

# ***What If If Only: Caryl Churchill's Language***

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## Statement of Goals and Impact

Caryl Churchill's *What If Only* focuses on grief at a personal level. The way in which Churchill expresses grief in the play was the first thing that drew me to it, and what I hoped would resonate the strongest with the Purchase community. By not explicitly addressing how the main character's loved one died, Churchill crafts an emotional journey available for any viewer or participant with experience in grief in their own lives. My junior year, when I planned this project, was the first year back to something resembling normal class settings on campus after the initial waves of COVID-19 swept over the world, removing us from our dorm rooms and classes. As a theater artist, I understood theater could offer an outlet for the resulting pressure of crisis. By presenting my peers and mentors a play centered on coping with a personal loss, I hoped to provide a space and time for them to come to terms with the enormous weight of loss brought upon by the millions of deaths from COVID-19 and other events like school shootings, wildfires, and hurricanes. I saw a peace offering in this play that I, my actors, and my crew could present to a campus whose pain needed acknowledgement and whose grief might not yet have cooled from anger.

Previous generations faced things like war or economic catastrophe, and these events are acknowledged as the destructive, traumatizing forces they are. No one argues that the World Wars, the Vietnam War, or the Korean War were anything other than horrifically scarring for the people involved. The Great Depression is called "great" for good reason. But these events are different than the crises confronting the youngest generations today, and that difference is what I aimed to highlight with *What If Only*. In presenting this play with college-age actors on a college campus, I hoped to bring the narrative closer to my peers at Purchase to offer them a chance to come to terms with how they might feel about our world at the moment. Some of the oldest of my generation are fighting on the same battlefields in the Middle East as their parents

twenty years ago, because the undeclared “war on terror” rages on, out of our control, without our say, from before we were even born. Some of the oldest of my generation have survived not one, but *multiple* school shooter attacks. Many more of their peers did not survive because our value as children, as the future of the nation, as living beings, is ignored in favor of fearmongering and paying politicians to vote against gun control. My generation looks toward a future on this planet full of floods, wildfires, raging blizzards, superstorms each storm season, and we see not enough being done to preserve our future. There is a lot to be angry, confused, and heartbroken about, and not nearly enough people to acknowledge that young people need this pain addressed.

The way *What If If Only* approaches grief is individual, as it follows one character through one event of loss. However, as theater presented to an audience of many people with different experiences, the piece takes on individual meanings to each viewer. The openness of the story attracted me initially, and I saw potential to reach people of vastly different backgrounds across Purchase campus. We have all been affected by the pandemic and other tragic events differently, so what was most important was polishing the emotional honesty of the piece into a mirror for everyone to find space to feel whatever they needed to feel. As a whole, I believe I did accomplish this with my production. My actors were invested in the emotional truth they were telling, and during the performances, I could feel the air in the theater take on that beautiful quality of stillness when the audience is fully invested as well. Those audience members I spoke to afterwards remarked upon how powerful the piece had been, and how important the message was to hear.

Part of acknowledging the situation facing my generation involves leaning into the surreal and the unpleasant. The world of *What If If Only* is not “very nice,” as the character

Present says about herself (*What If If Only*, 11). The open honesty about how ugly the world can be was refreshing to encounter, and I knew I wanted to meet that head-on instead of implying or talking around it. The show opened with an audio clip of several news headlines about the pandemic, natural disasters, and school shootings, and it might have been jarring for some audience members. I hesitated on including it for this reason, but in a way, I needed the performance to jolt those watching into recognition or realization of just how much of the grief they would see felt familiar because of the world we live in today. In preparing Future and Present's performances, I worked specifically to dig into Future's abrasive personality, and Present's overt bluntness. Future's offers of "silver and white," of worlds without wars or pollution, are beautiful, but the character herself was overwhelming and only used Someone's grief for their own purpose (*What If If Only*, 9). For people my age, the future is scary and overwhelming right now, staring down climate change and an unstable war in Europe, and all that on top of a job market and economy stacked against almost anyone attempting to join the workforce. The Future is the most difficult character to grasp in the show, and I encountered a few people who expressed confusion about them and their role in the story. The Future uses language most removed from realistic dialogue, which took the audience slightly off-guard, since it conflicts with the realistic set and the more grounded dialogue presented by Someone at the beginning of the play. The language might have distanced the audience from the character by making it difficult to fully comprehend her as a character. The audience here at Purchase most easily connected with the character of Present, and her relationship with Someone. Her dialogue was more cohesive, allowing the audience to connect better to her message and her presence in Someone's grieving. The admission that the Present is not very nice and becoming more unstable was clear to people as well, and I was pleased with how assuring and compassionate the Present

appeared despite these qualities. As my directorial vision centered around the present world my generation faces, her character had to be spot-on for me. Without a convincing anchor to the present moment in both *Present* and *Someone*, the vision I had of Churchill's story would not hold up. But I believe it did. The play was not meant to be depressing, and the audience laughed and smiled as it played, never burdened by an oppressive sadness while they watched.

The performance of *What If If Only* presented to the Purchase College community was a moving emotional journey of grief and hope, and I am proud of my cast and crew for helping me provide a piece of insightful theater to the campus. I sought to create a story my peers could access emotionally, as a way to recognize the pain and collective trauma experienced by my generation during our short lifetimes. The audience reception was overwhelmingly positive, with many comments on the emotional clarity and expressiveness of the piece. The few confused reactions I received related more toward the abstract and slightly surreal nature of the work in itself. Having the concepts of Future and Present times represented as people on stage will perplex some people inevitably. But even so, I was immensely pleased with the performances of my actors and the efficacy of the sound and lighting from my designers. The performances they created together displayed Churchill's story of heartbreaking loss with dignity and humanity, ensuring the audience received a truthful experience of hope in desperate times.

## Reflection on Process and Performance

Like many people in my graduating class, my time at Purchase has been altered by the pandemic that interrupted my education (although it did not alter anything more, fortunately). To me, transferring into the Theatre & Performance program in my second year while online made it seem like my senior year approached far too quickly. I consider myself fortunate to have had an idea for this project before starting the drafting and proposal process in Junior Seminar, and I am continually grateful this idea required a small number of people to execute. The process of producing my version of *What If If Only* was a journey of navigating several firsts for everyone involved. This was my first directorial assignment outside of a class. This was my stage manager's first project here at Purchase. My lighting and sound team had no experience at Purchase running either of those theatrical elements. But I was confident in my ability to keep the project going forward, and in my access to faculty who could give me and my team help when we needed it. Overall, this experience strengthened my trust in my creative abilities, introduced me to working with technical crew, and contributed to my skills in collaborating with other teams as we worked to put up our festival.

The start of the process for creating a senior production met me at a point in my college career where I did not have the experience I thought I would need to lead an entire production. Having worked on several senior projects previously, though not in any directorial capacity, I understood in principle what needed to be accomplished, but I was constantly battling my own feelings of doubt over my own abilities. Fortunately, of the projects I had worked on, two of them had me involved in the production team, allowing me a better view of the more technical aspects of the process than if I had just been a cast member. As a directing student, this was invaluable. In Fall 2021, I was the props charge for the project *FrameD* by Leah Bickley, and in

Spring 2022, I was the assistant director for about half of the process of *Mac Beth* with Chris Padro and Sara Meade. Working on *FrameD* offered insight into production meetings and especially clarified the role of a production stage manager for me. I was not involved in that project from the very beginning of the production process, but seeing it through to the end, including tech week and long rehearsals for lighting or sound, informed my own approach as I prepared my proposal in Junior Seminar. With *Mac*, I got the opposite end of the experience. From the beginning, I was involved in production meetings, cast introductions, and cold readings, and I watched the show grow from an amorphous collection of scenes into something closer to a coherent story of betrayal. At that point, I was actively seeking out material and lessons that I could take with me to my own project the following semester, and was dismayed when the production team asked me to leave a couple weeks before going into tech rehearsals. This experience emphasized to me the importance of open communication between all members of a creative project, and the need for procedure if complaints arise.

The casting process and working with the actors cast was a delight, despite the bumps in the rehearsal process that followed. I had to abandon my original casting ideas at the beginning of the fall semester due to unavailability and injury among those I had hoped to cast. So, I held auditions and was left with a quandary of casting an actor I knew well, and knew to have some scheduling difficulty, or an actor new to me, but who showed great potential. As a director with little experience and a large portion of my senior project experience riding on this cast, I eventually cast the actor I had already known as Someone, hoping her notoriously busy schedule would be workable. The choice paid off.

The three actors I chose were intelligent, courteous, and eager to bring *What If If Only* to life with me. The first few rehearsals, where we sat down to really examine what kind of story



we were telling, proved to me they were capable and willing to explore the odd characters presented in the play. They quickly got along, and we were blessed with no “cast drama” whatsoever. The main issue I had with the cast was scheduling, as I had feared. We set up a schedule according to everyone’s availability for three days a week for two hours each day. With a play that runs about twenty minutes at speed, this was more than enough time to dig into the characters and speeches while still having some time to run the whole thing at the end. But with such a short play and with only three actors, it became apparent to me that when one actor was absent, our ability to effectively rehearse dropped significantly. With larger casts, there is a chance to change the rehearsal plan when one or two actors are absent, but I had very few options to alter my plans with such a short play and such a small cast. Luckily, there were not too many rehearsals like this, and I had left myself enough time during the semester to have some cushion room in these cases, so there was no overall negative impact on the production.

One of my favorite moments in working with my actors came in working with the actor playing Future: Judit. She was a freshman who had never acted at Purchase before this production, and she had never worked with a piece of text as complex as Churchill’s writing. The Future is an odd character, with unusual, jumbled speech patterns threading throughout enormous blocks of text. The two main struggles were getting the language accurate to what Churchill had written, and then figuring out how to infuse it the energy I wanted from the character. I felt Future should be a lively, excited character, to the point of overwhelming. When I couldn’t seem to get the energy I wanted in rehearsal with the blocking we were trying. I developed an exercise to try out. I told Judit to forget all the blocking we had just done, and to focus exclusively on one thing: she had to chase Brisa (who played Someone) around; she was not allowed to let Someone get away from what she was trying to tell her. My instructions to

Brisa were to move according to whether her character wanted to listen to what was said, or wanted to get away instead. The exercise worked well, and we re-blocked Judit and Brisa's scene around the new shape and the new energy they found in the exercise. I found that, because Churchill's text is more unconventional compared to other works these actors had seen, giving the actors exercises based more on energy and emotion instead of psychology or character was much more helpful to them and to the play as a whole. As long as they knew the emotional direction that guided the dialogue, they could find their way through the words much faster and more believably than when they had first been trying to rationalize the meaning of each word in the text and their characters' minds.

In a perfect world, a creative team should work as smoothly as possible towards a shared end goal. It's not a perfect world, but I do think I got pretty close to one, thanks to the people I chose. Firstly, there was the process of finding a stage manager. I had no idea how that relationship would play out over the course of the process, and I would have played it differently if I had the chance. The play only had three actors, and no excess of sound or lighting cues that I could foresee, so the role of the stage manager should have been scheduling rehearsals and keeping track of the actors. Those aspects lost definition throughout the rehearsal process, with the actors mainly contacting me if they had conflicts not listed ahead of time, and with me calling breaks in rehearsal instead of my stage manager Chris. I would have liked to have been clearer with him about his roles and expectations, but unfortunately, I was uninformed. The only stage managers I had worked with previously had been almost overly eager to take on those roles, and as an inexperienced director working with a stage manager new to Purchase College, the exact needs and expectations I had grown used to were not explicitly addressed. However, that aside, once the show got into tech week, Chris' outside experience in calling shows and

working with lighting and sound teams was invaluable to me. He worked well with the other stage managers and soothed my silent nerves over the whole tech rehearsal process.

Working with a lighting designer and the lighting and sound board operators was a first for me as well. I knew their jobs were important, and I had been in tech rehearsals for *FrameD* while the director had been working with both of them, but I had little understanding of how to approach their process and how to meld them into the vision. It was surprisingly easy. Our lighting designer, Matt, also designed the other two shows in our festival, which, for a freshman, was truly impressive. I sat down with them and my stage manager to explain the story behind our play, and to ask what their experience level was to gauge if they would need extra help from Peter Sprague to learn the technology. They came to the table (or couch, rather) with beautiful ideas, offering ways to translate the story they heard into a light show. All three shows in the festival were lucky to have worked with Matt, as they were intelligent and flexible with all of us. My show had very few cues for lights, but the ones we did have had to be specific, and Chris, Matt, and my actors were patient and persevered as we worked together to get them all just right. Our sound designer Daniel was less involved with the whole process, only because he was employed only to create one sound cue for the top of the show, and our board operator would click Go to start the show. Communication there was difficult, and I wasn't entirely happy with the resulting sound cue. My intention was to create a medley of news headlines about various crises around the world—something to condense the sense of hopelessness, fear, or collective trauma into an audible function. It included mentions of the Queen of England passing, the COVID-19 pandemic, the increase in school shootings in the US, and Hurricane Maria in the Caribbean, and I had wanted to include something about Russia's war on Ukraine, but that sadly never made it in. I certainly learned what happens when lines of communication are not as open

as they need to be, because the main reason the sound was so hard to coordinate was a lack of reliable communication between myself and the designer. In a professional reality, my stage manager could have helped foster more effective communication during production meetings and designer check-ins. Still, what we got was useable and effective in aiding our storytelling.

The goal of the performance was to condense the story to something as specific as possible to make it understandable to a larger audience while still keeping a sense of universality. I worked with my cast to solidify as many details about Someone's story as we could. How long had their relationship lasted? When had their loved one died? What kind of relationship was it? What in the set might draw from their relationship? Focusing on a concrete character instead of the emotional journey was useful in giving the actors something tangible to work from, despite the sometimes-baffling text. I wish I had worked more on personalizing the characters Future and Present, though. In working with Michi Barall on directing *Yaneura/The Attic*, I came to appreciate the value in finding a story arc for each character individually, then blending them together as one. Defining the Present and Future as individuals could have solidified their relationship with Someone throughout the play. Regardless, I was pleased with my ability throughout the rehearsal process to come to rehearsal with questions for the actors to explore the world of the play. Planning out what to do in each rehearsal was a concern of mine going into the process. The actors asked intelligent questions that gave everyone something new to think about, and I was proud of their dedication to a complex script like *What If If Only*.

This was my first opportunity to experience the production process of a play from start to finish, albeit on a small scale, and it was a rewarding, enriching project for me. In turn, I believe it was a valuable opportunity for the Purchase campus to experience a complex and emotionally intelligent play. From the beginning, I wanted the production to create a space of emotional

vulnerability for audience members to share the grief and slowly start to heal with the characters on stage. Learning how to work with a production team came easily with the people I found, and my actors taught me useful lessons on character arcs and emotional continuity as we explored the text together. After the dust has settled on this production, and after my work on *Yaneura/The Attic*, I possess better skills in rehearsal planning and working with stage management, both of which will serve as part of a solid foundation in directing as I move forward into my post-graduate career.

## Listen for the Story

Musical underscore, rhythmic repetitive motion performed on stage, and the words coming out of the actors' mouths—these elements serve crucial roles in creating a unique soundscape on stage for an audience to hear. In particular, the language a playwright employs can drastically alter and enhance the experience of a play. One playwright known for consistently experimenting with textual and dramatic structures over a multidecadal career is Caryl Churchill. Throughout many of her works, the language serves to go beyond expressing characters' thoughts and intentions and crosses into an almost musical sound. The patterns and sounds of spoken word become as important as their meanings in the story, with words functioning as musical notation. Churchill has experimented with language throughout her long career as a writer in both long and short-form drama, and in various social and political contexts as well. Her exploration of language in the plays *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* (1971), *The Skriker* (1994), and *What If If Only* (2021), differentiates characters, such as the Skriker, Vivian, or the Futures, as contesting temporal or human boundaries, and relies on experimenting with grammatical structure to communicate how different characters impact the stories told on stage.

### *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*

This short play, first produced as a BBC radio drama in 1971, depicts a view of a future in economic and environmental crisis. Its language strengthens and fleshes out how the three characters relate to their harsh world, depending on their ages and experiences. The decades between World War II and 1990 in Britain were tumultuous, as they were in many other countries torn by combat or emerging from colonial rule. Britain saw the end of its Empire across the globe, and a growing immigrant population meant urban expansion. Burgeoning

industry continuously encroached on natural environments (Black). Life expectancy went up and birth rates remained stagnant, leading to fewer children and more adults. Both the over-expansion of urban life and the waning birthrate appear as underpinnings in the world Churchill creates in ...*Not Enough Oxygen*. Many commentators in the 1960s and '70s called Britain almost “ungovernable” due to the rising unrest among unions, coal miners, and the Troubles in Northern Ireland (Black). Yet, this period also saw progressive legal actions, including decriminalizing homosexuality and abortion. The play mentions couples required to enter a lottery to earn a license to have a child, and must have permission to get an abortion for an unlicensed child, marking a contrast between the supposedly “ungovernable” past of the mid-nineteenth century with this micromanaged future in 2010. In a rapidly changing country, Churchill looked towards a future shaped by these contemporary social issues. The genre of radio dramas allowed her the freedom to explore this hypothetical future, in part by giving a bigger role to how words and speech affect the world of the play.

*Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* is set in 2010 as originally seen from 1971. The future suggested in the play extrapolates from the time at which it was written, depicting a world in which the issues facing the country in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have become more pronounced in this new future. For example, one can buy canned oxygen to spray around a room to relieve the ill-effects of not enough oxygen in the air. Having children is a difficult and expensive proposition, highly regulated by the government. The natural world is fading, with most plants and animals disappeared from “the Londons,” a term that hints at egregious urban sprawl. Without a visual perspective for the audience listening to the radio drama, the world these characters inhabit already begs the use of imagination from the listeners. Instead of a stage and set, the audience must merely listen and fabricate the environment from their own experiences and the clues from

the text. The radio drama is already removed from the whole of reality in that it exists only in an auditory form. The imaginations of the listeners are informed by the whole reality, thereby connecting the play to the contemporary world through each listener. Each listener can form an individual connection to the play and a slightly different interpretation, while still experiencing the story with millions of other people at the same time.

The action of ...*Not Enough Oxygen* takes place in Mick's small apartment in the London, featuring a woman Vivian and Mick's son Claude. The differences in spoken syntax separate one character from the next, amplifying preexisting social and age gaps. Mick's speech is recognizable, with the expected cadence of an Englishman of proper upbringing. He tells Claude, "You're not the first person to see horrors" when Claude explains his charitable actions by pointing out what he sees as faults in the world (51). Claude is young, traveling around the world for his work, and earning a fair bit of money doing it, although he rarely spends the money on himself or others. His speech is similar to his father's, but his phrases are clipped slightly, and his cadence never develops to full speed. "Just came to see my father. Thought he'd be glad afterwards that he saw me once more first," he says, unsettlingly at peace with some sort of ending he set for himself, a last goodbye to his father (53). The stilted speech reflects Claude's dissatisfaction and feelings of purposelessness in the ruined world around him, although he hides them well behind the education his father no doubt secured for him. The character most often speaking in unusual ways is Vivian, the younger married woman who lives in the same building as Mick and often comes up to his room because she loves him. She has a nervous disposition, and cannot remember a time when the skies were blue. Her speech is not jumbled or overlapping, but repetitive, almost as if she had a kind of stutter. She tells Mick, "Spoke caretaker, caretaker says speak manager, manager says local authority local authority won't give us won't give us the



money” (39). Her sometimes-jarring repetitions are both part of her character and somewhat part of the world she inhabits, like another Churchill character, the Skriker, was to hers, to be examined later. The dismal world full of smog, smoke, and bad air seems to have seeped into Vivian’s person as she grew up in it, unlike Mick. Claude and Vivian know nothing of the city before it was consumed by whatever crisis covered it in choking smog. The gap between these two and Mick is not just generational, but cataclysmic, in the sense that Mick is from some “before time,” while Claude was “one of the last children born in the Londons” before it became too expensive to buy the licenses to have children (51). Mick tells Vivian she may be able to help him communicate better with his son because she is closer to his age, yet she rarely speaks directly to Claude. In many ways, her unique syntax and her nervousness make her an outcast in the conversation. As the only female character, it works to create an isolating effect as well. The differences between her character and the others parallel the differences Mick sees between the world he grew up in and the world in which he currently lives. To have a person embody some of the imagined future’s faults as Vivian does gives the audience an understanding of how a world like hers can intimately change a human being, and a reflection point to consider how they might react to such a world.

The genre of radio dramas has an interesting relationship with the spoken word. Many of Churchill’s early short works were radio dramas, and they feature some of her early experiments in language and spoken word that she refines in later writing. As in any radio drama, the importance of the words fell less on their meanings and more on their sounds and the aural landscape they created for the listener. Many of Churchill’s plays featuring unique language or speech patterns have this quality. A production that can only be heard must incorporate words both as a means of communication, and as the only way of bringing the listener deeper into the

world of play. While Churchill has not credited Shakespeare as an influence, he often chooses words, like Churchill, “to create the rhythm he seeks... sometimes to give a character his or her own speech pattern or to allow the character to speak in a special way” (Mowat and Werstine). Both playwrights use the rhythm of language to offer insights into character circumstance and emotional state.

The radio drama format gave Churchill the creative freedom to navigate new ways of storytelling, and she took full advantage of it. By using a wash of dialogue, “the sounds of words come to the foreground, while their meaning slips to the background” (Frattarola). Vivian’s speech has a different cadence than the men, and even if the listener knew no English, it would be noticeable as something to set her apart from the other characters. The world the characters inhabit has robbed them of so many freedoms already: the freedom to walk outside, the freedom of living in multiple rooms, the freedom to start families on their own, and in the case of Vivian, their freedom to communicate normally. Mick’s nostalgia for the London of the past is almost ironic, considering the numerous conflicts and controversies facing England in the 1960s and ‘70s, and yet, the future presented as 2010 seems worse. Churchill presents how the future has affected these three people individually; it impacted their relationships, their words, and their health, yet they never explicitly state what caused the damage. She leaves that up to the audience to interpret based on their own reality, whatever they might see there. The audible differences between each character’s speech, combined with the passing descriptions of their hostile, climate-ravaged world in 2010, are her tools to demonstrate how a discordant present can influence the formation of an unstable future.

*The Skriker*

Like *...Not Enough Oxygen*, the cultural and political context when *The Skriker* premiered in England greatly influenced the reception and interpretation of the work. The play premiered in 1994, and Churchill had been working on it for quite some time before that. Margaret Thatcher had recently been defeated as the UK's Prime Minister, having served from 1979 until 1990. Several of the policies enacted during those years had devastating effects on economic and social inequality, including child poverty rates more than doubling (Dean). The generation growing up in the world created by these changes found itself in a strangely hostile world, much like the play's main characters, Josie and Lily. Churchill uproots the contemporary issues surrounding her play and recontextualizes them within a world of the fantastical. Within the harsh and unforgiving landscape of this fantastical world, the struggles of the two young characters do not feel out of place, serving to highlight the severity of the issues facing contemporary youth in the UK.

The story of *The Skriker* takes place in another kind of future, one where society has devolved and the mythic and fantastical have sway over human lives. While the world in *...Not Enough Oxygen* seems to be a manmade climate catastrophe, the world the characters inhabit in *The Skriker* contains more elements of mythos and the supernatural blending with human calamity, and the language featured in the play reflects this combination. First and foremost, the character of the Skriker hinges on her unique language and ability to morph her speech patterns to the situation. There is an opening speech for this play, and it is immense, dense, and seemingly nonsensical. The Skriker melds and morphs words from one phrase into the next and the next. The individual words are indeed words, as Derek Attridge points out when comparing Churchill's abstract writing in this play to the writing by James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Churchill uses, as a "substitute for Joyce's technique of lexical and phrasal *superimposition*, a

technique of lexical and phrasal *overlapping*, maintaining the *Wake*'s ability to present quite disparate meanings simultaneously" (Attridge). The Skriker speaks in roundabout and overlapping sayings, homophones, and the occasional song, as in this passage:

Out of her pinkle lippety loppety, out of her mouthtrap, out came my secreted garden  
flower of my youth and beauty and the beast is six six six o'clock in the morning comes  
the electric petrel bomb. (*The Skriker*, 1)

The audience's ears cannot possibly pick out each reference or clever quip given by the Skriker in her opening four and a half pages of text, but every audience member will pick up the general framework of the story threaded through the overlapping phrases. In a sense, Churchill is building a landscape painting with every line or phrase adding another layer of color or another shape to the overall piece. Eventually, when enough come together, the image reveals itself. By just examining the individual strokes and colors, the entire image would be obscured. In the case of *The Skriker*, the landscape is a hostile one, disorienting and overwhelming. The world is similar in hostility to *...Not Enough Oxygen*, and both feature unconventional syntax and vocabulary as methods to inform the audience of this strangeness.

But beyond shaping the framework of the world, the Skriker's ability to change her language use throughout the play extends her power over the story itself and over the two girls she is following. The two girls, Josie and Lily, are just two teenage girls, and they talk to each other like teenage girls talk with their friends—with the added caveat that they have both gotten pregnant. Josie killed her baby when it was days old before the action of the play, and Lily has her baby half-way through the play. Their language helps define their world for the audience, just as the Skriker's language helps define who she is playing at any given moment. The Skriker's speech ranges from understandable conversation to riddles or vague references. But

when she is revealed as she is, a mythic queen of the Underworld, her speech slips back into her overlapping sing-song from the opening monologue. This contrast in language accompanies the contrast of Lily and Josie's youth, innocence, and—for lack of a better word—fertility, to that of the Skriker's ancient cosmic power, dogged pursuit, and innately chaotic nature.

A final point about the language in *The Skriker* would be about what is not said in the play. As Churchill described it, “a number of stories are told, but only one with words” (Kritzer). Truly, the words of the play only tell a fraction of what happens on stage. During the play, while the girls navigate the catastrophic world of mental illness and teen motherhood, the world around them is filled with characters and creatures from folklore and myth going about their own tasks in the background. In the first scene, the stage directions describe this: “A YOUNG MAN, who is a BROWNIE, comes in and starts sweeping and cleaning. The GREEN LADY and the BOGLE disappear when the girl looks away from the telescope [sic]” (*The Skriker*, 12). A brownie is a benevolent sprite usually found tidying houses in exchange for sweets; the Green Lady refers to a Scottish legend of a female spirit continually performing household duties in her afterlife; and a bogle is a capricious sprite who causes perplexing problems for people without outright malice. Each bit of folklore adds to the strange and surreal nature of Josie and Lily's world. The background of folklore and mythical creatures creates a disconnect between the story world and the audience that the young girls bridge with their comparative normalcy in the face of such oddities. Similarly, the Skriker's ability to speak in various cadences and accents further blurs the lines between “normal” and “impossible.” She holds immense power over life and death and lives unfettered by human influence or time, making her all the more dangerous. By establishing the world as home to fantasy and folklore, the story's ending, with Lily entrapped by the Skriker's magic while trying to find Josie, is fully believable within the world of play. The

Skriker's opening monologue sets the groundwork for the absurd world of the play, and by entwining this language with the realistic story of two young teens, Churchill expands the audience's ability to suspend their disbelief and sympathize with the characters presented.

### *What If If Only*

This short play was first produced in September of 2021 at the Royal Court Theatre in London, about six months after schools in London had reopened after the third mandated lockdown for the city due to COVID-19 infections (Institute for Government, UK). The social context here is vital, as the world had been irrevocably changed, and nearly every person viewing the play would have had some experience with the virus and the lethal toll it took across the globe. The world had been in crisis, and for the UK and the US at least, the government response had been hectic and less than effective leading up to that autumn. Fall of 2021 saw the emergence of the *Omicron* variant of COVID-19, and a surge in cases and deaths over Fall and Winter (Lawson, 2021). *What If If Only* addresses death by examining what is left behind when someone dies. When an object is removed from a dusty shelf, its position is held by the very lack of its existence. Churchill's characters do something similar in this play by focusing on how the present moment is still deeply affected by a person no longer there. The original production imagined this person as a life-partner, a beloved without equal, a relationship born from decades of shared time, and the journey occurs in the wake of their death. The main characters are not named people; rather, they are called Someone, Future, and Present, letting each viewer form a different relationship to the characters. *What If If Only* also continues a recent trend in Churchill's works in the decreasing run time of her plays. Many of her recent works, including *Far Away* (2000), *A Number* (2002), *Here We Go* (2015), and *Escaped Alone* (2016) all run for

an hour or less. Yet each of these plays, like *What If If Only*, tackle complex and emotionally taxing concepts, including human cloning and identity, or the fear of an over-controlling and corrupt government. Instead of fixing these plays as double or triple billed evenings, these shorter works have been featured as their own full theatrical experiences, a demonstration of Churchill's focus on "compressing plot and dialogue to their absolute essentials," so to be able to present a storyline usually experienced over a couple hours in just one (Lawson, 2015). In place of a traditional narrative, Churchill uses the rhythm and structure of language to communicate the characters' emotions in *What If If Only's* story of attempting to move onward from grief.

The language of this short play varies between conversational to stream of consciousness, and that variation gives freedom of expression for the characters to voice complex emotions outside of traditional grammatical structure, as well as hinting at where the characters might exist in time. Someone, the main character, opens the play with a monologue about apples, and the speech feels similar to a modernist stream of consciousness piece, wherein "the present moment is always intertwined with the past and future" (Fratferola). Someone makes this speech about a subject they have just read about, but everything they say is inextricably linked to the past in the form of the late loved one who would have found the conversation interesting. The lines on the page have structure; they read like normal conversational speech, with expected punctuation and paragraph breaks when the topic shifts naturally:

I was thinking, would it always be the same apple? Because they would go rotten, you never liked the smell of an apple once it was cut. Did he paint the apple day by day as it shriveled? Or did he always paint a perfectly ripe apple? Also there's different kinds of apple. Did he specialise [sic] in a cox, or a discovery, or a russet

or did he have a go at different kinds? Braeburn. Bramley. Winter pearmain.

*(What If If Only, 4)*

The whole speech feels grounded in the past rather than the present. The words set a standard of communication for the production. The thoughts are arranged linearly and connect to one another in a straightforward fashion. When the Future and the Present break that standard later on, the contrast in rhythm and sound is clear and more impactful for the audience.

The next character to arrive brings with them an entirely new way of speaking and seeing the world. The Future's speech is full of run-on phrases, repetition, and often interrupts Someone as they try to converse. The abrupt change is a clear signal that something is strange and wonderful about this new person. The text on the page loses almost all of its punctuation when Future speaks, save for the odd comma, a few periods, and apostrophes. The lack of structure mirrors this character's lack of boundaries and limits in time and space. After all, the Future has no limits to what it could be—theoretically, that is. The time beyond the present moment takes form as a being so possessed by its own magnitude of possibilities, they cannot be bothered with sentence structure. When Future suddenly “splits” into multiple Futures, their words become even more muddled:

...if only silver and white and me and faster faster faster till suddenly what if slow slow  
and you would have noticed if only no flies on the eyes they never they never if only  
help me make me the one that happened you never if only butterflies help me your  
beloved *(What If If Only, 10)*

The Future's speech has the least punctuation, the most run-on phrases, and the most repetition, and Churchill uses the chaotic speech to emphasize the lack of limits on what a Future could be. In fact, as soon as Someone talks to the Future, their *own* speech loses some of its previous



structure. When the Future says, “I solidified just enough look you can’t see through me can you, I’m here I’m almost almost here and you have to help me give you what you want,” Someone immediately replies, “Can you what bring back can you?” (*What If If Only*, 5-6). The glimmer of hope for a Future where their loved one is alive and well is so strong a temptation that Someone loses their footing semantically. It demonstrates the power of the Future as a concept, and at the same time, the weaknesses. Future cannot bring back the loved one. But it could have, and that hope, that possibility, is enough to make Someone lose their grip on what is and was.

The Present appears immediately after Someone chases the Futures offstage, an instant contrast already by simple juxtaposition. Where the Future was all youthful eagerness and jumbled phrases, the Present reads as assuring and realistic. Their first line to Someone is “Are you alright?” From the first words, formed as a full sentence out of concern for Someone’s wellbeing, Churchill has already set Present apart from Future. Present’s speech has more punctuation, more complete sentences, but they are not without a few oddities in syntax and structure:

I’m the only Future that didn’t die, I’m what’s happening hurrah hello I’m the Present,  
 I’m here I’m now I’m here I’m now now now every second gone to the Past but always  
 here now now now now. (*What If If Only*, 11)

This looks like Future’s lines, with repetition and run-on phrases abounding, but it remains contained between punctuation. The Present becomes the Future, and Churchill connects the two through their speaking styles. Where the Future has endless possibilities and seems able to become whatever Someone wants, the Present is realistic, but not unyielding or impossible. They refer to the Futures as their children, relaying that connection more explicitly, telling Someone that their actions will have the effects necessary to bring about *the* Future (*What If If Only*, 12).

Similar to Someone's opening speech, the Present sounds like a stream of consciousness when they first appear. They say what is at the forefront of their thoughts, always coming back to "now" as they go. In addition, just as with the Future, Someone's speech changes when they come in contact with the Present, like they are coming back down to Earth after the Futures whisked them up to impossible heights. Their lines gain more structure as the Present grounds them in reality, but they never revert fully back to the level of grammatical structure heard at the beginning of the play. It is almost as if the Future and Present have finally lifted their eyes up beyond their own grief, allowing them the freedom to move forward out of the past.

The play was first produced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and serves as an example of artists emerging during times of strife and crisis and seeking to find some way to express the overwhelming emotions society feels during times of turmoil. After the events of 9/11, there were people wondering when the plays about those events would start emerging. The play *One Flea Spare* (1995) by Naomi Wallace responded to the social feedback around the US AIDS epidemic in the 80s and 90s. But the global pandemic was—and still is—*global*. How can one work of art encompass the emotions of a whole world, of a whole country? Perhaps this kind of play, with its abstract characters going through real, specific grief, is more accessible for each individual audience member to confront their own experiences through the story on stage. Some audience members will identify personally with Someone, grieving a loved one lost to time. But most will be a few degrees separated from this grief, unsure of how to unpack the cocktail of emotions brought about by now almost three whole years of thousands of people dying each day. The openness of Churchill's language, the lack of specificity about characters, as well as the phrases she writes about wars, climate change, and nuclear devastation, create room for each

viewer to find their own place in the story, and to perhaps find some closure along with the characters.

In *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, *The Skriker*, and *What If If Only*, the characters' language communicates their intentions and emotional states, as well as aspects of the characters' temporality (or lack thereof) and their physical relationship to the worlds of their story. The climate and industrial crisis surrounding *...Not Enough Oxygen* makes itself known in the repetitive, clipped cadence of its characters affected by the poisonous smog choking their city. The Skriker demonstrates her otherworldly talent for manipulation and inhuman powers of destruction through her constantly changing speech patterns. In her true form, her lack of grammatical structure, overlapping phrasing, and run-on ideas reveal her chaotic nature as one who thrives in a world ravaged by climate change and social inequality. The varying forms of peculiar speech in *What If If Only* create an open emotional dialogue untethered to a specific time or place, but tied firmly to the overwhelming loss of a loved one. Breaking down grammatical and syntactical barriers on stage allows the audience to connect with the pain and catharsis found in the story. Each play demonstrates Caryl Churchill's profound skill in communicating dramatic intention and narrative information while using patterns in rhythm and syntax as a linguistic exploration of crisis.

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## Director's Notebook

### First Impressions

This play made itself unique in my mind from the character's names right at the beginning. A main character named Someone prompts some thinking no matter the play. The other characters, the Future(s) and the Present, were intriguing in their own right, mainly because of their odd speech and lack of punctuation. It reminded me strongly of the play I had just seen *Everybody* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, where the characters are named Cousin or Friendship, and they represent that larger concept on stage. In a way, the abstract storyline was similar to that play too, but *What If If Only* is not a morality play in the same sense. What struck me hardest was the beauty in how the text expressed the pain of loss, the confusion of knowing someone is gone but not quite believing it, and the reality of moving on after losing someone so dear.

I realized I understood, in an odd way. Coming back to college after the initial lockdown in the US due to COVID-19 was surreal. I had just lived through almost a year of nothing but death and suffering making the news each week, and a government that was at best ill-equipped and at worst unwilling to do enough to staunch the flow of mortalities. On top of this, 2020 saw numerous protests against police brutality, many of which ended in injury and death when protestors clashed with law enforcement. From a further perspective, even, I am part of a generation of students whose education has been overshadowed by a threat of school shootings my whole life. Fire drills went hand-in-hand with lockdown and active shooter drills while I was growing up.

While talking about this play in *Directing 1*, I realized what had really stuck with me initially after reading the play was how much I needed to hear the last line: "I'm going to happen," says the Child Future, confidently and completely sure. The play was not gentle with my emotions, and that was good. I don't think I could have taken this play seriously if it had tried to be gentle.

### Later Impressions

This play has almost no instructions for a director or actor when looking at the text. Where to start?

The actors in the first rehearsal brought up how much of the deceased loved one's presence bled into the scene, and how little fear of the concept of Death Someone has. The base reality here seems grounded, but somehow not belonging to Someone at the same time.

Honestly, I hadn't decided until we had started rehearsals if the Child Future was even going to appear on stage. I had an idea to make them "invisible" via spotlights marking their path on stage. But realistically, it was easier and more fun to have Future's actor play both parts. There was a lot of confusion about Future as a character, especially because two of my actors have English as a second or third language.

The initial meeting with the lighting designer was very productive. They had similar confusions about how the Future and Present fit into the story. Once I explained the overall

emotional tones, going from dull and gloomy to a bright hope, they were totally onboard. They even agreed with me on the spotlights for Child Future.

Music!! I totally forgot about house pre-show music until Jeana reminded me about house music. Fortunately, I happen to subscribe to a YouTube channel full of music videos for a television series that have the right vibe for the show. The first songs that popped into my head were “I’ll Follow You into the Dark” by Death Cab for Cutie and “A Thousand Years” by Christina Perri.

The set has been a bit fluid throughout the rehearsal process. We didn’t have specific pieces in mind, only that I wanted a desk up front for the apple, and I needed *something* upstage for miscellaneous pieces like the sunflower for Ukraine. The set finally solidified after we started rehearsing in the space and had access to the other two shows’ set pieces. I ended up utilizing the desk, chair, and table from *Piñata*, for which we are very grateful.

### Discussion of the Play

#### The Fable:

Once there were two lovers. They found home and happiness in each other’s presence, as far as everyone else knew. The two lovers had built a life together, but it didn’t last. One day, one horrible day, Someone lost their beloved to their own hand. Suddenly, Someone’s world was far less bright. Even apples brought back the memory of their beloved one. Someone wished and hoped and thought “what if if only” and suddenly, one day, it happened. Something appeared. She wasn’t quite like the beloved one, but she was close. She was the Future, and as many Futures as Someone could imagine, that’s how many possibilities there were. Maybe even a possibility where their beloved didn’t die. The Futures overwhelmed Someone, and they lashed out, yelling at the pestering Futures that they would never happen! And something else was there instead. The Present, she called herself. She knew she wasn’t very nice, not right now. So many wars, so much pain... but the Present is here and now, and that was what Someone had to work with. Their beloved was gone, that was the Present reality. The Present was not without reassurances, however. She told Someone that a Future will come, one of her many children, and Someone would make it the Present. As if summoned, a Child Future appeared with one message: I’m going to happen.

#### The Story:

This play focuses on Someone, who is still struggling with the death of a loved one. They are caught up in memory, wishing with all their might for a different future. A different Future appears. They lay out possibility after possibility to Someone, Future after Future joining in to become reality. Overwhelmed, Someone fends them off, realizing they will never happen. The Present appears then, with the admittance that she isn’t very nice, not right now, but she is all that Someone has. The past is past, and the Future depends on Someone. A Future appears in the form of a child, full of youthful determination to happen. Will Someone let them happen? Is Someone granted a choice in the matter?

### Structure:

This is a short play without clear scene divisions. The whole story is told in one continuous scene. It focuses on Someone throughout. The audience follows their journey during the action of the play, while Present and Future appear and affect the action, but are not the main focus. The different ways in which Someone, Future, and Present speak do help the audience understand something is odd about them. Future and Present don't speak in ways we do normally, so an audience member watching them would know right away that something was special about their appearance in the play.

### Ideas

What explicit or implicit ideas in the play interest you?

The language intrigued me immediately. I've never encountered a play where characters have so little punctuation in their text, and have so much text at once. The way in which the text layers to add meaning as it goes, especially in the Futures monologue, is also unique in my experience. I've discovered Churchill plays with language a lot in her plays. *The Skriker* has the most similarities to the text in *What If If Only*, because the Skriker and the Future share a lack of grammatical structure, and a similar layering affect as they speak.

I was also drawn to the concepts of Present and Future presented on stage as characters. After seeing *Everybody* here at Purchase, I can sort of equate the characters in Churchill's play to the conceptual characters presented there (and in the original work of *Every Man*). It seems a fun challenge to figure out a way to depict the nature of the Present moment and of the Future time on stage to an audience, and still have the audience understand what the story wants to say.

### Directorial Concept:

The main part of this play I want to emphasize is the aspect of moving forward with grief, and acknowledging that grief and pain and loss can be familiar to people in different ways. Someone is just that: someone. Anyone. Thanks to COVID-19, many more of the world's population can identify closely with the loss of someone dear to them, so if this play can offer a moment of catharsis or emotional release for someone in pain, I feel it would be a success. But overall, I do want to leave the audience with hope. I don't want this to be a depressing experience.

### Imagistic and Sensory Response:

#### Primary Images:

- Empty kitchen, early morning.
- Two chairs at a table, only one place set.
- Ghosts of Christmases Past and Present.
- Apple
- Time-lapse of a painting coming to life.

- Apple with a bite out of it.
- Cold blue, pre-dawn light.

#### Visual Material:

- The image of an artifact placed atop a white pedestal and cased in glass in a museum

#### Central Directorial Image:

The apple on the corner of the desk beside the photograph of the Beloved one are the two primary images associated with my vision. The apple is a strong image in the beginning of the play, and its impermanence as an object goes well with Someone trying so desperately to hold onto the pain and the memory of their loved one, when their existence is as temporary as the apple's. The Present comes to claim the Past, and the Future comes to claim the Present, and thus, time passes. The apple decays. The grief never fades, but it changes, hopefully to something we can carry forward.

#### Sounds, Textures, Tastes, and Smells

- Birdsong: I originally had birdsong as a primary sound during the production. I ended up not using this. I still like the idea, and the association remains strong.
- Petrichor: the smell released by rain hitting dry earth. A clean smell to me.
- Echoing: the sound of speaking into something so harsh and empty, only your own voice comes back to you.
- Apples: the crunch, the taste, the smell, the smooth skin breaking against teeth.

#### Other Sensory Elements:

I want to add in clips of news headlines to help set the stage, as it were. The crisis of COVID-19 has lessened in the US, but it remains real, as do other issues. I want them fresh in the audience's minds. COVID, school shootings, Russia's war on Ukraine, the devastating effects of wildfires and hurricanes, and maybe something about the death of Queen Elizabeth II?

I had originally planned to include more music during the production, but the idea lost favor with me over time. I wanted the silences to speak for themselves, and I wanted the overwhelming feelings to come from the actors' performances more than a musical underscore or a soundscape.

#### Performance Space:

##### Ideal:

I would want this piece in a black box or a small, intimate space. The play works best, I think, when the audience is as close to the action as possible. A proper proscenium seems like overkill? I like the idea of having a white backdrop, or a white playing space, so color is more obvious.



### Reality:

I mean I pretty much got what I wanted. The CMFT Studio upstairs is small, intimate, and allows the audience to be close to the action without feeling cramped by the space. The only slightly annoying part was the lack of upstage entrances, but the aisles were easy to work with. The lighting team did a great job with what limited resources we had in there, and I was glad to have kept our set small and easily broken down.

### Style:

What style do you hope to achieve?

There was an idea upon initial proposal of this project to use movement that leaned more towards choreography or pantomimed gestures (i.e., gestures with specific definitions), but I turned my focus away from that idea in favor of blocking slightly more grounded in reality. I want a slightly surreal environment inhabited by real people, give or take a few temporal anomalies in their characters. The Future especially had to be set apart in speech and action. One of the specifications I made to my actors playing Future and Someone was that Future could lay hands on Someone, touch her shoulder or bat her hair, but Someone *was not able* to touch Future.

### The Characters:

These characters have nebulous descriptions. Their ages, appearances, backgrounds, and experiences are somewhat indeterminate. That is, it is up to me and the actors to discuss these facts.

Someone: My Someone is young, perhaps in their early to mid-twenties. The line “I thought we’d be old” implies some portion of life not yet lived, regardless of age. They are intrinsically tied to the presence of their deceased loved one, and much of their thoughts and actions still have traces of this love for them. Their confidence is lacking, but not nonexistent. Someone does understand they need to move on, they are not stuck in grief indefinitely or to the point of serious mental harm, but they are stubborn. So much of their character relies on having been a compassionate, enthusiastic lover before the object of their affection died, leaving a void where the love used to land. Their grief has not made them cruel or unkind, and they are seeking hope wherever they can find it.

Future(s): The first descriptor that my actors and I latched onto Future was *territorial*. In my mind, they are rather selfish, and petulant, but not immature. They move with the boundless energy of endless possibilities, speaking in bright colors and sharp contrasts. They have an innate desire to become reality—to become the Present moment—and are callous in how their methods might affect Someone. Future has a youthful energy, vibrant and excitable, but I do not see them as childish. They are too cunning to be childish. They play into Someone’s fears and insecurities easily and with skill, demonstrating a knowledge of how people work and how people grieve.

Present: The Present moment in this play describes themselves as “not very nice,” but my actors and I agreed that she actually is quite compassionate. She is assuring and grounding, helping Someone come back down to Earth after the Futures raised their hopes too high. But she is blunt and confident in her quiet intelligence. My Present has a keen intuition and an honest way of speaking. The age, again, is uncertain. But I imagine an older presence, someone with some experience in a few things, and a gentleness to their blunt expressions and open truths.

Child Future: The Child Future largely presents as the name implies. They are impressionable, eager, and largely single-minded. They, like the other Futures in the play, are insistent, slightly pushy, and enigmatic. They give just enough information to intrigue Someone, but not enough to make a whole truth. But, unlike the other Futures, I imagine this one as slightly less... aggressive. They share the desire to become reality, but they are more confident it will actually happen.

Super-objective?

Each of these characters seeks to change their current emotional or mental state, in some way. They want their ideal reality, the ideal existence, for themselves.

Whose play is it?

This play belongs to the Someone in each audience member watching it. The character is named Someone on purpose. The story of grief and looking ahead to the future despite the pain is one I want to give to my audience. They could be Someone. They could know Someone. They could have watched hundreds of Someones. They need to hear this story.

Movement: What style of movement suits this play?

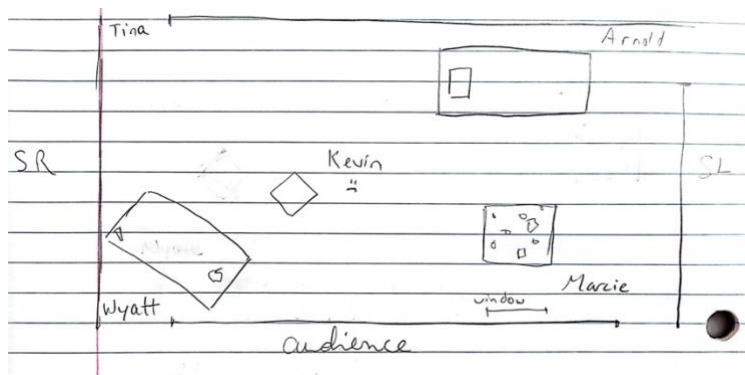
I hope to differentiate the characters by how they move in and interact with the space. Someone has a routine in the space, so their movement is pedestrian and known, with the added hole left by their Beloved. But Present and Future have a different relationship to the space. Future hasn't happened yet, but they are bursting at the seams to be real. They should have a playful, wide-open movement, not restricted by pedestrian motions or by supposed “walls” in the set. The Future doesn't exist yet, so it can exist everywhere. Present ought to be more grounded, with surer steps, clear and confident in her existence in the moment. But they shouldn't be predictable, so I don't want their motions to fall too closely into step with Someone.

Voice: The language and sound of this play as you hear it?

This language is odd, to begin. Someone should speak as naturally as the words allow, making sure the story is told as clearly as it can be. But Future and Present have more freedom, both syntactically and vocally. Future really should be all over the place, letting their jumbled words settle through the audience's minds like a sieve to filter out what meaning each individual can find. Present is more natural in her speech, and I need her to be assuring, almost comforting, but not coddling. Child Future is as they are: a spirit of youth. They speak petulantly.

## Set, Lighting, Costume

Set: I want to keep this simple. Below is the ground plan we used in rehearsal. This only changed through omission. For comparison, the actual set is photographed below, by myself during our final dress rehearsal.



Lighting: My designer Matt DeScalzo suggested that using a slow transition and shifting the saturation levels of light would help communicate the shift in tone from beginning to end. In Appendix C, the photo of the set is as it was at the top of the show, with a cool blue wash on stage. I wanted the tone to warm throughout the play, and the lighting matched that as well. We also worked together to create a sequence of spotlights to isolate Child Future when she enters. I want her to be a glowing beacon of hope.

Costume: Future and Present seem obvious to me. Future is a bright thing, a flashy, attractive figure. The final look was bright white and bright pink, and looked incredible under the cool wash of light on stage. Present is slower, more sure, and more grounded. Neutral, more earthy colors suited the character in my mind, implying a more nurturing figure. Someone, I had fewer ideas. Did I want them to stand out? Should they wear street clothes to tether them to the outside world and the audience? After some chats with the actors, we agreed on all black, sort of as an homage to mourning. For a photograph of the costumes, see Appendix D.

## Tempo and Rhythm

Contrast is an important idea to me for this play. The differences between Someone now and Someone of the past; the differences between Future and Present; and the differences between Child Future and the other Futures all need emphasis. The play's rhythm definitely changes the second Future steps on stage, and the moment they leave. The sharp, fast, chaotic energy they bring is so different from Present's more slow and steady approach. The change in these rhythms will pull the audience along. They should feel a little tense while Future owns the stage, and they should be breathing a sigh of relief at Present's genuine concern.

## Mood and Tone

I have never wanted this play or experience to be depressing or overly sad. The mood is somber, yes. I plan to remind the audience of some of the horrible events of the past few years, and then Someone arrives in all black. But the tone is not one of abject sorrow. There must always be hope, and indeed the play demonstrates that there always will be, in the form of that Child Future.

Throughout rehearsal, I was constantly reminded by my actors that there are several lines in this play that are quite funny. So many times reading a play will desensitize you, I suppose. But I did work with them to keep the brevity and the jokes, to help lighten the sadness slightly. My favorite is the joke about King Charles and his head.

### Rehearsal Strategy

The first hurdle is the text. I have two actors for whom English is a second language, so I suspect we will work a bit on understanding what is truly being communicated by their characters as we go through. Hopefully, when we get to a place in the text where the actors feel confident in what they are saying, the blocking will come easier. A piece like this, without obvious stage direction, will be a work of collaboration to an extent, I think. It will be a challenge for the actors to connect with these nameless characters, and I will have a challenge in drawing their performances through these characters into a coherent story.

I want to start rehearsals in September, with meetings three times a week for at least two hours. This is a short play, and I don't want to overwork it.

Auditions: Sept. 7-8<sup>th</sup>

First Production Meeting: Sept. 10<sup>th</sup>

First Rehearsal: Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>

Move-in Day: Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>

Tech Rehearsals: Nov. 2, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14<sup>th</sup>

Dress Rehearsal: Nov. 15<sup>th</sup>

Performances: Nov. 16, 18, 19<sup>th</sup>

## Set Photo



Taken by Edie Gregg on November 19, 2022 before our final performance.

## Cast Photo



Taken by Stage Manager Chris Walker on November 19, 2022 after our closing performance. From left to right is Judit Queral-Perramon (Future), Brisa Nunes (Someone), Edie Gregg (Director), and Kiana Hindi (Present).

## Poster

Designed and created by Edie Gregg.

