

Enter, Soccer Mom: Analyzing One-Scene Characters in the Context of Sarah DeLappe's *The Wolves*

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Artistic Aims

It is important to me that my Senior Project be a play written by anyone other than a white man. I have spent three years in the Theatre and Performance program being introduced to many plays by marginalized people, and I have complete confidence that more plays like this, written by women, people of color, queer people, or disabled individuals, are possible, and important, on the SUNY Purchase campus. Ideally, I would like to create an original piece. Some of the most inspiring plays I have seen or been a part of on this campus were created by a student, or a group of students. However, with the constraints of the Senior Project and everyone already having chosen their ideas, this is not a possibility. I realized early on that to put myself in a position where I had to form an entire cast, teach them how to devise, and then devise with them for months to create a play, would be irresponsible and eventually cause me more stress than joy. So, I settled on *The Stronger*, by August Strindberg as a festival piece.

August Strindberg was a white man who wrote about dynamics between women (among other things) in the late 19th century in Sweden. There lies the problem. I went very quickly from excitement to dreading having to cast my counterpart, find a director, and put up this play that I was ultimately not very passionate about. My passion dwindled because this play was written over 100 years ago, not in this country, by a man who took it upon himself to write about women at a time where, I presume, most men had an even more shallow understanding of women. It is a complicated piece, as it does have some very interesting feminist rhetoric interwoven through the monologue. However, I was unable to get past the dense, outdated

language, and all of the ways in which *The Stronger* did not fulfill my original goals for my Senior Project, so I eventually abandoned this project.

After the mainstage for Fall 2019 was announced, I quickly decided to make that my senior project, knowing it would be contingent upon me getting cast, and if I did not I would be back to square one. Thankfully, I was cast as the Soccer Mom in *The Wolves* by Sarah DeLappe. This play tells the story of a team of 9 teenage girls preparing for each game of their indoor soccer season, weaving their stretching circles with typical teenage banter until they are struck by a terrible loss. My character only comes on stage in the last scene of the play, to deliver a heartbreaking monologue in remembrance of her late daughter to her daughter's teammates. Early on in the process, I already knew this was going to be a very challenging role for me. I had never played the eldest character in a show before, nor had I ever played a character who was dealing with such a significant loss.

My goal was to accept all challenges as they arose, and strive to give the best performance I can, despite not being a part of most of the play. The fact that I am not in the rest of the play is a challenge, because it does not give me time to build up to this emotional monologue. I knew I would be sitting backstage for the entirety of the show prior to my entrance, so I would have to figure out a way to get myself into the proper emotional headspace each night before I went on. This is not something I had ever done before, as each play I had been in at Purchase had a cast-wide warm up prior to each performance that equally benefited each actor in getting them into the world of the play. I hoped that we would have full cast warm ups, but even so, I knew that the hour and 20 minutes I would spend backstage alone would make it challenging for me to maintain the energy I may have found during the warm up.

My first show at Purchase, the second semester of my freshman year, was the mainstage titled *Horror Show*, directed by Jordan Seavey and Geo Decas O'Donnell of *CollaborationTown*. Through that project, I met many wonderful artists, most of whom I continued to work with through my years in this program. I was the youngest of these artists, one of two freshmen in the company. In contrast to that experience, *The Wolves* felt like the perfect capstone to my time in Theatre and Performance because I am the only senior and the eldest member of a cast. Being the only member of the cast who is separate, in so many ways, from the others, was bound to be a challenge both on and off stage. Theatre is an intensely collaborative art form, and I was concerned that missing out on much of the rehearsals would affect the relationship I'd have to the text as well as my castmates. I have experienced great benefit from rehearsal activities that build upon the relationships between actors within the world of the play, and I hoped I would have the opportunity to do so during this process.

My character is, first and foremost, a mother. Moreover, a mother who has recently lost her child. In order to portray this role to the best of my ability I hoped to tap into the times in my life that I have experienced loss, even though none of them could ever equate to the loss of a child. I have been preparing in this way for long enough to know which real-life connections keep me emotionally safe onstage, and which do not. I plan to hone in on one of these to focus on backstage during the performances. Even more importantly, however, are the relationships that I am able to establish with my castmates. In the text, it is clear that my character has known most of the players on the team for most of their lives. In order to emotionally connect with them in that way on stage, I hope to establish relationships with my castmates in real life, or else it will seem as if my character is a total stranger when she comes on in the last 3 minutes of the play.

This may be a challenge, as stated earlier, because of the amount of time I will spend in rehearsal in comparison to the rest of the cast, however I will do my best to cultivate these relationships on my own.

I think *The Wolves* is an important, though not groundbreaking, play to put up at Purchase this semester. Even though I did not choose it per se, I was immediately drawn to the unconventional writing style and the very real conversations that occurred within it. I don't think these conversations will be relatable to everybody, as it is obvious from the script that these characters have grown up in middle-class families and mostly share similar experiences regarding their education and home life. However, I think there are aspects to the text and nuances within the story that will resonate with the student body here. For example, I think the most obvious metaphor throughout the text is the experience of growing up and realizing your own shortcomings, as well as the privilege you may have over others and the ways in which we can all be blind to realities outside our own. Reading the script, I was immediately brought back to my own high school days, and the seemingly trivial lunchtime conversations that inadvertently resulted in revelations of class and privilege. These realizations of self are even more amplified, in my opinion, when they occur within a group that has known each other since childhood. If portrayed effectively, I believe this play will evoke a bittersweet nostalgia for ignorance, while making the audience laugh, cringe, and eventually cry.

I hope that this project will help me to grow as an actor in many ways, but foremost by giving me the tools to age myself that I have not been presented with thus far. I am very aware of the differences between the character I will be portraying and myself, but I think I can overcome these differences and deliver a strong performance. This is much easier said than done,

nonetheless I will maintain professionalism throughout this process and am looking forward to the final result.

Because this play is being directed by a director from outside the SUNY Purchase campus, it is important to me that I establish a good working relationship with her. Not to say that I would not put in this same effort for a Purchase faculty member, but since I have never met Sarah Wansley prior to this semester, I want to leave a good impression. I enjoy working with outside directors because it always shows me a new perspective on theatre-making. Experiencing a new style is always good practice for an actor to be flexible to different approaches. I hope to learn new things from Sarah, and develop a good working relationship.

I am very excited to be a part of this production, and that my Senior Project ended up falling into the category of plays I am most invested in. This play is current, written by a woman, and is a great ensemble piece. These are the three elements I was looking for originally, and to have landed back on *The Wolves* seems like a stroke of luck for which I am very grateful. I sincerely hope that the director and the rest of the cast are as invested in the project as I am, and if they are, I believe our audience will be invested too.

Technical Essay

During the process of having my initial senior project proposal: *The Stronger* by August Strindberg approved, I was told that the 2019 fall mainstage would be *The Wolves* by Sarah DeLappe. I read the script out of curiosity and also out of fear that the project I was proposing did not spark enough passion in me to be something I knew I could be proud of. At the end of the Spring 2019 semester, I had been approved to do *The Stronger*, but was very fearful of the pressure it would put on me as I needed to find a director, another actor, the means of production, and hopefully some tech crew by the end of the summer. After I read *The Wolves*, that fear was replaced by blind ambition because I knew I had to do everything in my power to be a part of this play and make it my senior project. I fell in love with the text and started to envision myself as many different characters within it. Candidly, I was also charmed by the idea of not having to crowdsource all of the funding for my senior project on my own.

Upon reading the script for *The Wolves*, I was mesmerized. My very short career as a high school athlete came flooding back to me: the vulgarity of locker room banter, ogling over boys and shamefully making fun of other girls, discoveries of sexuality through the pedagogy of peers, and the fragile innocence that veils all of it. In my opinion, these are the most important aspects of the play, which centers around 9 teenage girls preparing for their weekly soccer games on an indoor field. However, it is not about soccer. This story aims to bring the audience into the very intimate world of adolescent female relationships, which anyone who has ever been a teenage girl knows are complex and often traumatizing. These girls navigate the content they are exposed to at school through their privileged and sheltered personal lenses, so they discuss atrocities such as genocide and immigration detention centers as if they are talking about the

latest tabloid gossip. In my initial reading of the text, it seemed clear to me that the driving action of the play was these girls having the luxury to discuss such tragedies because they have such distance from them, until they face a tragedy themselves.

I was very drawn to the script of *The Wolves*, not only because of its content but also its structure. I had not read a play written in columns with nameless characters since my Freshman year when I participated in the Spring mainstage, which we devised with directors from a theatre company called *CollaborationTown*. Since being a part of that production, I had hoped to be in another play with a similar experimental structure. When I read or watch a piece that has an element I haven't seen represented much in previous theatre, I am inherently excited. So, I am very glad to have been cast in *The Wolves* despite being presented with the challenge of the one role in this play that does not exist within the soccer team.

I was cast as "Soccer Mom", the mother of player #14 who tragically dies towards the end of the play, leaving her teammates grief-stricken and more grounded in harsh reality than many of them have ever been in their lives. Since I am the only senior in the cast, my goals for this production revolved generally around stepping up as the oldest member of a cast and acting as a sort of leader for my castmates. Since the start of my theatre career, I have consistently been in shows where I was among the youngest members of the cast. This was my first experience being the eldest member of a cast, and I think that position did give me some tools for playing such an adult role. I imagine it would be difficult for someone who looks the same age as the girls on the team to effectively portray this grieving mother. So, even though I originally wanted to be cast as one of the teenagers, I completely understand why I was given this part due to my age compared to the rest of the actors at the callback.

After I accepted the role and began my process of character building, I hoped that my director would be a helpful ally in discovering the nuances of this role. As the rehearsal process went on, it became clear that most of my work would have to be done on my own time, as I was called for even fewer rehearsals than I anticipated and got very few helpful notes in the time I did have with the director. I became increasingly frustrated because it was very important to me that I put on my best performance possible for my senior project, and I was not being given the tools to do so. Often when I was posed a question relating to my character's intentions or motivations at a given moment, I would give my input and be shut down immediately. Through this, I learned an important skill for my future directing endeavors: to pose specific, yet open ended questions to the actors that will push them to make discoveries on their own. I do not think the ways in which the director interacted with me and my castmates were very effective, and I do believe it altered the poignancy of the performances.

Because I was not being particularly motivated to make specific choices for my character, I took it upon myself to delve deep into the life of the woman I would be portraying on my own time. This proved to be very challenging, as I have never played a role remotely similar to this one and I was not sure of the best ways to approach it on my own. The past rehearsal processes I have been a part of have always taken a large chunk of time to develop each character through games with the whole cast, questions that led me to make discoveries for my characters, and working scenes many times to experiment with different motives. None of these were tools presented to me during *The Wolves*.

The first thing that helped me relate to this character was the experience of being the eldest member of the cast, which gave me a kind of maternal role amongst the other actors in the

show, half of whom were at least 2 years my junior. It was very enjoyable to build relationships with each of my cast members, even though I had to do most of this outside of rehearsal time as I was not called very often. Getting to know the girls on the team made it easier for me to imagine that I had known these girls since they were children, even though I still had a long way to go in order to do justice to this role. The next most important aspect of this role is the tremendous loss she has just experienced. I have never had such a tragic death in my family, and if I had I don't think it would have been a responsible or safe choice for me to use that experience. Instead, I chose to envision a very real yet less volatile sense of loss I have personally experienced: the loss of my singing voice.

I used to love to sing, and I would do it as much as possible. I was in my high school's choir, took voice lessons every week, and truly thought my future would involve musical theatre, or at least the presence of music in my career. Due to years of poor choices that affected my lung capacity and vocal strength, I no longer have the same abilities I used to, or anywhere near close to them. Every night during the performances, I sat backstage and listened to music that used to mean a lot to me during my vocal career. I would sing along with them and bring myself into a safe, but usable place of loss and desire for something no longer available to me. This may seem like a silly tactic, but it was the only thing that really worked to get myself into the emotional space I needed to be for my entrance at the end of the play.

One of the biggest challenges for me in this process was staying focused while sitting backstage during the show. Every night, I had at least an hour after I put my makeup and costume on, before I went on stage. For one of our dress rehearsals, I recall doing homework and listening to upbeat music backstage because I was anxious about deadlines and trying to

multitask. This severely affected my performance as I had not taken the time to get myself into the emotionally vulnerable headspace I needed to be in in order to convey the deep trauma and sense of loss that my character was feeling. From that show on, I learned my lesson and spent every performance meditating backstage for the first half, and then listening to the aforementioned music and singing along. I found that this tactic worked well for me in the sense that I was able to feel a strong sense of vulnerability every time I walked out on stage.

Overall, I am proud of my performance. I do not think this was one of the best shows I have been in at Purchase, but it was one of the biggest acting challenges I have been presented with thus far in my career, and for that I am grateful. It was always important to me that my senior project be something that challenges me to grow as a performer and learn something new about my craft, and both of those criteria were definitely met. This process taught me that I need to be much more self sufficient as an actor and not rely on my director or my castmates to assist me in the process of making discoveries, because I will not always be working with people willing or able to do so. I have been very lucky during my time as a Theatre and Performance major to have worked with such open minded collaborators with whom I mesh well in a creative sense, but I am also aware of the importance of not expecting that experience for every show. As I emerge into the real world, I must be aware that my ideas may not be accepted by everyone I work with and I strive to be the most involved performer I can be, no matter who I am working with.

The Final Women: An Analysis of Four of One-Scene Matriarchs

Unlike celebrity cameos in films, characters that are only present in a staged work for one scene carry a certain responsibility to further the plot of their play. These characters have been featured since the dawn of acting at the Theatre of Dionysus, and continue to grace the stage in modernized theatrical works. Contemporary playwright, Sarah DeLappe, utilized this trope in her play, *The Wolves*, by including the character of the Soccer Mom who exists in the margins of the world of her play. Alongside DeLappe's Soccer Mom, there have been a number of evocative performances of one scene characters in the 21st century, many of whom are complex women who present great strength and vulnerability at once. Three such examples exist within *The Bacchae* by Euripides, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson, and *Doubt* by John Patrick Shanley. Each of these four fleeting female characters carry unique weights in the worlds of their respective plays, but share the role of mothers who appear for only one scene.

The original text of *The Bacchae* was written by Euripides in 407 BC and is one of 18 surviving texts by Euripides¹. It is his only known depiction of the god Dionysus, in honor of whom the City Dionysia theatre festivals were held. This ancient Greek play tells the story of Pentheus as the treacherous king of Thebes and his fight against the provocation of Dionysus within the walls of his city. The main conflict of the tragedy revolves around the feud of Pentheus and Dionysus; however, the king's demise and exodus of the play are brought on by an army of angry women—the Maenads—including Pentheus' own mother, Agaue, or Agave. She enters in the last scene, known as the exodus in Greek tragedies, holding the head of her son who

¹Marissa Hicks, "Bacchae - Ancient History Encyclopedia." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, 2018

she has mistaken for a lion in a fit of animalistic rage.² Agave is the oldest known example of a powerful woman impactfully entering a play for only one scene. She has been portrayed by a great expanse of actors since the character's debut at the Theatre of Dionysus.

August Wilson's, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, originally premiered in 1984 as the second installment in Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle. Set in 1911, "when slavery's wounds were still raw,"³ it tells the story of Harold Loomis as he recovers from seven years in forced labor after being falsely arrested by Joe Turner, who serves as a symbol of racist oppression.⁴ Loomis' search for his lost wife brings him and his daughter to the boarding house that acts as the main setting of the play. It is a poetic story of Loomis reconnecting with spirituality and emerging from racialized trauma alongside family, but something continues to haunt him. Loomis longs for his wife and mother of his daughter, Martha Pentecost, whom he lost 7 years prior. The toll that Martha's absence takes on him throughout the entirety of the play makes her entrance in the last scene incredibly impactful to its overall dramatic action.

The way in which Wilson wrote Martha's character certainly demands great emotional depth from any actor who may be portraying this role. She is a complex character, having left her daughter to be raised by her own mother while she traveled in search of faith and liberation. Furthermore, Martha's entrance during the final scene of the play does not act as a resolution for the plot. Even though Harold Loomis has finally found his wife whom he has been searching for since his emancipation, he and Martha realize they are no longer compatible people. Martha has been absent too long to maintain a position in the hearts of Harold and his daughter, Zonia, but in

²Ibid.

³Elysa Gardner, "'Joe Turner's Come and Gone,' Back and Better than Ever: And 'Normal' Hits the Right Notes." Usa Today, Apr 17 2009

⁴Ibid.

that time she has gained her own sense of self and infallible values which she is not willing to compromise on. Upon entering the boarding house and being told by Loomis that he has been searching for her since his emancipation, Martha remarks:

Harold, I didn't know if you was ever coming back. They told me Joe Turner had you and my whole world split half in two. My whole life shattered. It was like I had poured it in a cracked jar and it all leaked out the bottom. When it go like that there ain't nothing you can do put it back together... You wasn't gone but two months and Henry Thompson kicked me off his land and I ain't had no place to go but my mama's. I stayed and waited there for five years before I woke up one morning and decided that you was dead. Even if you weren't, you was dead to me. I wasn't gonna carry you with me no more. So I killed you in my heart. I buried you. I mourned you. And then I picked up what was left and went on to make life without you. I was a young woman with life at my beckon. I couldn't drag you behind me like a sack of cotton.⁵

This short monologue is accompanied by intimate moments of dialogue between Harold and Martha, regarding the past and future of their relationship throughout the final scene of the play, but this line encapsulates the obstacles that both of them have faced over the past 7 years. Martha compares her lost husband to a sack of cotton, a reminder of the trauma of slavery as he was still beneath its oppressive heel. In order to begin the process of healing herself from this racialized trauma—after learning that her husband had been enslaved and could not be freed—Martha needed to cut her ties with her family, which was obviously not an easy decision. Martha's complexity in her role as a mother and wife, as well as her integral part in the plot as a whole make her a very effective final-scene character.

John Patrick Shanley's play, *Doubt*, premiered on Broadway in 2005 at the Walter Kerr Theatre, breaking the theatre's all-time weekly box office record on multiple occasions.⁶ It

⁵August Wilson, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. New American Library, 1988.

⁶Peter Marks, "For 'Doubt,' a Certain Magic; Broadway Drama Seems to have that Rarest of Attributes: Legs: [FINAL Edition]." *The Washington Post*, Jul 10 2005

received a Pulitzer Prize in drama and a number of Tony Awards⁷, one of which went to Adriane Lenox. The play follows Sister Aloysius, the principal of a Catholic School in the Bronx that had admitted its first African-American student. Set in 1964, *Doubt* tells the story of her battle against the parish's priest, Father Flynn. Upon receiving information from Sister James, a less experienced nun, that Father Flynn was alone with Donald Muller, the only black student at their school, and may have given him wine, Sister Aloysius immediately begins an investigation against Flynn. The play mainly takes place between these three characters, with scenes between the two nuns while Sister James rapidly regrets igniting these allegations; as well as between Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn, when she interrogates him while he continually accuses her of destroying their parish with her investigation. One scene in particular is very unique. Amidst her unshakable drive to get information on what happened between Donald and Father Flynn, Sister Aloysius calls Donald's mother into her office.

Given the sociopolitical context of the year 1964, Mrs. Muller is, first and foremost, concerned about her son's status. His enrollment in such a prestigious Catholic school is in order to ensure the possibility of moving on to a good high school, and eventually college. When Sister Aloysius initially alludes to Mrs. Muller that there may be a problem with Donald, she says, "whatever the problem is, Donald just has to make it here till June. Then he's off into high school."⁸ However, as the scene goes on Mrs. Muller comes to her son's defense in a very surprising way. Upon hearing the allegations from the school's principal that their priest may have engaged in inappropriate conduct with her son, this steadfast mother states that if anyone should be getting in trouble it should be Father Flynn, not Donald.

⁷David Sheward, "Tonys are 'Doubt'-Ful." *Backstage* 46.23 (2005): 1,1,39.

⁸John Patrick Shanley, *Doubt*. Dramatists Play Service, Inc, 2005. 41

During this scene, it is discovered that Donald's father has been beating him for some time, because of his "nature"⁹, which Mrs. Muller tries to explain to his principal in earnest, but she is not concerned with nature and instead focuses on actions. That is to say, for Sister Aloysius, the possibility of Donald being queer is not a concern, but father Flynn taking advantage of that is. For Mrs. Muller, this possibility is not her concern either, but the way that the world perceives him, and the way that his father treats him for it, are her concerns. These two women have the same shared goal of keeping Donald safe, but because of their vastly different life experiences, they have a very different outlook on the situation. Sister Aloysius insists that they leave Donald's "nature" out of the conversation, to which Mrs Muller responds:

"Forget it then. You're the one forcing people to say these things out loud. Things are in the air and you leave them alone if you can. That's what I know. My boy came to this school 'cause they were gonna kill him at the public school. So we were lucky enough to get him in here for his last year. Good. His father don't like him. He comes here, the kids don't like him. One man is good to him. This priest. Puts out a hand to the boy. Does the man have his reasons? Yes. Everybody has their reasons. But do I ask the man why he's good to my son? No. I don't care why. My son needs some man to care about him and see him through to where he wants to go. And thank God, this educated man with some kindness in him wants to do just that."¹⁰

For Mrs Muller, the intent behind Father Flynn's actions matters less than the opportunities her son is receiving by being given special attention from an educated and powerful white man, especially since his own father seems to reject him entirely. This thought-provoking monologue has been equally matched with powerhouse performances throughout the play's short history, even including an incredible cameo by Viola Davis in the 2008 film adaptation.

⁹John Patrick Shanley, *Doubt*. Dramatists Play Service, Inc, 2005. 44-5

¹⁰Ibid.

Sarah DeLappe's bacchic portrayal of a high school girls' soccer team, *The Wolves*, was touted by *American Theatre* as one of the most produced plays in the 2018-19 theatre season.¹¹ Since its first two sold-out runs at the Duke theatre on 42nd street in 2016, and its subsequent time at Lincoln Center's Mitzi E. Newhouse Theatre,¹² this play has been regularly produced in high schools and colleges around the country. DeLappe's youth—being a grad student when her work was originally published—is clearly visible in the dialect of her nine adolescent characters as they navigate their burgeoning adulthood in a suburb shrouded in unrecognized privilege. The naivety that bounces between the team members, along with their soccer balls, is so much of what makes this play relatable. It forces audiences to revisit their own childhood ignorance, which can be unnerving and nostalgic altogether. The role of the Soccer Mom provides a reprieve from the high energy of the preceding scenes and grounds the teenaged ensemble in a harsh reality, despite appearing onstage only in the last few pages of the play.

Having just lost her teenage daughter to a tragic accident, the Soccer Mom appears on stage during the team's first reunion after the death. She delivers a heartbreaking monologue that lasts only a few short minutes. DeLappe writes in the stage directions that upon her entrance, "she is manic with grief,"¹³ and that energy continues throughout her scene. Despite the age gap between herself and the girls, the Soccer Mom speaks with the same youthful cadence that the audience has grown familiar with throughout the play. Her lines are written in a fashion identical to those of the members of the soccer team, including a line break every few words and a smattering of "likes" and "ums". However, the emotional energy that she brings to the stage

¹¹Diep Tran, "THE MOST-PRODUCED PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS OF 2018-19." *American Theatre* 35.8 (2018): 36

¹²Adam Green, "Pack Mentality." *Vogue* 12 2017: 240. ProQuest.

¹³Sarah DeLappe, *The Wolves*. Samuel French, 2016.

drastically alters the world of the play, which had previously revolved around the sheltered lives of these 9 teenagers. The mother does not receive any information in the character list written by DeLappe, she's only listed under the rest of the characters as: SOCCER MOM. This shows that there is a lot of room for directors, and actors alike, to decide what kind of mother she will be since the only given information for her character is the tragic death of her daughter. The role of the Soccer Mom differs greatly from Agave, Martha, and Mrs. Muller for many reasons; the most glaring of which, is the playwright's choice to mention her only twice, in a very flippant manner before her entrance. This puts extra pressure on those involved in performing *The Wolves* to make sure this character is relevant and important to the audience at the time she is presented to them.

In the past 15 years, all of the aforementioned plays, despite being vastly different in genre, historical context, and subject matter, have all been produced in New York City's theatre district. Additionally, *The Bacchae*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, and *The Wolves* all appeared within 10 years of each other at the Lincoln Center Theatre. In the 2400¹⁴ years since its conception, *The Bacchae* has been adapted into a myriad of artistic works, but one particular 21st century production brought in great praise for the role of Agave. In 2007, audiences at the National Theatre of Scotland were presented with a flamboyant adaptation of *The Bacchae* written by David Greig and directed by John Tiffany.¹⁵ The show later transitioned to Lincoln Center, and the remarkable Alan Cumming took center stage as Dionysus as he was flanked by a 10-woman chorus, all leading to "the height of the tragedy, when Paola Dionisotti's Agave is unknowingly brandishing the head of her own son much to the distress of Ewan Hooper's

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵Mark Fisher, "Legit Reviews: Abroad: A Sassy New 'Bacchae'." *Variety* Aug 2007: 32

Cadmus.”¹⁶ It is clear in various reviews of this adaptation that Dionisiotti’s one-scene exodus did not go unnoticed by audiences and critics alike.

In 2008 Marilyn Stasio wrote for *Variety* that, “the amazing Paola Dionisotti [does] all the heavy emotional lifting when she flings herself onto the stage as Agave,” amongst the bacchanalia of director John Tiffany’s spectacular technical feats.¹⁷ In the closing statement of their review, Stasio remarks that, “for all the pyrotechnics of Tiffany's sound-and-light show, it's the pure language of Euripides' poetry and the raw pain of Dionisotti's electrifying performance that reveal the true power of this ancient tragedy - and its curiously modern message.”

Dionisiotti’s success in bringing excitement to a 2400 year old character is evident through her glowing reviews and through the image below captured in a 2008 performance at Lincoln Center.

Within the same theatre seasons, Lincoln Center Theatre housed another, drastically different, revival that featured a mother that is only present for one scene. In the 2009 revival of *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* at Lincoln Center’s Belasco Theatre, the role of Martha Pentecost was played by Pulitzer finalist, Danai Gurira.¹⁸ In an interview with *New York Magazine*, the character of Martha is referred to as the play's “Godot Figure,” as her absence throughout the play carries great dramatic value. In this interview, Gurira revealed that she originally auditioned for a larger role in the revival, but the director thought she possessed the, “certain type of emotional power he needed to play Martha.”¹⁹ Most reviews of this revival did not include much information on Martha, as is the case for many one-scene characters, except to state that Danai

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Marilyn Stasio, “The Bacchae – Variety.” *Variety*, 2008,

¹⁸ Boris Katchka, “Q&A With 'Joe Turner's Come and Gone ... - New York Magazine.” *New York Magazine*, 2009

¹⁹ Ibid.

gave an exceptional performance. For example, a review for *The Hollywood Reporter* only references her momentarily: "...Loomis has been searching for [his] wife (the excellent Danai Gurira)." ²⁰ Reviews are completely subjective; however, studying how often or how little one scene characters are mentioned in them can give some insight into the power of these performances in terms of the acting, as well as the efficacy of the role itself within the world of these various plays.

The Broadway production of *Doubt* earned three Tony Awards in 2005, including best leading actress in a play, which went to Cherry Jones, best direction of a play, given to Dough Hughes, and best featured actress in a play, which went to Adriane Lenox for her portrayal of Mrs. Muller. ²¹ In an interview that year, Lenox spoke about the unique challenges of playing a one-scene character. She stated, "It's a challenge to come into a play so late in the story and then have to get the facts across in a very short amount of time," then continued, "It's even more challenging to express all those unspoken things—Mrs. Muller's baggage about race, and homosexuality, and her husband's relationship with their son." ²² Despite these challenges, Lenox still received great praise for her performance in both its off-Broadway and on-Broadway iterations. Meryl Streep, an "aesthetic mentor" of Lenox's, came backstage after seeing *Doubt* to tell her that she found her performance delicate. ²³ In another reviewer from *Variety* in 2006, David Rooney writes that, "Adriane Lenox has cranked up the anxiety even higher in her single scene as the mother of the boy whose welfare is in question. It remains a searing, incisive depiction of a character whose responses to Aloysius' suspicions are among the more audacious

²⁰Alexis Greene, "'Joe Turner's Come and Gone.'" *Hollywood Reporter* 409 (2009): 14.

²¹David Sheward, "Tonys are 'Doubt'-Ful." *Backstage* 46.23 (2005): 1,1,39. ProQuest. Web. 20 May 2020.

²²Simi Horwitz, "FACE TO FACE: Adriane Lenox-A Tony Winner After 20-Plus Years." *Backstage* 46.25 (2005) 7

²³ *Ibid.*

elements of Shanley's fine play, a period piece trenchantly rooted in the moral climate of America today."²⁴ While there is no way to know for sure if the efficacy of this role should be attributed to the writing, directing, or acting, it is clear that Shanley's use of a one-scene character has been widely well-received throughout the play's history.

Adriane Lenox and Paola Dionsiotti both received quite a bit of recognition for their short-lived roles. Danai Gurira did not receive as much, but even so she got more recognition than Mia Barron, who originated the role of Soccer Mom in Sarah DeLappe's *The Wolves*. Through examination of a number of reviews of this young text, there was a clear lack of discussion around her character. One of the only prominent reviews that mentions her does so only to flesh out the plot of the play in the author's recap. Tim Teeman of *The Daily Beast* writes that, "it is her daughter whose tragedy has affected the team, and she has some urgent words of advice to impart and (less overtly) comfort from being around the team."²⁵ There are very few reviews past a simple mention of the character in terms of the plot, but that does not necessarily mean that the Soccer Mom was less effective than the other one-scene roles.

The combination of all of the different creative minds that go into a production, along with the subjectivity of theatre critique, make it so that these roles cannot be compared to each other in a linear manner. They each bring unique experiences to their respective plays, but they share the common experience of being mothers. Agave and Martha are more distant mothers, yearning to stay steadfast to their personal beliefs even when it means the sacrifice of their family. Mrs. Muller is a present mother, but holds close her morals that have proven to be

²⁴David Rooney, "DOUBT." *Variety* Feb 2006: 64.

²⁵Tim Teeman, "Inside a Soccer Team Full of Secrets: Review of 'The Wolves': Sarah DeLappe's Brilliant Play, 'The Wolves,' Focuses on a Teenage Girls' Soccer Team, which-as Well as being Determined to Win-Contains a Richly Complicated Set of Players." *The Daily Beast*, Nov 21 2017

controversial to the play's audiences, which make her a very dynamic character. The Soccer Mom is a present mother who has experienced an unimaginable loss and struggles to reconnect with other young people afterwards. Together, these characters make up a unique and under-recognized genre of dramatic roles that has yet to be given an official name, other than the trope of a "one-scene wonder", but with powerhouse performances and strong plot lines, this category of roles will always shine.

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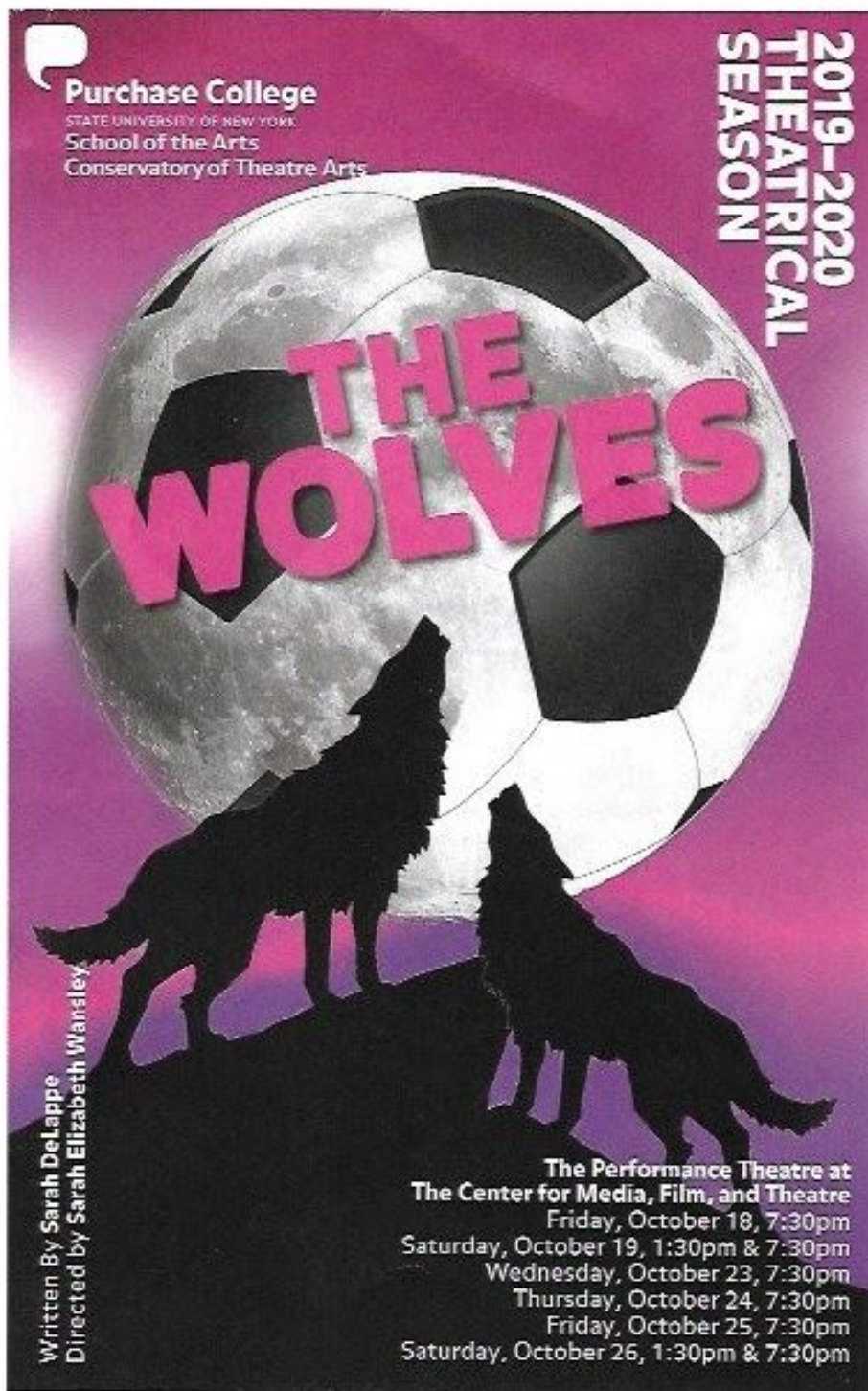
Paola Dionisotti as Agave Photo:Richard Campbell, NY Sun, 2008



Adriane Lenox as Mrs Muller Photo: Joan Marcus. Playbill, 2006



Mia Barron (left) alongside castmate Tedra Millan Photo: Allison Stock. Theatermania, 2017.



Playbill from the 2020 production of *The Wolves* written by Sarah DeLappe & directed by Sarah Wansley

Chris Padro is a second year BA actor from Larchmont, New York. Past credits include: *Up the Down Staircase* (Carole Blanca), *All Shook Up* (Natalie Haller), *Once Upon a Mattress* (The Minstrel), and *Barefoot in the Park* (Corie Bratter). Many thanks to God, her family and friends for their unwavering support, and the cast and crew for all of their amazing hard work!

Berenice Rojas is a third year BA actor from New York City, New York. Past credits include *Peter and the Starcatcher* (Gremplin), *A Doll's House* (Nora), and *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* (Poncia). A big Thank you to my mentors, friends, and family. Fausto Gracias por todo!

Amanda Santiago is a third year BA actor, writer and spiritual enthusiast from Brooklyn, New York City. She has participated in several plays from her previous school, LaGuardia Community College such as *Electra* (Chorus) and *Anonymous* (Serza and Naja). Amanda keeps her family and supporters close to her heart.

Mika Steele is a fourth year theatre and performance major, and this is her acting senior project. Past Purchase credits include *The Terrifying* (Annalise), *The Skriker* (Lost Girl/ Ensemble), *The Dream Factory: 60 Most Fascinating People* (Ultra Violet), and *Men on Boats* (OG Howland). She would like to thank her family and friends with a special shout out to her wonderfully supportive partner. Go Wolves!

SaCha Stewart-Coleman is a third year THP major from New York City. Her first MainStage appearance was in *Orestes 2.0* and she is grateful to have been allowed the opportunity to perform onstage again. She would like to thank her friends back home who have always supported her and her new Purchase family.

Biographies from the playbill for *The Wolves*



The cast of *The Wolves* including Assistant Director Claudia Swidzinski (top left), from left to right (top): Natalie Celebi (#11), Berenice Rojas (#00), Chloé LaBorde (#2), Amanda Santiago (#14), SaCha Stewart-Coleman (#25), (bottom) Sydney Nocerino (#7), Dixie O'Connell (#13), Chris Padro (#46), Mika Steele (Soccer Mom), and Caroline Loftus (#8)