to the main storyline.

Problematic Actions

On page eight, Steph threatens to destroy Greg's goldfish to get him to stay and fight. She plans to "wreck his life a little bit," but flushing a goldfish may not match her anger. When Steph tells Greg about her engagement, she admits that she still pictures him as her husband. She reveals that "part of me is still waiting for you to sweep me off my feet or something, some last ditch thing to win me back" (119). This does not sound like someone who would kill a goldfish, and Steph is not someone with a violent streak. Also there is a lack of physical action between Greg and Kent. Kent is the frat boy, the athlete, and the guy who initiates most of the physical contact with his buddies; "high-fives," slaps on the back, and punching. Steph and Carly, for the majority of the show, play "angry," so the audience must see their softer sides. During the fight between Greg and Kent, Greg does not want to participate. At the last minute he does so, thus making him stoop to Kent's level.

Problematic Character Interpretations

Greg is seen as being trivial at first, but, in essence, he does have a heart, and he sometimes tries too hard to be liked. Steph is "hell on wheels," and there are a few moments in which the audience sees her warm up. Kent is a stereotypical jock that will never grow up. Carly is a "trophy wife," who also happens to be the weakest character in the play. The only time she has a backbone is when she talks to Greg after Steph moves

out. During their marriage she has never addressed her husband Kent's frat boy behavior. It is difficult to believe that she is not fully aware of Kent's cheating.

Problematic Character Interpretations Caused by Actors Who Have Already Done This Role

The footage available on *YouTube* indicates that the actors are "playing the page." This play shows the decline of a relationship. For some reason, the actors in the clip are not aiming for what is at stake. In the aforementioned Chicago production, the two male actors were great performers; though they looked too mature for the characters they were playing. The women were talented as well, yet still Carly lacked some depth. The actor was competent, but many of Carly's layers were nonexistent. Carly was portrayed how Kent views her: as "the babe." In addition, in observing high school students who have performed scenes and monologues from this play, a lack of variety and depth of character was also apparent.

Problem Posed by Casting Difficulties

Casting the women can be difficult; this show is about the perception of looks. How does one go about casting someone who looks "regular?" The casting is crucial, since their appearances need to live up to the text.

Problematic Representations of Race, Gender, Religion

Religion is not represented in the play. There are ways to incorporate religious symbols in the set design, if desired. For example, there could be a menorah in Greg and Steph's apartment, or other religious decorations. The portrayal of gender is problematic, especially from the standpoint of Steph and Carly. Steph moves out because of what Greg says about her looks, and Carly is with Kent for the same reason. The bottom line is that

the women only feel complete when told that they are beautiful; someone else's thoughts influence the state of their relationships. Concerning race, it is not an element in this play; therefore, "color-blind" casting may be considered.

Problems Posed by the Thematic of the Text

If audiences are seeking answers to the following questions: "Why do men behave this way?" "Who determines what's pretty and what's not?" or "Are we that shallow?" then the answers will not be found in this play. The idea of the piece is to create a discussion about shallowness, and not to solve the problem in two hours. The audience should find their own solutions.

Problems Posed by Genres

This is a dark comedy. The audience has the opportunity find their own humor in the play. The actors should not "go for the laughs," as it should be organic.

Problems Posed by the Status of the Text

The published text is from the off-Broadway production; the Broadway production utilized a revised draft. The Broadway script is the version that all theatre companies are now utilizing, as is the only version available for performance.

Problems Posed by Dialects

The setting of the Broadway version is outside of Chicago. If any of the actors chose Boston, Chicago, Brooklyn, New Jersey, or Dallas as their place of origin, the problem would be to maintain the appropriate dialect for the duration of the show. Most importantly, a dialect should not offend audience members. It is up to the director to determine where the story will take place and to address any dialect concerns.

Problems Posed by the Need for Adaptation

There is no need for an adaptation, yet there have been several performances throughout the country, which could lead to overexposure. After a certain point, the show may need to go on hiatus. Fortunately, this was the first time this play was performed in Greeley, Colorado.

Problems Posed by Unusual Linguistic or Rhetorical Styles

As mentioned earlier, LaBute uses words as weapons. There is a great deal of profanity, and it is ideal to support the anger behind the words. For example, Steph says, “Fuck you, fuck you, FUCK YOU! FUCK YOU!” (LaBute 14). This is an excellent opportunity for Steph to use subtext to attack Greg, instead of swearing on stage because it is on the page. Greg has hurt Steph, so she wants terribly to stab him in the heart verbally, and everything she says during the introduction section should reflect this notion.

Scenic Requirements

There should be four locations used in the play: Greg and Steph’s apartment, the lunchroom at the warehouse, a locker room, food court, a restaurant lobby, and a softball field. There are no external scenes in the text. In addition, there is no mention of the time of year, yet deciding on these elements assists in determining wardrobe and lighting.

Special Effects

The special effects are minimal; there should be some background noise during the food court scene. There are warehouse sounds (alarms, intercoms, trucks, etc.) during the lunch scenes.

Problems Posed by the World of the Play

The characters are a part of a working class environment. Greg and Kent work at a warehouse, Steph is a hairdresser, and Carly is a cop/security guard. Their concern about looks is derived from what society dictates to them, which is an issue that affects all classes of people. The question, “What is pretty?” fuels the piece. The book, published in 2008, could be set in 1998, 1988, or 2012. The play is a snapshot of what couples go through when they are not happy in their relationships, and addresses problems concerning appearance, self-perception, and body image. The characters seen on stage truly exist, which makes this production effective, and the world of this play is today’s world, which is what critics, audiences, and actors appreciate most about the material presented on stage.

Applications

Technical Preparation

1. *Limitations and advantages of the venue.* The Hensel Phelps theatre is an intimate setting that is utilized for theatre productions, meetings and recitals. It is located upstairs from the Union Colony Civic Center, which houses theatre productions, the yearly concert series and the University of Northern Colorado Jazz Festival. The limitation of the venue was that the stage was rather large for my intimate set design. This production’s design would be better suited for a black box theatre such as Norton Theatre located on the UNC campus. In any case the actors adjusted to the stage well. There were several

advantages of producing the show in this venue. There was a light operator provided, as well as ushers, and box office staff during business hours. There was plenty of room backstage for the cast for dressing and warm up purposes. Parking for the run was a challenge since there was a load in and performance for a show at the UCCC Saturday night.

2. *Notes about Technical Elements of Concern.* During preparation for the production, it was apparent that this would not be a show that demanded much technical work. Specific music and sound cues were desirable, and incorporating an opening slide show as the introduction was imperative. The scenes take place in a living room, a break/lunch room, a food court in a mall, a restaurant lobby, and a softball field. the design concept was inspired by the Profiles theatre production in Chicago. The venue has a capacity for fifty people, so there was limited room for set pieces. The pieces used were limited to a table and chairs. This approach was chosen since it was not necessary to utilize numerous set pieces. From a production standpoint, this is a “simple” show and the stage needed to be stark and empty to represent the emotions of the characters.
3. *Resource pictures.* The following images were compiled from the production concept are represent visually what is indicated in the text.



Fig 6. An arguing couple. *greatmarriagetips.blogspot.com* Marriage and Family, 7 Jan. 2010. Web. 22 July 2011.



Fig 7. Upset Couple. *crosswalk.com*. Crosswalk, n.d. Web. 23 July 2011.



Fig 8. Beauty is More Than Flesh. *beautyspotleitrim.ie*. Beauty Spot and Holistic Therapies, n.d. Web. 21 July 2011.

4. *Scaled Floor Plans on Scale Drawing of Playing Area*. The following figures are ground plans provided by the Hensel Phelps Theatre.

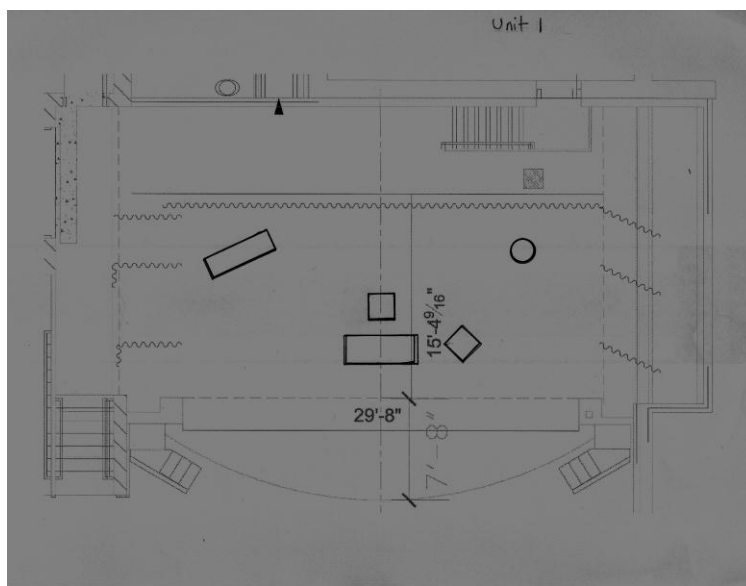


Fig 9. Groundplan for Scene One. ucstars.com/venue.php. Union Colony Civic Center, n.d. Web. 26 Feb. 2012.

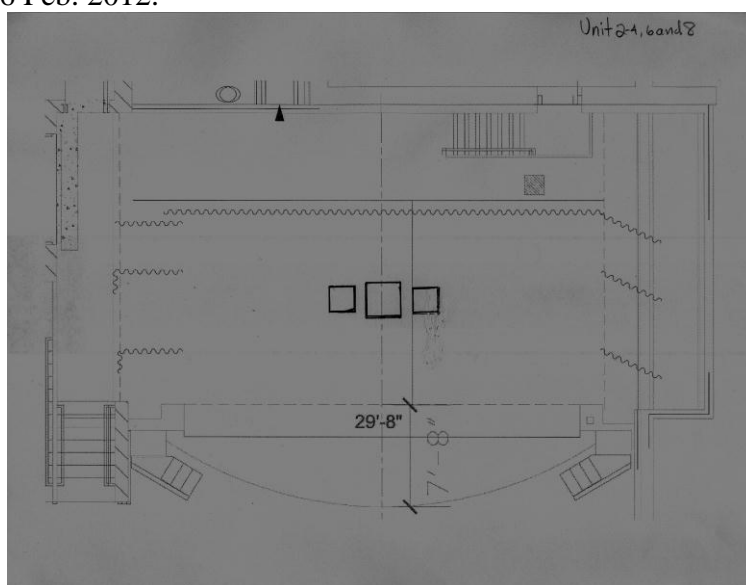


Fig 10. Groundplan for Scenes Two, Four, Six and Eight.

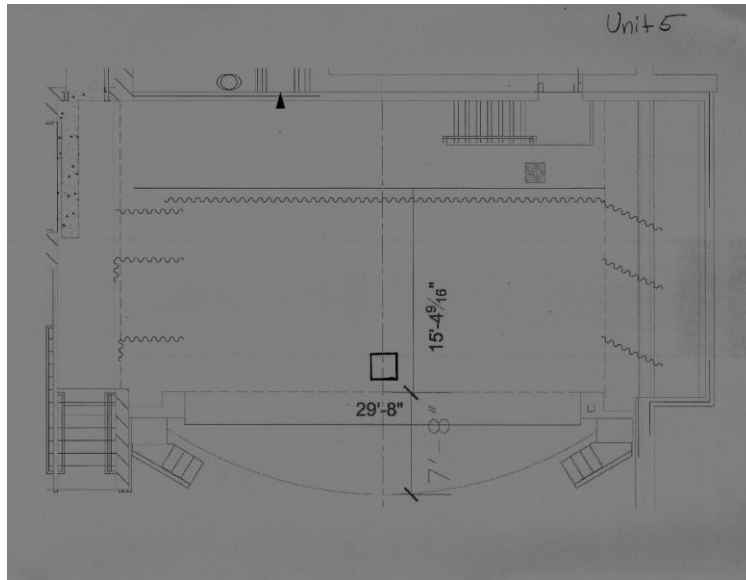


Fig 11. Groundplan for Scene Five.

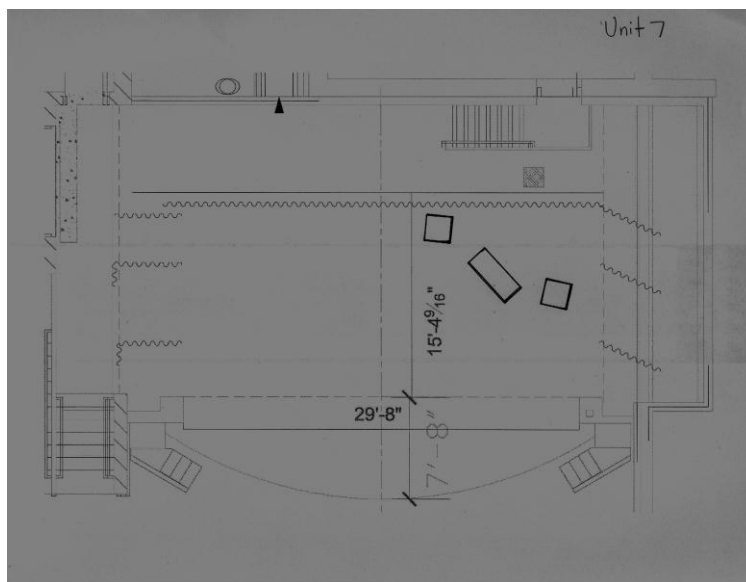


Fig 12. Groundplan for Scene 7.

5. *Lighting Plot.* The lighting for this show was basic. I did not work with a lighting technician until two days before opening. What we agreed on was that the lighting should indicate what time of the day it is. Also due to the nature of the show, I wanted the lighting to be harsh during the first portion of the show so that the actors would not look pretty.

6. *Costume Designs, Resource Pictures and Flow Chart.* The costumes for this production were provided by the directors and actors. The only piece of wardrobe that was purchased was Carly's work shirt.



Fig 13. Costume renderings for Steph during the design process.



Fig 14. Greg. [pinterest.com/AngSosi/for-jimmy](https://www.pinterest.com/AngSosi/for-jimmy). Pinterest, n.d. Web. 24 July 2011.



Fig 15. Steph. visualphotos.com. Visual Photos, n.d. Web. 24 July 2011.

7. *Properties List and Expenses*

1 Medium size table (suitable for dining room) \$25

2 Chairs \$10

2 Baseball bats: On loan

1 Softball: On loan

2 Gym bags-big enough to carry softball equipment: On loan

3 Bag lunches \$20 for bread, chips water and lunchmeat

3 Books (Hawthorne, Irving, Swift)-Checked out from library

Edible Items (apples, powerbars) \$5

1 Bouquet of fake flowers \$3

2 Cellphones: Actors used their own cellphones

1 set of keys: Actors used their own keys

8. *Final Production Budget.* A budget was discussed with Alpha Psi Omega, but never fully realized. The ticket prices were \$8. The cost of the posters were covered by Alpha Psi Omega and priced at \$50. A \$100 donation was received from someone who wishes to remain anonymous. The cost of the production overall \$121.

9. *Production and Rehearsal Schedule.*

~ January 2012 ~						
◀ Dec 2011						Feb 2012 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
22	23 Auditions Frasier 5 4-6	24 Post callbacks and sides	25	26	27 Callbacks 4:30-6 Crabbe 301	28

~ January 2012 ~						
◀ Dec 2011						Feb 2012 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
29	30 Post cast list	31 Off	Notes:			

~ February 2012 ~						
						Mar 2012 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 Read Thru 4-6 All rehearsals will be in Crabbe 301 unless otherwise noted	2 Finish Unit 8 (Greg, Steph, Carly) and work Unit 1 (Greg and Steph) 4:30-6	3 Unit 2 (Greg, Kent, and Carly) 4:30-6	4
5	6 Unit 3 (Greg and Steph) 4:30-6	7 Unit 4 (Greg, Kent, and Carly) 4:30-6	8 Unit 5 (Greg and Steph) 4:30-6	9 Units 1 and 5 (Greg and Steph) 4:30-6	10 Unit 6 (Greg and Carly) 4:30-6	11
12	13 Unit 7 (Greg and Kent) 4:30-6	14 Unit 8 (Greg, Steph, Carly) 4:30-6	15 Kent and Carly scenes 4:30-6	16 Greg and Steph scenes 4:30-6	17 Greg and Steph scenes 4:30-6	18
19	20 Greg and Kent scenes 4:30-5:45	21 Run Units 1-4 4:30-6	22 Run Units 5-8 4:30-6	23 Greg and Steph fight choreography/Improv day 4:30-6	24 Greg, Steph and Kent fight choreography/improve day 4:30-6	25
26	27 Unit 1-4 4:00-6 CANCELLED Ragtime call at 5:30	28 Unit 5-8 4:30-6 CANCELLED Ragtime call at 4:30	29 Ragtime opens-no rehearsal	Notes:		

~ March 2012 ~						
◀ Feb 2012						Apr 2012 ▶
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 Ragtime-no rehearsal	2 High School Day- Ragtime-no rehearsal	3
4	5 Run Units 1-4 (Offbook)	6 Run Units 5-8 (Offbook)	7 Run Show 7-9	8 Run Show 7-9, Steph-out	9 No rehearsal Spring Break	10
11	12 Break	13 Break	14 Break	15 Break	16 Break	17
18	19 Run show 7-9	20 Run show 7-9	21 Run show 7-9	22 Run show	23 Run show 7-9	24
25	26 Run show 7-9	27 Run show 7-9	28 Load in 5pm Tech rehearsal 6-10	29 Tech rehearsal 6-10	30 Opening night 7pm	31 Matinee 2pm Final show 7pm

The Casting and the Rehearsal Process

January 2012

On Monday, January 9, I attended UNC's Theatre department meeting. The agenda for the day was to meet with the President of UNC's theatre fraternity Alpha Psi Omega (APO), announce auditions for *Reasons to Be Pretty*, and determine performance dates. Auditions were to take place on the 18th, along with the semester One-Act auditions.

During the meeting it was determined that APO would provide a publicity team, technical crew and assist with the production budget. The rest of the week was spent preparing notes for auditions, and putting together callback materials.

Auditions were rescheduled for the 23rd for reasons that were out of my control. I was impressed by the amount of talent that day. The actors were required to perform a two-minute contemporary monologue, and many had great potential. I realized that calling back more actors resulted in more options since the same pool of actors was shared with other directors. Over thirty actors were called for a show with four characters. On the 24th the callback information and scenes to prepare for Friday the 27th was posted.

In preparation for Friday the following list of objectives was created:

- To stimulate effective choices for all of the actors that will be attending callbacks.
- To lead a productive, resourceful, educational callback.
- To inspire every actor to build upon his or her instinct and decision making.
- To recruit a talented group of individuals who are willing to take a journey with me.
- To congratulate all of the actors for their performances at auditions on Monday.
- To rally a group of actors to appreciate and dissuade their fears regarding callbacks.

At the beginning, everyone was called in and thanked for their hard work. This was also the opportunity for me to alleviate any fears that the actors may have had before they were asked to perform material from the play. As an actor, I am aware of how nerve wracking this process can be and I wanted everyone to be comfortable so they could perform effectively. Once the process was over, I was able to narrow down the possible cast. The following questions were taken into consideration: Is the actor emotionally connected? Does s/he have presence? Charisma? Do you want to be in a room with this person for several weeks? Does s/he have an intuitive sense of the role? Can you teach or direct this person? Can s/he handle the big moments? Does s/he have enough energy? Can s/he fill the theatre with her/his acting?

Ultimately, a musical theatre major was elected to play Greg, a theatre studies major to play Steph, an acting major to play Kent and a former technical theatre major to play Carly. With the exception of Carly, the cast were all freshman, and since we were already working together in *Ragtime*, scheduling would not be an issue during the first half of rehearsals.

February 2012

The read through on the February 1 went very well. In addition, there were other pieces of business that needed to be taken care of, such as rehearsal schedules, spring break conflicts and, last but not least, the nature of the play. It was conveyed that if anyone had concerns with the derogatory language in the script, now would be the time to address the issue; fortunately the actors had no issues.

Rehearsals ran smoothly during the month. In an hour and a half, there was enough time to run a scene twice. APO was contacted about publicity, and even with the

short time frame, things seem to be in great shape. So far, Greg, Kent, and Carly have a handle on their characters and are committing to their choices. Steph has good instincts, although spending extra time with her working on subtext and objectives was needed. Kent and Carly lead standard vocal and physical warm ups at the beginning of rehearsal.

March 2012

Ragtime opened the last week of February and closed on March 2, so there were no *Reasons* rehearsals during that time. The following week was crucial. On March 5, the cast was supposed to be off book yet they were not. This was also the week before spring break, so we lost another week due to vacation plans. Last minute conflicts resulted in losing a cast member for the last rehearsal before break. APO indicated that the posters and other publicity materials would be ready during the break and distributed. The cast was instructed to be off book since after break there would only be two weeks before opening.

When we returned from the break, the first rehearsal on the 19th was less than stellar. Actors missed cues, were not paying attention, and overall behaved as if they did not want to be there. The rehearsal was canceled halfway through, and the actors were sent home. Additionally, there were no posters, and APO would not respond. At this stage I had to take back ownership of the show, which meant no more excuses for not knowing lines, no more questions about posters and tickets, and no more rescheduling rehearsals for other conflicts that were not brought to my attention ahead of time. As a director, it is important that to keep everyone on task since we were to open in two weeks.

Since APO did not return my messages about programs, I made them myself, and they were put up two days before opening night. By this time I had lost my patience. I did what I could do to hold the show together. Once we moved into the space we finally got back on track. There were costumes, light and sound cues and props. On Thursday, the show previewed. That evening was the best rehearsal of the month. There were objectives, choices, raised stakes, commitment, focus, and great performances. It took two weeks to get back to where we were before spring break.

Performances

The transformation from rehearsal to performance was incredible. Opening night continued with the energy from the last rehearsal. From this point the show was out of my hands. I sat in the audience and watched as a patron and not a director. The major adjustment was the addition of the slide show at the beginning of the play with various quotes regarding beauty, while a jazz version of *I Feel Pretty* from *West Side Story* played in the background. Once the show began, the audience was engaged, and they were quite attentive. The cast continued to go beyond the work from the night before.

The second show, a matinee performance was the weakest of the run. There were problems with costumes, cues, and props; it looked like one of our worst rehearsals. What happened over the last two nights evaporated. After the performance I called a meeting to talk about what had happened. This was a prime teaching moment even though the actors were not my students. I did not want to single out the two individuals in my cast who made the most errors, so I addressed the entire company. I explained that no matter despite the number of people in the audience, they deserve a great show. Also, a matinee is still a performance, and not a warm up or pick up rehearsal.

The third and final performance was almost at the same level as the first. I was aware, however, that there was tension backstage. At this point my concern was about the show and not the prima donna behavior that was taking place backstage. At one point, I considered releasing one of the actors before the show began and replacing him with an actor in the audience. Since it was the last show, however, I relented. Overall, the performances reached their potential during the run, with the exception of the matinee. The character work was consistent. The technical elements were challenging, since I had a crew of three, yet fortunately my lighting technician was employed at the venue so the process flowed smoother than expected. Most importantly the dramatic arc was successful. My vision of this show was to ensure that the actors were able to execute a performance that forced them to reach outside of their comfort zones. The developments in rehearsal were successful, despite some of the false starts along the way.

CHAPTER III

PROMPTBOOK

Given Circumstances

Environmental Facts

Geographical Location, Including Climate

In *Reasons to Be Pretty*, the action occurs indoors with the exception of one scene. Half of the scenes take place in the break room where Greg, Kent and Carly work.

1. Scene 1 takes place in Greg's and Steph's living room.
2. Scene 2 is set in the break room.
3. Scene 3 is set at a food court in the mall.
4. Scene 4 is set in the break room.
5. Scene 5 takes place in the lobby of a restaurant.
6. Scene 6 is set in the break room.
7. Scene 7 takes place at a softball field.
8. Scene 8 is set in the break room.
9. Seven out of the eight scenes take place inside. Since scene seven is set during a softball game the climate is nice outside. Softball seasons begins around the same time as baseball season, so this can be sometime between April and September.

Date: Year, Season, Time of Day

The date and year is not mentioned in the play. Since it is softball season, it is most likely early Spring. The time of day is mostly after midnight during the break room scenes since Greg, Kent and Carly work the third shift. The first scene takes place in the morning right after Greg has returned home from work and Steph is headed to work.

Economic Environment

The play is set present day, so with today's economic instability, Greg and Kent work the third shift, so that they are eligible for shift differential. These are suburban blue-collar employees.

Political Environment

Within the framework of today's political environment, Greg, Steph, Kent, and Carly are people that are supported by the Democrats. They are known as the "common" people; they pay their taxes, obey the law, and work hard so that they do not live paycheck to paycheck. They are products of the system of hard work equals great rewards.

Social Environment

The social world of Greg, Steph, Kent and Carly is secluded. They spend time with each other every day, therefore creating their own "circle." Greg and Kent's actions break the circle, which creates social reconstruction within the group.

Religious Environment

Greg, Steph and Carly are invested in their faith, although their church attendance is inconsistent. It is their faith that enables them to make major life decisions and

embrace them at the play's conclusion. Kent is disengaged from their religious environment, which is the catalyst for his juvenile behavior.

Previous Action (See original script)

Polar Attitudes

Greg

At the beginning of the play, Greg's world lacks color and variety. He is content with his relationships, even though they are problematic. Greg feels that his life is mundane, and that the cycle of work, sleep and socialization is becoming stale. Greg's prospects are on hold. He needs to either guide his relationship to another plateau or disassemble it.

At the end of the play, Greg's world is vibrant. He realizes that there is a new beginning in store for him, and his relationships have improved. He is no longer with Steph, has become better friends with Carly, and realizes that he is a much better person without Kent in his life. His prospects look good. He has decided to leave his job and go back to school to become a teacher.

Steph

At the beginning of the play, Steph's world is on the verge of breaking apart. She is not getting anything she wants out of her relationship. She feels good about herself, yet does not understand Greg's feelings towards her. Steph's prospects are similar to Greg's; she is in a holding pattern and is desperate to escape.

At the end of the play, Steph's world has been mended. She is now in an environment where she feels she is getting what she deserves. Since she is no longer with

Greg, their relationship is more honest. She is happy with her fiancé since he is providing her with everything that she wanted from Greg. Her prospects look good; she is engaged and has received a promotion at the hair salon.

Kent

At the beginning of the play, Kent's world is similar to a locker room after a college football game. He is an adult still stuck in his junior year of college. His relationships are not healthy. He is married to Carly because she is hot, he is having an affair with Crystal from work because she is hot and younger, and he bullies Greg because Greg will not "man up." No matter what he does in life, and no matter where he goes, he is eternally "the big man on campus." Kent's prospects revolve around his softball team's winning the first place trophy, as well as how much he can get away with without getting caught.

At the end of the play, Kent's world is crashing around him. Carly is pregnant, and he has switched his shift so he can spend time with Crystal. He alienates Greg to the point of physical confrontation. His relationships are an illusion. There is no love anywhere, yet Kent feels that he can have his cake and eat it too. His prospects look shaky; he has lost his best friend and his wife has moved out, but he will be a father soon.

Carly

At the beginning of the play, Carly's world is stable. She has a job, a husband and her looks. She is settled in her relationship with Kent, and she is a shoulder to cry on for Steph. Her attitude towards Greg is not positive since he has hurt Steph. Carly feels that her beauty is all she has going for her. Her prospects are non-existent.

At the end of the play, Carly's world is in upheaval; she is pregnant and has discovered that Kent has been cheating on her with a co-worker. Her relationship with Steph remains the same, but now she has become friendlier and more open with Greg. She can confide in him. She is still married to Kent, yet they are separated. Carly now feels unsure about herself and how her future daughter will survive in a world that only seems to value appearance. Carly's prospects are not clear at this point, and she may become a single mother.

Dialogue

Greg

Choice of Words

Greg uses profanity occasionally, and sometimes he relies on pop culture references to make a point.

1. "... you're acting a little like one of those chicks from the seventies who started taking shots at President Ford or somebody . . . a fucking nutcase" (14)!
2. "So she can hear me talking-she's suddenly like Wonder Woman or something . . ." (12).
3. "My God, you're like a Chris Rock concert or something . . ." (13).
4. "Kent it's a fucking snack! Take it easy" (20).
5. "Different paths or some shit-what the hell was all that crap" (43)?
6. "... or call me when this, this miserable shithead that you're going out with tonight hurts you" (77).
7. "Yeah that's me, Drew Carey, Junior" (82).

8. "You run a pretty tight investigation there, Mrs. Columbo" (91).
9. "I felt like shit when I did that to Carly" (100).
10. "Fuck. You. Talk about someone that I care about like that then I say "Fuck you, Kent." Ya hear me? Huh?! Shithead" (107).

Choice of Phrases and Sentence Structures

Greg usually speaks in short sentences when he feels that he cannot win, but when it is time to make a point, he will talk longer than usual.

1. "Fine then" (10).
2. "I'm not! I'm just trying to be . . ." (10).
3. "Yep. Pretty much" (21).
4. "You're so angry you're not making any sense!-and I just wanna go home. Ya know? Just go back to the house and climb into bed with you, say "I'm sorry" again if you want me to, but crawl in and have you up against me . . ." (43).
5. "You can walk out on me for . . . for some horrible perceived slight that I did you, some horrible judgment I made about your womanhood; you can swear at me and, hit me—whatever the hell suits you, you just go ahead and do, that's always been the way with you . . ." (77).
6. "Seriously you haven't you know, spoken three words in kindness to me since Steph went away and that's all right, I get that, but you're really throwing me off tonight and I just wanna know where we stand" (83).
7. "Look, you do what you want—your life's a different thing than mine and if you can do that, realistically live with yourself after you act that way, then it's OK . . ." (101).

8. "I'm sorry Steph, but it's true-I liked you a lot, obviously even loved you in my way, but I was drifting , and the four years we spent together probably could've gone on another four years or ended in a month and Id've been fine either way- and that's how it was, we were just getting by on fumes at that point" (121).

Choice of Images

Greg's images are derived from some of the books he reads during his lunch break.

1. "It's Poe. Oh. 'S pretty dark . . ." (23).
2. "Hawthorne. Great short stories . . . Early American stuff. Kinda like Gothic" (56).

Choice of Peculiar Characteristics

Greg is not a peculiar character. He is an everyday hardworking, "regular" type of guy.

The Sound of the Dialogue

Greg is sympathetic and sensitive when he talks to Steph and Carly, yet when he is with Kent, he is "one of the guys."

1. "I said one little thing. A stupid thing. I know, I agree with that . . ." (39).
2. "Stephanie, this is crazy, all the stuff you're saying, because I really care for you . . ." (40).
3. "I'm trying to comfort you . . ." (41).
4. "Women . . . one day they're gonna save a little time and just stick that word in the dictionary all by itself . . . and any guy who stumbles across it'll roll his eyes and know what the hell it means" (56).

5. “You’re the most beautiful cow out there. Don’t forget that, OK? And I’m including your face . . .” (112).
6. “So go be happy then. That’s what I want for you” (122).

Structure of Lines and Speeches

The lines and speeches in the play contain an abundance of ellipses and overlapping lines. This applies not only to Greg, but also to the other characters as well.

Steph

Choice of Words

Steph’s words are violent, piercing and are full of profanity.

1. “. . . I’ll murder your fish when you’re gone. I’ll flush them or I’ll, I’ll do whatever it takes but I will hurt you and you will not like it” (8).
2. “Fuck “please.” Please is shit” (9).
3. “You’ll know it and I will pounce on you like I was death itself if you’re lying to me . . . Seriously. Like fucking death” (9).
4. “I know now that I’m not supposed to be with you, in some bad situation with you that we could fuck up by having kids or getting married or I don’t know what” (40).
5. “You’re wishing the guy gets a bone stuck in his throat or something . . .” (73).

Choice of Phrases and Sentence Structures

Steph speaks as if she is recounting what happened in the past.

1. “You said it loud enough for her to hear it, for her to repeat it to me in complete detail . . .” (11).
2. “You said some stupid shit and this is what happens . . .” (37).
3. “What you said about me suddenly made total sense about where we’re at . . .” (39).
4. “You said stuff. Said it and meant it” (49).
5. “And what you said, all that you said about me-even though it’s just the one thing-it’s completely and for all-time’s sake true. You meant it” (51).
6. “. . . my boyfriend-this guy that I gave a whole lot of my heart to-couldn’t find me attractive . . .” (74).
7. “You were never good about talking about me-keeping me up-to-date on your life or anything” (116).
8. “And so there I am and I get dropped off at my place this morning-he took me over to where the river is, down by that part of the park where the falls are-and I’m staring at this thing in the dark” (118).

Choice of Images

Steph uses imagery to explain to Greg what his faults were during their relationship.

1. “I don’t like your eyes. I never have. I think they’re small and piggish . . .” (46).
2. “Your mouth is wide and your lips are way too thin to be sexy” (47).
3. “Your tongue is like this little poker . . .” (47).

4. “. . . you rip your toenails with your teeth . . . and eat them, or nibble at them . . .” (48).

Choice of Peculiar Characteristics

Steph is a down to earth, fiery individual. She does not exude any peculiar characteristics.

The Sound of the Dialogue

Steph’s dialogue is rapid. It demolishes Greg during their interactions.

1. “No, don’t, do not “Steph” me right now” (7).
2. “. . . don’t try to Lance Armstrong your way out of this one” (7).
3. “Don’t do it! Do not walk out of here when we’re fighting . . .” (8).

Steph can also be thoughtful and reflective.

1. “. . . we’re talking about our lives and how we want a house and kids—you’re in my head. Yeah I’m seeing you” (118).
2. “. . . you know part of me us still waiting for me to sweep you off my feet or something, some last ditch thing to win me back” (119).
3. “. . . we’re both in a good place and one that we were maybe even holding each other back from” (120).

Structure of Lines and Speeches

The lines and speeches in the play contain an abundance of ellipses and overlapping lines. This does not only apply to Steph, but also to the other characters as well.

Kent**Choice of Words**

Kent is blunt and uses profanity. He has no problem speaking his mind regardless of what others may think.

1. “And getting all chubby is not the way to win her back” (20).
2. “Amazing ass, you know” (29).
3. “You like shit, clothes and stuff so you can cook and like that, right? Oodles of items that we order with our paychecks on QVC do I don’t get why you’re busting my balls when I say that I’m trying to be a useful member my team tonight . . .” (53).
4. “Puts a fucking crimp in my plans” (54).
5. “Carly heads to work now and over comes Crystal. Bam” (98).
6. “Your ex is an ugly piece of shit. Real fucking Alpo eater that I never understood your interest” (106).
7. “. . . man, your taste in women is, like, completely up your ass” (106).

Choice of Phrases and Sentence Structures

Kent’s uses of phrases are “locker room” appropriate.

1. “Are you out running? Or swimming? Hmmm? I don’t see you doing cardio work or, like lifting. Nothing. Athletes get away with that shit because they’re always active, chipping away at their bodies” (20).
2. “Good enough to get us that motherfucking trophy” (21).
3. “Heard who we’re playing next-it’s that fucking bailbonds team! Pricks” (57).

Choice of Images

Kent's sense of imagery is used to describe the opposite sex.

1. "... you think she looks good in those dress clothes you should see her in a pair of shorts" (59).
2. "She's amazing, she is, it's not just, like a, you know ... some teenager or whatever. Their skin is-I'm not being a perv or anything-but" (60).
3. "... a gymnast or one of those cheerleaders, that age. Tight" (60).
4. "Her face is, like ... ummmmmmmgh" (61).
5. "... she's got the most awesome features. I'm serious. These teeth that're ... and her lips. Find myself staring at 'em sometimes and her eyes are a color, I don't even think it's one you'd find in a box of crayons-maybe one of those bigger cartons, like sixty-four colors, with the sharpener in it" (62).

Choice of Peculiar Characteristics

Kent does not have any peculiar characteristics. He is immature at times.

The Sound of the Dialogue

Kent's dialogue is rough, and he has the tendency to boast when he is talking.

1. "See that's how you do it man. Treat 'em nice ... 'specially the ones with the badge" (29).
2. "I've been seeing her. Lately" (59).
3. "Listen to me! Like a fucking kid! That's what she does to me" (62).
4. "Something else. Nasty, really, but in a fun way, too, you know? Sexy-dirty" (99).
5. "... you wouldn't want me kicking your ass in front of all these people that you know" (103).

Structure of Lines and Speeches

The lines and speeches in the play contain an abundance of ellipses and overlapping lines. This does not only apply to Kent, but to the other characters as well.

Carly

Choice of Words

Carly uses very little profanity. She speaks as if she were investigating a crime scene.

1. “. . . I figure if you can look me in the eye and lie then at least I did everything that I can do . . .” (86).
2. “You truthfully and with full disclosure do not know anything that’s going on with my husband” (87)?
3. “. . . if I was to find a, you know, different type of hair on his passenger headrest or, or like, a photo or something-this receipt from a restaurant he’d been to, with you supposedly, but the price would suggest that another couple people might’ve been there-what should I do with that” (89)?

Choice of Phrases and Sentence Structures

Carly’s phrases are simple and to the point, especially when she is conversing with Kent.

1. “You’re not late” (52).
2. “Great. Point, set, and . . . whatever” (53).
3. “No, I’m tired of you now” (54).
4. “Doesn’t matter” (54).

Choice of Images

Carly's uses of images reflect Greg and Steph's situation.

1. "So it's gonna be . . . you know. Dark" (24).
2. "'Cause it gets dark at night . . ." (24).

Choice of Peculiar Characteristics

Carly does not embody any peculiar characteristics. She is loyal to Steph, she loves Kent, and she realizes that Greg can be a decent person after all.

The Sound of the Dialogue

Carly sounds as if she is unsure about situations that are not in her control.

1. "But what I'm not right now, what I don't seem to be able to get to . . . is someplace that makes me feel, you know, OK, safe" (85).
2. "Shit, I don't know if I can take another six months of this, you know" (91)?
3. "I don't know why God had to make it so, like exhausting to trust you guys. But he did. And it sucks . . ." (92).

Structure of Lines and Speeches

The lines and speeches in the play contain an abundance of ellipses and overlapping lines. This does not only apply to Carly, but to the other characters as well.

Dramatic Action

Greg

Desire

Right now, more than anything else in the world, Greg wants to restore his relationship with Steph. He wants to go back to school to become a teacher and leave his graveyard shift behind.

Will

Greg is not a strong willed individual. He has been in a relationship that has suffered for quite some time and he would rather let it dissipate than address the problems.

Moral Stance

Greg's morals are inconsistent. He is responsible, but when he is faced with conflict, he does not tell the truth. He will not admit what he said about Steph immediately, as she must wrestle the information out of him. He stands up for Kent when Carly questions his whereabouts during the day. This leads Greg to confess to Kent that he feels bad for lying to Carly.

Decorum

Greg works nights and plays softball in his spare time. His style of dress is limited to t-shirts, sweatshirts, jeans and baseball caps. He does not stand up straight, and he walks as if he were sore from the lifting he does at work. His speech reflects that he has had some education outside of high school. He reads classic literature and is the most educated of the group. His face displays the weight of the world that is on his shoulders.

Summary Adjectives

Passive—Apologetic—Isolated—Understanding—Sensitive

Initial Character-Mood-Intensity

1. Heartbeat: Elevated during confrontation, slow and moderate otherwise.
2. Perspiration: Greg is usually calm. Although he stresses out during intense situations, which leads to perspiration.

3. Stomach: The stress of the job and the hours he keeps cause his stomach to be upset. He is always on the move, therefore his stomach is unsettled.
4. Muscles: Worn down and sore, they show the effects of someone that was active when he was younger. They have gained more mass due to the nature of Greg's occupation.
5. Breathing: Greg's breathing is moderate. It increases during tense situations. During those moments, he breathes as if he is running.

Steph

Desire

Right now, more than anything else in the world Steph wants Greg to be thoughtful, considerate, and romantic.

Will

Steph has a strong will when there is something she disagrees with or does not like. She stands up for her beliefs.

Moral Stance

Steph values honesty, and is committed to everything she is involved with, whether it is her relationships or her job. She expects that everyone around her should be as honest as she.

Decorum

Steph's speech is loud and piercing. Her walk is moderate since she stands on her feet all day at work. She dresses nicely, and she wears bright colors. Her clothing style is creative. There are not very many people that dress like her. She carries herself as though she is comfortable with herself.

Summary Adjectives

Commanding—Vulgar—Flamboyant—Vulnerable—Hopeful

Initial Character-Mood-Intensity

1. Heartbeat: Strong and dominant.
2. Perspiration: Light to non-existent. Steph goes along with whatever the day presents.
3. Stomach: Steph feels distended, because she works during the day and she sees Greg in the morning when he returns from work, while she prepares for work.
4. Muscles: Steph is tense, due to the drama that surrounds her on a day-to-day basis.

Breathing: Steph's breathes deep from her diaphragm when she is talking. She very seldom speaks from the throat. This adds to the fact that her voice projects.

Kent

Desire

Right now, more than anything else in the world, Kent wants to sleep with every hot chick he can get his hands on. He wants to win the softball trophy.

Will

Kent is a strong willed person. His motivation is directed towards trivial matters. He focuses his energy on obtaining "trophies," literally and figuratively.

Moral Stance

Kent's morals are non-existent. He operates as though he owns the world and he can do what he wants regardless of who gets hurt. He behaves as if he is owed something.

Decorum

Kent, like Greg, dresses in t-shirts, hoodies and jeans. When he and Carly go out, his idea of dressing up is wearing a pair of jeans with a wrinkled button down shirt. He has new clothes but prefers to wear things that are old and faded. He carries himself as if he is a bachelor. His posture is straight, and he puffs his chest out. He resembles a peacock.

Summary Adjectives

Arrogant—Rude—Manipulative—Inconsiderate—Sexist

Initial Character-Mood-Intensity

1. Heartbeat: Strong and forceful
2. Perspiration: Heavy. Kent is very animated when he talks about women and softball. He is unable to remain still, therefore, he constantly perspires.
3. Heartbeat: Strong and forceful
4. Perspiration: Heavy. Kent is very animated when he talks about women and softball. He is unable to remain still, therefore, he constantly perspires.
5. Stomach: Kent's stomach is cast iron. Since he behaves like a junior in college, he can still eat like one.
6. Muscles: Kent has a great deal of muscle tension because he is married to softball. He is the type of person that "high-fives" and gives his friends headlocks.

7. Breathing: Kent's breathing is fast since he is always in motion. He does not
8. speak with a loss of breath since he keeps in shape, but he utilizes a lot of air when he is talking.

Carly

Desire

Right now, more than anything else in the world, Carly wants answers to her questions.

Will

Carly is a strong willed person, and she gets good results. She is similar to a detective when she asks questions. Almost nothing can get past her.

Moral Stance

Carly takes her marriage vows seriously. She is honest and believes that "right" is right and "wrong" is wrong. Her honesty is one of the reasons she is best friends with Steph. She is responsible and dominates in any situation.

Decorum

Carly wears a security uniform at work, and her hair is always up. When she goes out, she wears clothing that shows off her body and wears her hair down. She carries herself as if she were a model; she looks good and knows it. She walks with her head up high and displays that she is proud person. She is feminine, yet masculine at times as well. She may have been a tomboy growing up.

Summary Adjectives

Sexy—Confident—Assertive—Disciplined—Thoughtful

Initial Character—Mood—Intensity

1. Heartbeat: Durable and pulsating.
2. Perspiration: Very light. Carly will perspire at work since she is in a building without windows. Even though she is a security guard, she thinks like a cop.
3. Stomach: Carly's life does not affect the condition of her stomach. In fact she likes to eat. She becomes a little more self-conscious when she is pregnant.
4. Muscles: Carly keeps her tension under wraps even though it is located in her shoulders. This is due to her job and the behaviors of Steph and Kent.
5. Breathing: Her breathing is regular and not deep. In fact she breathes lightly, even when she is in the mood to interrogate.

Idea

Literal Meaning of the Play's Title

The literal meaning of the title *reasons to be pretty* reflects that if a person thinks something or someone is pretty, what are the reasons? What are the qualifications?

Usually when someone makes a decision or a statement there must be a reason behind it.

Symbolic Meaning of the Play's Title

The lower case letters imply that appearances are illusory. What are the reasons to be pretty? There are none.

Philosophical Statements (Included on the original script).

What is the Play Literally About?

Two relationships take a turn for the worse when it is discovered that everyone's needs are not met. Both relationships are at the point in which just one more negative situation, argument, or infidelity could cause a separation or break up.

What is the Moment of Climax in the Play?

Greg and Steph meet at the food court so she can borrow Greg's keys. When Greg attempts to apologize, it backfires. Greg does not say what Steph wants to hear, so she proceeds to berate him in public. When Steph admits that she did not mean what she said and that she chose her words just to hurt Greg, it is obvious that their relationship is beyond repair.

Why Does The Character Make This Climactic choice?

Steph is not appreciated in this relationship. She is confident with who she is and how she looks, and the fact that her boyfriend referred to her as "regular" and said it behind her back eliminates the trust that was established in the relationship.

What is the Result of This Climactic Action on the Other Character?

Greg is heartbroken. He realizes that the relationship had lost its spark some time ago. He was also feeling complacent and did not know his current direction in life. The breakup put everything into perspective for him.

Moods (See script notations below)

Tempos (See script notations below)

Pages 5-11

UNIT 1: "ARMAGEDDON IS HERE"

IMAGERY: It's like an ambush during a battle.

SENSORY IMAGERY:

Sight

train crash

Smell

burned rubber

Taste

extra spicy salsa

Sound

nails on chalk board

Touch

hot pot handle

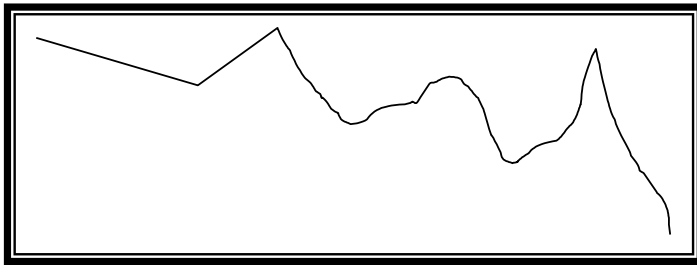
CHARACTER SUMMARY VERBS:

Steph—to denigrate

Greg—to placate

TEMPO: Quick and pulsating to moderate and slow

IMAGE OF TEMPO:



Pages 11-19

UNIT 2: “BLANK AND MARRIAGE”

IMAGERY: It's like someone gave a kid a birthday gift and then took it away.

SENSORY IMAGERY:

Sight

a team in a huddle

Smell

dirty clothes

Taste

stale potato chips

Sound

a crowd booing

Touch

cold concrete

CHARACTER SUMMARY VERBS:

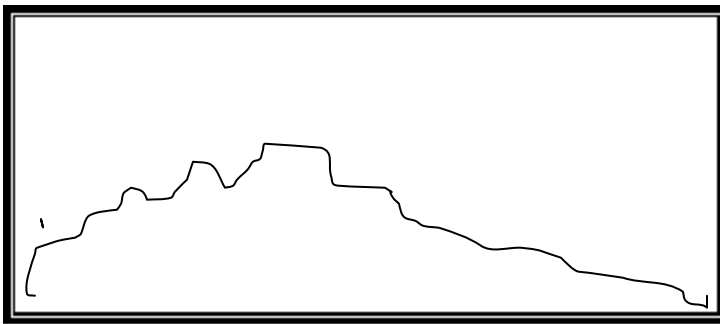
Greg—to confide

Kent—to boast

Carly—to criticize

TEMPO: Medium and percolating to slow and subdued

IMAGE OF TEMPO:



Pages 19-26

UNIT 3: “WHAT I *DON’T* LIKE ABOUT YOU”

IMAGERY: It’s like ripping a band aid off of your skin.

SENSORY IMAGERY:

Sight

a cheetah attacking its prey

Smell

gasoline

Taste

an undercooked egg

Sound

glass breaking

Touch

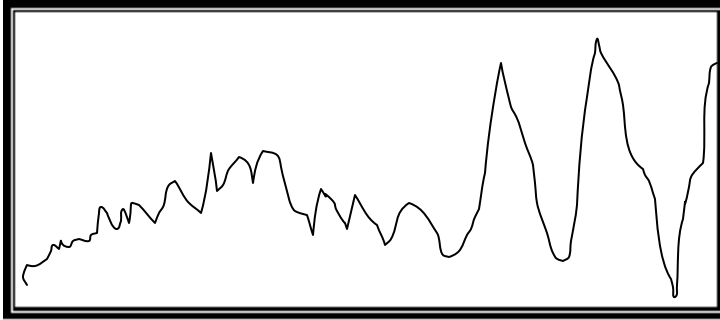
a new blister

CHARACTER SUMMARY VERBS:

Greg—to reconcile

Steph—to pounce

IMAGE OF TEMPO:



Pages 34-40

UNIT 5: “REUNITED DOESN’T FEEL SO GOOD”

IMAGERY: It’s like trying to apologize for something you did not do.

Sight

An infant trying to walk

Taste

lukewarm soup

Sound

water boiling

Smell

scented candles

Touch

a jagged fingernail

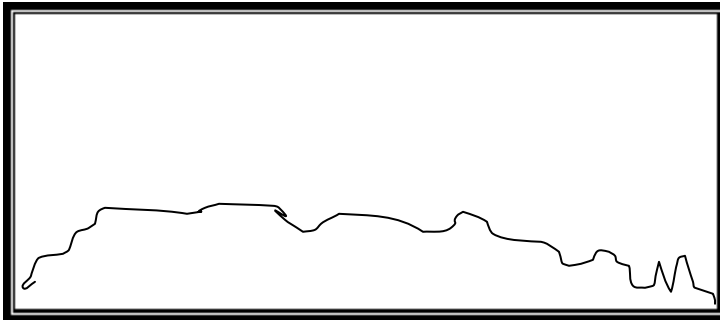
CHARACTER SUMMARY VERBS:

Greg—to take the hint

Steph—to manipulate

TEMPO: Medium and laid back to slow and pulsating

IMAGE OF TEMPO:



Pages 40-47

UNIT 6: “TELL THE TRUTH”

IMAGERY: It’s like being interrogated by a detective.

SENSORY IMAGERY:

Sight

Smell

Taste

Sound

Touch

blinding light

old books

dry bread

fire alarm

sticky floor

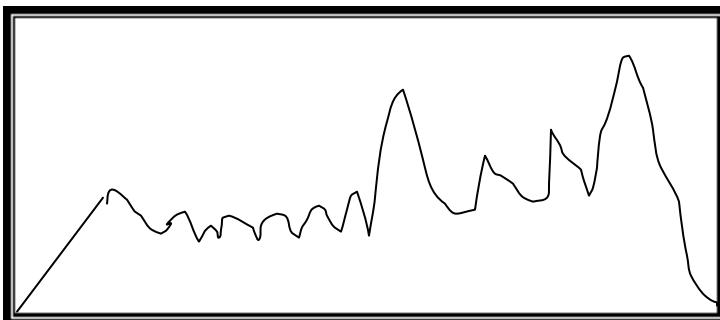
CHARACTER SUMMARY VERBS:

Greg—to tip toe

Carly—to gain entry

TEMPO: Slow and throbbing to medium and confident

IMAGE OF TEMPO:



Pages 96-110

UNIT 7: “PLAY BALL!”

IMAGERY: It’s like confronting the school bully.

SENSORY IMAGERY:

Sight

Putting out a fire

Smell

a slaughter house

Taste

hot tea

Sound

firecrackers

Touch

A splintery wall

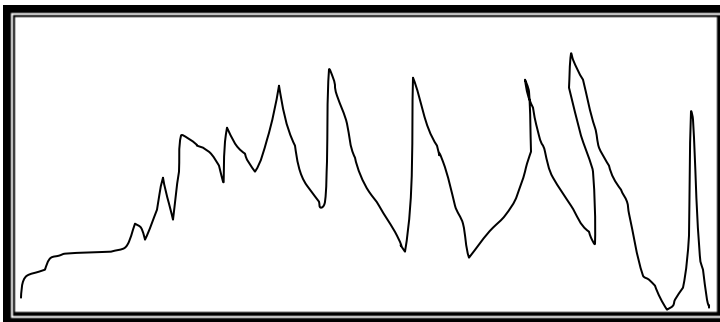
CHARACTER SUMMARY VERBS:

Greg—to sidestep

Kent—to asphyxiate

TEMPO: Medium and brash to fast and animalistic

IMAGE OF TEMPO:



Pages 55-61

UNIT 8: “A MOMENT TO BREATHE”

IMAGERY: It’s like cleaning a wound.

SENSORY IMAGERY:

Sight

Taste

Smell

Touch

Sound

Putting out a fire

a fresh salad

clean laundry

soft skin

wind in the trees

CHARACTER SUMMARY VERBS:

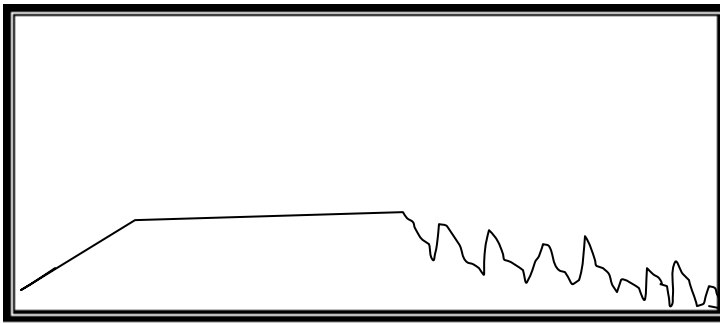
Greg—to offer

Carly—to absorb

Steph—to accept

TEMPO: Medium and nonthreatening to slow and punchy

IMAGE OF TEMPO:



CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Two years ago *Reasons to Be Pretty* was chosen for this graduate thesis project. The production was performed on March 30 and 31, 2012. After extensive exploration of every element of *Reasons to Be Pretty* over the last two years, it is time for evaluation and reflection.

The research process was daunting; nevertheless, it enhanced the production development, unveiled the message of the play and the intent of the playwright, and enhanced the actors' performances. A director can select a play, read it, cast it, and bring it to the stage, but it is the process of dramaturgy, preparing a promptbook, and creating a prospectus that creates a solid environment for rehearsals and performances. The objectives of this project were to direct, produce and design a play that would both entertain and enlighten, and this task was accomplished.

The guiding questions for this project were: Why is it important to analyze a character's internal and external qualities? How can one develop a strong ensemble? What is the role of the media in society's perception of beauty? How can a successful production with rehearsal limitations be produced? What is it about this material that will keep the actors and the audience engaged? How can one ensure that the audience understands the message of the story? Examination, rehearsal and enactment resulted in acquiring the answers to these questions.

Acting goes beyond memorization and fantasizing. Acting is listening. Acting is reacting. In order to embrace these concepts actors must create a background for their characters. The actor must consider who the character is, what are they doing and, where they are within the context of the scene. It is imperative that actor considers what the character wears, how he or she walks, talks, stands, breathes and interacts with others. This is what separates the actor from the character. Theatre is more intriguing when an audience is able to see the transformation from actor to character. Listening and reacting during a performance is stronger when an actor takes the time to focus on character analysis. This is a crucial element for a successful production.

Over the last two years, the reality of directing a quality production was apparent. Not only were capable actors cast, but they were also placed in a position that forced them to stretch beyond their current abilities. Actors need to be challenged with each role they play, and the director must push them to reach their full potential. The cast must work together, accept constructive criticism from all involved, and show up to rehearsal prepared to work. The director and the actors are a combination of leaders. Strong leadership leads to a strong ensemble. A strong ensemble is developed via teamwork, collaboration, professionalism and respect. The cast of *Reasons* was put to the test, and despite some obstacles, they were ultimately successful.

The concept reflected the message of the show. The cast wore no makeup and the lighting was hazy and harsh during the majority of the play. It is not until the last scene that the audience is treated to a warm lighting effect signifying a safe environment. This was the opportunity to address the infatuation with looks and appearances within society. The role of the media in society's perception of beauty is an unseen brutal force. It has

the power to uplift and destroy at the same time. The media is unforgiving, unrelenting and persistent. The images that society is inundated with are usually related to entertainment, clothing, and sports. These are the images that the characters in this play are faced with and they are forced to address them throughout the production.

The show was not only highlighted by opinions of looks and appearances, it was also driven by abrasive language. This script contains a great deal of profanity; in fact there is not a single page where a four-letter word is not used. If it is not a swear word, then it is a term that is considered to be politically incorrect. This kind of script is a disaster if not executed properly. There are scenes that are available on the Internet in which the performance is geared towards how many times a character can say “fuck” rather than how he or she focuses on the objective of the scene. Through rigorous rehearsal and repetition this trap was avoided in this production.

Preparation is fundamental for a successful production. Although the show opened in March 2012, several factors were in place almost two years prior. The play was selected in October 2010. Dramaturgical work continued through December. Further research took place during the winter of 2011, the design concept was created in July, and the venue was secured in November. Audition materials were prepared during winter break, and the rehearsal schedule was completed the first part of January 2012 immediately before auditions. These are elements that must be in place before a first cast meeting, especially if there are time limitations.

Throughout the rehearsals and performances, expectations were high. The process was treated as a challenge. The best way to address it was to leave fear by the wayside and dive right in. The fact that there were only fifty-eight days of rehearsal made the

challenge even greater. In addition to this show, UNC was mounting at least five other productions that were either in performance or in the planning and rehearsal stages. This made it more difficult to assemble a crew to oversee various off stage duties. Regardless, it was important to produce this show, not only because it was a graduate project, but because audiences deserved to experience its' message. Ultimately there was a crew of three: a stage manager, a light board operator and a backstage crew member to operate the curtain and relay messages to the actors from the stage manager on headset. The cast was responsible for moving set pieces on and off the stage. The objectives for *Reasons to Be Pretty* were not limited to directing, producing and designing a play that would entertain and enlighten. It was also an exercise in management, negotiation, cooperation and patience. These are qualities that are not only beneficial in the theatre world, but also in real life. Since this was a cast of theatre majors, it was important they understood that this performance was just as important as anything else that they would perform in their college career.

As a director, preparation is essential regardless if the production takes place at a college, high school, church, community theater or professional theatre company. The intensity of the preparation differs with each situation. The cast must know that the director is the coach, captain, and quarterback. The director should be able to answer questions, but it is also okay if the director does not know every answer. There is nothing wrong with, "I don't know but I will find out for you." Hopefully a cast recognizes the preparation and care that the director has invested into the show, therefore motivating them to meet and exceed the expectations that were set initially.

At the beginning of the rehearsal process, it was clear that something magical was about to take place. There were elements of the production that were worthy of recognition. The lighting design was simple, yet it added the right atmosphere to the show. The simplicity of the set was welcoming. The actors were able to tell a story on stage. The audience was receptive to taking the journey with four individuals over the course of 105 minutes without an intermission. What was also enjoyable about the process was the dramaturgical aspect of the process. Over a two year period character development was addressed along with visuals and location in relation to the storyline during rehearsals. The research process was instrumental in preparation for character work with the actors. It was exhilarating to see ideas and concepts come to life on stage.

Although there were great moments from a performing and technical standpoint, there were other components of the show that did not work. A great show is a better show when there is an audience. Unfortunately the weakest link in the chain was the publicity crew. A *Facebook* page was established for the show in lieu of postcards, bracelets, and “teaser” posters. The show was advertised on the campus radio station. This was due to the fact that one of the members of the cast worked there. The posters were ready two days before opening. The end result was a poorly attended show. This happened because there were several people involved with this project that did not live up to the expectations of the promotion team. There were many promises that were not kept, and due to the lack of communication, tensions increased two weeks before opening night.

Everything that learned earlier in the year was not wasted, which means that future work will be influenced by this experience. The skill of dramaturgy has opened up a new world of exploration and analysis. This allows the director to invite the audience

into the life and environment of the characters. If directors do not do their research, then their production may not be successful. An important piece of knowledge is that dramaturgical work is not solely the responsibility of the director. Actors, designers, and technicians are also dramaturges.

As a director, this experience was inspiring. It is very easy to fall into the director trap of “actors act, directors direct.” In order to be an effective director, the actor inside of him must be prepared to make the same choices and take the same risks. A director should be prepared to do whatever he asks the actor to do. The director must be willing to retain ownership of the production at all times. In the case of this production, it had gotten to the point where there were people in charge of certain aspects that did not fulfill their responsibilities. The reason this happened was that trusted individuals did not look out for the best interests of the show. There was a belief that certain people would be true to their word, but instead, they did not come through as they promised. The initial instinct as a director was to take complete control of the production early on during rehearsals. This was not followed at first but finally realized at the last minute. Directors must be prepared to assemble their own team before they initiate the production process.

Reasons is a tale of two couples who have arrived at the breaking point of their relationships. The characters are individuals who are unhappy with their place in life. They are suffocated by their own unhappiness. This unhappiness is the basis for the verbal, physical and moral abuse that is inflicted upon one another. The script contains physical action, dramatic tension and realistic dialogue. From an acting standpoint these are attributes that contribute to an appealing performance. The play allows a performer to embrace language and attitudes that they may not have used in their previous roles or in

real life. The script is well written and leaves room for the cast to grow into their characters.

The play begins with a loud shouting match between Steph and Greg, with no fanfare or warning. This was an effective way to get the audience's attention and keep their interest. The appeal of the show is that the audience identifies with the personalities in the story. What kept the audience engaged is the curiosity of what will happen to the characters. This is a piece of theatre that contains a message, and to ensure that the audience understands it, it the responsibility of the director and cast to convey the message accurately on stage. Dialogue, objectives, tactics and stakes need to be clear and concise. The questions that should be asked early on in the production process are: What should the audience learn? What should they take with them? It is the director's job to oversee that these questions are answered before opening night. If there are no answers then the message of the project is diminished.

The objectives were achieved, even though there were mixed emotions regarding this project. Selecting material was a simple task, but a great script by an accomplished playwright is not enough. There was the added responsibility of creating callback materials, creating a schedule that would not conflict with other UNC productions, designing a set, gathering props, and maintaining a positive and professional manner in and out of rehearsals. The reoccurring themes throughout the process were imagination, survival and perseverance. Imagination assisted with the technical design of the show. Survival was a result of working with a cast of four and a crew of three over the span of fifty-eight days with limited resources. Perseverance was important to uphold, especially during the last two weeks of rehearsals. The role of the director is to not only read and

analyze the script. The director must be prepared to coach, build, negotiate, defend, console and listen. Despite obstacles, it was obvious that this was a gratifying experience.

Overall, the final outcome of this project reinforces that theatre is not only a form of entertainment. Theatre inspires, provokes, enlightens, and engages. This may not have been the funniest, flashiest, show produced, and even though there were some peaks and valleys along the way, this was a truly rewarding project.

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