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Everything Will Be Different: A Brief History of Helen of Troy

By Mark Schultz

Theatre in Context

Original Context

Mark Schultz, playwright and Episcopal seminarian, wrote this play in 2005. Schultz typically writes plays that are very emotional, raw, and dealing with darker issues. He has been described as a “sensitive, ambitious writer” and brings forth many intense emotions throughout his pieces. Schultz even spoke that he “like[s] theater that’s brutally honest. Really, truly brutally and/or viscerally honest. [He] really respond[s] to plays that are unsentimental but emotionally gut-wrenching, that are not easily digestible, that grab [him] by the throat and won’t let go.” He then adds his love for plays that are “conscious of the overwhelmingly dazzling and awful beauty of what it means to be alive and human. Plays that are not afraid to go to dark and ‘ugly’ places.” These are similar constructs in his piece, Everything Will Be Different: A Brief History of Helen of Troy. This show demonstrates “points when you when to look away,” almost having to shun the reality of the “ugly.” It also presents many dark themes such as loss, mental illness, vulnerability, and longing, common themes throughout his other pieces such as The Gingerbread House, F*U*N, The Depression, and Ceremony.

Characters

Charlotte – Seventeen years old. Her mother has recently died. The story follows her quest for beauty, fame, and love.

Harry – Charlotte’s father, also dealing with the loss of his wife. Charlotte and him do not have the best relationship.

Heather – Listed as “a friend” in the script. She is older, experienced, and beautiful. She randomly visits Charlotte and offers advice. It is hinted that she is just a figment of Charlotte’s imagination.

Franklin – Also listed as “a friend.” His relationship with Charlotte is never stable. There are a few instances where scenes with him may not be real.

Freddie – Listed as “a jock.” He is the object of Charlotte’s affection.

Gary – Listed as “a guidance counselor.” Is meant to offer Charlotte help, however her mental state complicates their relationship.

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1 http://newdramatists.org/mark-schultz
4 I Interview Playwrights Part 50: Mark Schultz
5 I Interview Playwrights Part 50: Mark Schultz
6 I Interview Playwrights Part 50: Mark Schultz.
7 http://newdramatists.org/mark-schultz
Mental Illnesses Within the Piece

*Everything Will Be Different* deals with heavier themes, such as mental illness. It becomes very evident early on in the piece that both Charlotte and her father are struggling with different disorders, perhaps as a result of Charlotte’s mother’s recent death. The audience becomes immersed in the story as the “reality vs. Charlotte’s mind” concept comes into play.

The main character, Charlotte, is very complex and unique. It is suspected as the show gets deeper into the plot that not all of the moments occurring onstage are real and may be playing through Charlotte’s mind. Charlotte believes all of these moments to be actually happening. However never said explicitly, one can deduce that Charlotte is suffering from a severe mental illness such as schizoaffective disorder, a personality disorder, and general instability due to her mother’s recent death. In order to understand these disorders further, I researched the profiles on the National Alliance on Mental Illness’ website. As a director, I have narrowed down the illness in which Charlotte is suffering from to two: schizoaffective disorder and borderline personality disorder.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Disorder</th>
<th>Median Age at Onset</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yr (interquartile range)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any disorder</td>
<td>14 (7–24)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety disorder</td>
<td>11 (6–21)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mood disorder</td>
<td>30 (18–43)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impulse-control disorder</td>
<td>11 (7–15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substance-use disorder</td>
<td>20 (18–27)</td>
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* Data are from Kessler et al.1

I do not wholly believe that Charlotte is schizophrenic, due to the description of schizoaffective disorder on the NAMI website. The condition is characterized by “symptoms of schizophrenia, such as hallucinations or delusions, and symptoms of a mood disorder, such as mania and depression,”9 verses the description of schizophrenia, that states that it is a “serious mental illness that interferes with a person’s ability to think clearly, manage emotions, make decisions, and relate to others.”10 I feel that schizoaffective disorder fits her character better, as she also shows signs of depression and mood swings as well as delusions. The symptoms of schizoaffective disorder include hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thinking, depressed mood, and manic behavior.11 Charlotte’s character shows multiple signs of

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each of these throughout the play; either through her actions, speech (sentence structure especially), or the way she interacts with others.

The other illness I believe Charlotte shows symptoms of is borderline personality disorder, or BPD. NAMI describes this as a condition characterized by difficulties in regulating emotion.” 12 These difficulties in regulating emotions can lead to severe mood swings, impulsivity and instability, poor self-image, and stormy personal relationships, 13 all things that Charlotte experiences throughout the course of the show, as seen in her inability to maintain close relationships and polar emotional levels in each scene. Interestingly enough, NAMI mentions that nearly 75% of people diagnosed with BPD are women. 14 The symptoms of BPD include: frantic efforts to stop abandonment by friends and family, unstable personal relationships that are characterized by either idealization or devaluation, distorted self-image, impulsive behaviors, suicidal behavior, depression, feelings of boredom and emptiness, and dissociative (out of body) feelings. 15 Charlotte particularly shows signs of trying to stop abandonment, idealized and devalued relationships, and dissociative feelings. This is most likely where the schizoaffective disorder and her want to be just like Helen of Troy comes into play.

The other main character of the piece is Charlotte’s father, Harry. Both Charlotte and Harry are having an extremely difficult time with Charlotte’s death, and neither of them know how to handle it or handle each other. It is also very indicative that Harry is battling a mental illness as well. However, his is different from Charlotte’s in that it highly resembles bipolar disorder.

NAMI states the symptoms of bipolar disorder as “distinct manic or depressed states, mania, and depression.” 16 Harry experiences these frequently, however more often than not he struggles to hold his anger in. He wants to be able to control his emotions, but he usually does not succeed. We see this often in his interactions with Charlotte, as he can go from yelling very violently and lashing out insults to saying things like “I love you, go make some cake, we can eat it together.”

Because mental illness is one of the main themes throughout the entire show, I wanted to become very educated on the specific disorders highlighted. This required me to diagnose a few of the characters on my own, but I feel it is very important that there are labels as to which illness the characters have, just from an artistic standpoint. This will allow for clear characterization and choices from the actors.

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13 "Borderline Personality Disorder." NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness.
14 "Borderline Personality Disorder." NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness.
15 "Borderline Personality Disorder." NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness.
Schultz’s Structure and Style of Writing

The structure of Everything Will Be Different is not extremely unique, however significant to the main concepts of the show. At the very beginning of a show there is a prologue, a scene between Harry and Charlotte that has such little dialogue that it is practically a tableau of sorts. Then comes the first time we see Charlotte at the chalkboard. The “chalkboard scenes” are all set as if Charlotte is giving a report or presentation of some sort. In her presentation, she is discussing Helen of Troy and her admiration for her. The chalkboard scenes precede each of the four parts, therefore alluding to the title, A Brief History of Helen of Troy (in four parts). The significance of these four scenes is the objective that the audience soon discovers: everything that Charlotte is doing throughout the show is to fulfill her need to be desired. However, she believes that mimicking Helen of Troy’s life can fulfill that need. Schultz included these four scenes at the blackboard to demonstrate the similarities in Helen of Troy’s life and what is to come in the scenes ahead in Charlotte’s life.

Schultz’s writing style is very realistic. When simply read, it can sound quite strange because it is quite repetitive. However when one reads it aloud, they can realize that Schultz wrote the dialogue in the show with the intentions of sounding as conversationally realistic as possible and lending to the theme of mental illness. Throughout the show, actors repeat phrases in a line multiple times. The dialogue at times can be quite redundant. This is seen in Charlotte’s monologue when she says, “I’ll just smile and mumble something profound or something really famous like a famous something like what someone famous would say because that’s who I’ll be because I’ll know a lot more.” When I first read this section, my head was spinning. But once I heard the text out loud, I realized that Schultz wanted the actors to sound as if they were coming up with their lines right there, on the spot. The lines are supposed to feel raw and a little bit awkward, because that is the tone of the entire show.

Theatre Processes

Intent Behind Choosing this Piece

Everything Will Be Different: A Brief History of Helen of Troy is a piece that I immediately connected to. I first found it in a search for audition monologues. I read Charlotte’s opening monologue, which is full of stammering, desire, and complete unknowing; feelings that so many teenagers, including myself, deal with constantly. I wanted to bring these ideas and characters to life. I feel that it is extremely important that the struggles teenagers go through are not undermined and that their desires can be further understood.

The piece shows the life of a teenager after the death of her mother and her quest for love, beauty, and ultimately, self-acceptance. It is dark. It presents themes such as mental illness, loss, and broken families. I chose this piece because it has a message that can resonate with so many people, just like it does for me. I feel that this message needs to be interpreted by a director that understands the pain that the characters are experiencing.
This monologue sets the tone for the entire show. As I happened upon it, the text really resonated with me. I think that deep down, every teenager is going through something like this. When you are seventeen, like Charlotte, the most important thing in your life is for you to feel loved. When you are loved, you are able to thrive and feel so joyful all of the time. However if you feel alone, like Charlotte, you will look to other areas of your life to find comfort.

This show has an important message representing an important age group. Teenagers are often misunderstood and feel as if others, particularly their elders, do not validate the issues going on in their lives. I connect with this play, as I live with my own mental illness and have experienced those moments of solitary pain. Constructing Everything Will Be Different will be therapeutic, but it will also serve as a way to spread more awareness of mental illnesses and the effects they have on those living with them.

The following is a summary of the play from Dramatists Play Service: “Teenage Charlotte's beautiful mother is dead, and in the midst of her own grief and her father's unwillingness to cope, she turns for comfort to the story of Helen of Troy, convinced that beauty, desire and fame can help her bring her mother back and punish the world that took her away in the first place. Getting beauty tips from her popular friend, seeking career advice on how to be a porn star from a guidance counselor who may or may not be having an affair with her, and searching for love from the football jock who may barely even knows she exists, Charlotte finds herself searching in fantasy for what she cannot find in reality, and ends up destroying the life and dreams of
perhaps the only friend she ever really had. But in the depths of pain, she comes to discover an unexpected grace.”

**Initial Response**

Before the dialogue of the piece, Schultz included two quotes: One from Rainer Maria Rilke, “For beauty / is nothing but the beginning of terror / which we are still just able to endure / and we are so awed / because it serenely disdains to annihilate us” and another from novelist Jean Genet, “Ugliness is beauty at rest.” One can infer that these act as a preface of the story we are about to dive into. The theme of outer beauty is already presented, as well as an underlying tone of discontent and perhaps sadness.

Once I started reading the piece, a few key components became very clear to me. In the prologue of the show, we see Harry and Charlotte at the dinner table, perhaps a family dinner. They are eating in silence as Charlotte extends her arm out to her father. Harry beings speaking in very short, tense phrases such as “You can’t. Keep. Needing. So much. Okay? You can’t. So stop it. Okay? Stop it. Just stop it. We’re fine. Let it go. Want some bread? I think the news is on.” The stage directions then read: Beat. Harry crosses off. Charlotte’s arm is still outstretched. She does not move. This already clues the audience into the brokenness within the household. After Charlotte’s first monologue, we then discover that Charlotte’s mother recently died. I inferred then that both Harry and Charlotte are not dealing with the loss of her well. Both are dealing with extreme withdrawal and sadness; however they both have different ways of showing it. Charlotte wants to be loved. She wants to be beautiful like her mother was and embody all that Helen of Troy was. Harry has random mood swings and is avoiding any sign of affection from his daughter. Along with their general coping methods, we soon become clued in that perhaps Harry and Charlotte are not completely mentally stable.

Another inference that I made from reading this play was that everything occurring onstage is not necessarily “real” at all times. The text clues us into this many times, especially with characters like Freddie, Franklin, and Gary. I suspect that the character of Heather is not real at all, but a mere figment of Charlotte’s imagination. Other scenes appear to just be scenarios playing out inside of Charlotte’s head, however later on we realize that Charlotte believes that these scenarios have actually happened. The audience begins to become more and more aware of Charlotte’s mental state as the show progresses, with her believing certain things to be true and talking with Heather often.

My initial thoughts while reading and studying this play all lead to the way that I will be directing the show so that the concepts presented, but not exactly explicitly communicated, become clear. This is very much one of those shows that leaves the audience talking; there is a lot to talk about on the drive home from the theater. In order for the audience to get a better understanding, I think they need to get inside of Charlotte’s head...literally.

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Inspiration – Two Live Pieces of Theatre

Many different facets of entertainment have inspired the piece that I am creating, from fashion shows to reality television, and even musicals. However, there are two pieces of theatre in particular that have inspired the ideas that are most unique to my production: *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens and *Dancing at Lughnasa* by Brian Friel.

*A Christmas Carol Performed at the Alley Theatre*

The Alley Theatre Company performs this classic Christmas story by Charles Dickens every year. It has become a tradition in my family to see the show each Christmas. The director, Gregory Boyd, has created a completely revamped version of the traditional show, with new elements added each year.

What inspired me from this particular production of *A Christmas Carol* is their use of stage space. They not only use the set on the actual stage, but many of the crucial moments of the show are performed in the aisle dividing the two sides of the audience. One of these moments is the Ghost of Christmas Present’s “Are there no prisons?” monologue. He backs Ebenezer Scrooge into the audience, as they are both headed towards a bright light.

This scene is significant to the staging of my show, because as the actors playing Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present are exiting, the audience is forced to infer what they are headed towards: Where are they traveling to? The entire night highlighted in *A Christmas Carol* follows Scrooge and the ghosts travelling through time; through Scrooge’s past, present, and future. This long walk into the audience and white light illustrates the image of moving onto the next step of the journey from the Ghost of Christmas Present to the Ghost of Christmas Future. This is why I chose the runway setup of my stage, in order to show the journeys of certain characters in and out of Charlotte’s mind.

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This is the Hubbard Stage at the Alley. The aisle right under “Gold Circle” is where many moments of dramatic action occur in their production of *A Christmas Carol*.

The idea of staging the most dramatic or impactful moments right in the middle of the audience really stood out to me. In my production of *Everything Will Be Different*, I want the audience to be completely immersed into the world of Charlotte. In order to do this, I want them to be surrounding her, seeing her gradually become weaker and succumbing to her illnesses. I think the “up close” view will be much more impactful in those moments, just as it was with *A Christmas Carol*.

*Dancing at Lughnasa* by Brian Friel

I saw a production of *Dancing at Lughnasa* at HITS Theatre. It was a charming show, narrated by a boy reflecting on his childhood in Ireland. It is a very reflective and nostalgic piece; similar to Schultz’s *Everything Will Be Different*. The inspiration for one of my key staged moments comes from the end of this show. In the very last scene of *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Michael is delivering his last monologue, as these stage directions are listed:

(Now fade in a very softly, just audible, the music “It is Time to Say Goodnight”)
And as MICHAEL continues everybody sways very slightly from side to side – even the grinning kites. The movement is so minimal that we cannot be quite certain if it is happening or if we imagine it.  

When I saw this performed live, I was in awe. It was so lovely and full of nostalgia, and I definitely questioned whether or not I was just imagine the swaying motion onstage. It created a dreamlike feeling throughout the entire room, almost like the entire theater was living in a fantasy. Just like the stage directions read, the audience was questioning if what was occurring onstage was real or not. Everyone was moving in slow motion and it made the whole room appear to be moving as well. As an audience member, I felt transported into a dream almost.

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I have staged moments planned at the beginning and end of the show where all of the other characters will spread about onstage as Charlotte is delivering her first and last words. As she is speaking, I will have all of the other characters slowly start to sway side to side as “Interlude for Piano” by Peter Bradley Adams fades in. With this, I hope to create a dream state just as *Dancing at Lughnasa* does. This will highlight the presence of fantasy and “other worlds” throughout the play.

Just as I experienced when I saw *Dancing at Lughnasa*, I want the audience to feel as if they are trapped in a surreal world. The juxtaposition of the characters in motion around a still Charlotte will demonstrate the swirling and constant movement of thoughts that she experiences. I want the audience to feel overwhelmed alongside her with the amount of movement and the increasing volume of the music. I also want to use this moment to demonstrate to the audience that Charlotte is often alone. I want to create a tone of solitude and loneliness as there is constant lives being lived around Charlotte and she cannot seem to find her own.

**Presenting Theatre**

**Concept**
I hinted at my concept when I first responded to the play’s text. I want the audience to feel as if they are completely immersed in Charlotte’s mind. I will treat the theater and set as Charlotte’s brain or imagination. I want it to have a haunting, close-up feel to all of the spectators. To accomplish this, I will be straying away from the traditional staging, set, costumes, and proposed staging of the piece.

**Set**
I want my audience to be extremely close to the actors, but also have a large set in order for the scenes to each have their own unique location in the space. I plan to have a stage similar to a fashion runway, with a large space at the back of the room with a thinner strip of stage dividing two sides of the audience. Besides this, the set will be very minimalistic, with only a few pieces of furniture and ladders scattered about.
The theater space will be similar to that of a black box, however there will be stage space in the front of the room and a runway dividing the crowd. There will be audience space at three places: the left and right sides of the runway as well as the back of the room.

Staging

The setup of the stage is specific to many integral moments in the show. The runway in this production signifies the pathway of Charlotte’s thoughts as they travel through her mind. Her bed sits in the middle of it, as many of her fantasies and delusions occur while she is on her own. The audience’s position in relation to Charlotte during these scenes will give them an up close view of how the thoughts travel in and out of her mind. I want them to get a sense of how quickly these thoughts come to her, and the runway will signify the beginning and end.

I have also included unique staging for the “not real” scenes that occur throughout the show. There are four ladders positioned at the back of the set. The actors playing Gary, Freddie, Heather, and Franklin will each have a ladder specific to their character. In the scenes where what is occurring is happening in Charlotte’s head, they will descend from their ladder, go to their scene space, and then exit down the runway. The exiting down the runway represents the “end” of a delusion and the character’s “escape” from Charlotte’s mind. The set allows for me to differentiate these specific characters entrances and exits in these “not real” scenes. The audience will see a clear

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difference in the origin of these characters coming onto the stage, and they will be able to interpret it as a different place that they are coming from.

In the opening and closing scenes of the show, I want to represent the swirling and running of thoughts in Charlotte’s head. I will have each of the characters onstage as the main action and dialogue is also going on, and they will be subtly swaying to soft music. They will be scattered about the stage as Charlotte is in the middle, representing the rushing of thoughts, lives, and people in her mind. I chose swaying because when one is overwhelmed in their thoughts, everyone and everything seems to be moving and rushing past them and they cannot find stillness. The constant movement around Charlotte onstage will physically recreate this sensation for the audience to experience.

Detailed Set Items

My set is very minimalistic. My intention is for the audience to focus more on what the ladders and runway signify rather than an elaborate set piece. Each character has their own “station” of sorts on the stage. Characters like Freddie, Franklin, Gary, and Heather will be in the same general spaces while onstage. They also only use the ladder specific to their character. These stations will communicate to the audience the different areas of life Charlotte has and how she keeps them divided; they never intermingle.

Gary and Charlotte’s scenes will always be stage left. Charlotte and Harry’s house is center stage, with her bed extending on part of the runway. Scenes with Franklin will generally be on and around the bench stage right. I wanted to achieve a certain consistency amongst the chaos of the show.

Appearance of Characters

Each of the characters will have “neutral” outfits. This means that throughout the entire show, they will basically be wearing the same articles of clothing. Charlotte, Harry, and Heather will all stay in the same outfits throughout the duration of the show because they stay in the same “state” the whole time. They are either in reality or fantasy; they never switch between the two. Their consistent look will communicate to the audience that they never switch between either reality or fantasy; they stay in the same world throughout the entire play.
The characters of Gary, Franklin, and Freddie, however, will change costumes between their reality and fantasy scenes. The outfits will only be different in terms of color. When characters are “real”, or what is actually occurring, they will be in complete gray scale clothing (this includes Charlotte and Harry). When there are scenes that are occurring inside of Charlotte’s head, the fantasized character will be in the colored, vibrant version of their costume. Through these colorful costumes, I want the audience to experience the feeling of being in an idealistic, dreamlike world. Whereas Charlotte’s reality is boring and dismal, her mind is vibrant and hopeful.

Characterization

For each role in Everything Will Be Different, I will require a very skilled and emotionally in-touch cast. This play confronts dark issues and will require raw reactions from the actors. I will especially require this from the actress playing Charlotte. This actress also must have a certain look to her. She cannot be too conventionally attractive, just ordinary looking in order to accurately portray her struggle with lack of beauty. I will ask this actress to explore the mind of someone with illnesses such as schizoaffective and borderline personality disorders by remembering times in which she felt disoriented, completely out of touch with her life. I want to portray Charlotte’s confidence and then ultimately contrasting numbness at the end of the show. The actress must be able to provide vastly different, yet controlled levels throughout the course of the piece. These different levels will make a more poignant impression on the audience, as they would be able to find areas that they relate with Charlotte’s character. However she does have moments of what seems like insanity, she also experiences more common struggles that can touch every member of the audience.

Along with the intent of portraying Charlotte and Harry with clear mental illnesses, I also wish to highlight the “reality” amongst all of the secondary characters. Characters like Franklin, Freddie, and Gary will have to characterize two different roles throughout the process of this piece. This is because these characters in Charlotte’s head are very different from their actual personas in real life. To demonstrate this clear contrast, I will require that these three actors characterize the two characters very differently and have differentiating emotional intent behind both. The distinction between their real and not real characters is important for the interpretation left up to the audience. I would rather this choice be more obvious or abstract, as I really want the audience to realize that the people in Charlotte’s head are very different from the people in her reality.

The character of Heather is different from the rest in that she is never exactly “real” in my interpretation. I see Heather as the new idol, mom figure for Charlotte. She is Charlotte’s inner monologue, but also the type of person that Charlotte wants to become; beautiful, confident, and desired. Within this show, Heather’s character will be specialized in the sense that she appears normal-esque, but is actually completely extraordinary, maybe not even real. I want her to be vibrant, commanding attention, but also controlled. My goal in this is for the audience to see a clear distinction between Heather and all of the other characters in Charlotte’s life. She should be the most puzzling of them all, for she does not have a “real” being.
Music

I will not have a lot of sound throughout the show, as I do not believe this particular production requires much. However, there is one specific song that I want to be included in the show. The song is called “Interlude for Piano” by Peter Bradley Adams. I chose this song because it is instrumental, and instrumental music always calls for a story to be interpreted, as there are no words to tell it for us. This song, all piano, is very nostalgic and melancholy, which will set up the feelings of loneliness that Charlotte often experiences throughout the show.

This song will be played in the beginning scene that I mentioned before, when the characters are swaying around Charlotte, as well as the end. I want to use the dramatic nature of the song to add intensity and the full circle effect at the end of the show. The song will be representative of the transition of all of Charlotte’s relationships: her and her father, her and her friends, and even Charlotte with herself.

At the beginning of the show, I will use a cut towards the beginning of the song, one that is softer and slower. I want it to be subtle at first, as it will be under Charlotte’s dialogue about Helen of Troy. At the end of the show, I will use a cut at the end of the song, when it is in its climatic moment. The volume and dramatics will be effective for the particular scene, but it will still sound similar to the cut that the audience heard at the beginning of the show.

I want the music to enhance the scenes it is being played in by adding a nostalgic tone of remembrance. I also want it to be a bit overwhelming for the audience, with a lot of movement and sound building throughout the scene. As the scene progresses, more people will be onstage, more movement will be occurring, and the music will gradually get louder. Each chord being played on the piano should symbolize each life that has touched Charlotte. As they appear, their entrance is accentuated by a specific sound in the music. I want the audience to recognize this and perhaps be reminded of how complex the world is around them. I want them to feel overwhelmed beside Charlotte, feeling the presence of those important in their lives surrounding them.

Intended Impact

I want my production of Everything Will Be Different to break the common misconceptions or unknowns that the audience members may have about mental illnesses. I feel that disorders of that nature are not talked about enough. And I want to take something usually so accessible and open to the public, like the theatre, and use it to give a voice to those struggling with mental illnesses. Similar to shows like Next To Normal, there will be moments that are shocking or even hard to watch, but I feel that is necessary. I want my audience members to be shocked and have the memories of this show stay with them. Through this production, I want to provoke thought through my production’s style, but also raise awareness of a community of people that are generally hidden or quiet of the public eye.

Impact Within the Concept

My hope for this production is that the concept will project the underlying theme of fantasy versus reality that Schultz constructed, however leave the audience feeling
unsettled. Facilitating the idea throughout the creative process that the entire space is Charlotte’s mind will immerse the cast further into the dark, mental themes of the text. I do not want the audience to be clued in right away, which is why I intend for the overall look of the show to be very simplistic. I want the audience to be able to clearly identify the characters’ origins in relation to the theater space and infer why they are entering and exiting from some places, why they are wearing color in certain scenes and grey in others, and why they surround her while swaying at the beginning and end of the show. These choices are made to demonstrate this other world that is occurring next to actual reality in the play.

**Impact Within the Set/Staging**

I found that whilst reading *Everything Will Be Different*, it was very difficult at first to understand what was occurring at certain points in the piece. This is a show that relies on visuals, especially in the “non-real” points. Within the text, there is not a huge difference at first between an actual character and then the character in Charlotte’s mind. To make a subtle, yet differentiation nonetheless between these characters, I have created a set that symbolizes the journey that these characters make in and out of Charlotte’s mind.

I have positioned ladders upstage, below the top curtain line. These ladders symbolize the “dropping in” or sudden occurrences of thought and fantasy that Charlotte has throughout the show. With her illnesses, these imagined thoughts and characters appear suddenly, dropping into her world in a dreamlike state. With the ladders, the characters in one of these imagined scenes will literally be able to drop or descend in, just as quickly as a thought can come to Charlotte. I want this thought to occur to the audience, as ladders often symbolize descent or ascent. I want them to ask themselves where these characters are dropping in from and why they are coming in from a different place.

I have also made the shape and structure of my theater space a lot different than the traditional setup. I wanted the audience members to be up close and personal with the action onstage, for dramatic and overall effect. However, it occurred to me how much more effective it would be if the actors were immersed in the audience space. Along with the overall visual effect, the runway style stage also has an intentional meaning. As the ladders act as the entry into Charlotte’s mind and thoughts, the runway acts as the exit. When imagined characters are “fading” and Charlotte’s world is transitioning back to reality, the journey down the runway will symbolize that imagined person’s end in her mind and also their overall validity. When those same actors are playing the “real” versions of their characters, they will enter from either stage left or right. The main stage section represents the place where Charlotte has a grip on reality. I want the audience to again question why characters are entering and exiting from certain points and what this long runway symbolizes in relation to them. I want the audience to feel what Charlotte feels when these thoughts leave her mind: prolonged abandonment. The thoughts do not take long to form, but they take a while to recover from. The audience will experience the awkward recovery period from Charlotte’s episodes right along with her.
Impact Within Characters’ Appearances

As I mentioned earlier, I have decided to create two different looks for the two different “worlds” in the show – fantasy and reality. When characters are in the “reality” state, they will be dressed in complete grey scale. However, when they are in Charlotte’s dream, fantasy world, they will be in a vibrant, colorful version of their reality costume. With this, I hope to further distinguish the difference between what is actually occurring and what Charlotte is imagining. It will also be representative of the drab reality that Charlotte is living in versus the amazing life she lives inside of her head. I want the audience to connect what various colors mean to them with what is occurring in certain scenes. Hopefully, they will recognize that the scenes in which the characters are in color are the scenes where they enter from the ladders and exit on the runway. I want them to make this connection and infer that what is occurring onstage is not entirely real. The contrast of vibrant versus grayscale colors will assist with this. The grey will make the audience think the moment is typical and lacking grandeur, whereas the colors reflect a more idealistic, lively mood.

Impact Within Music Selection

“Interlude for Piano” by Peter Bradley Adams will be a reoccurring song, heard at the beginning and end of the show. This song is instrumental and tells a story. It will help to characterize the escape from reality that Charlotte frequents and also demonstrating a feeling of chaos in her mind. The song reminds me of how thoughts build, very slowly and then all at once. I want the audience to feel an increased feeling of being overwhelmed accompanied by nostalgia. I do not classify the song as entirely sad, for I think it provides a chance of hope. I want the audience to become reflective seeing the characters sway to this song, perhaps being reminded of the people in their own lives that have touched them.
Two Moments of Staged Theatre

Moment One: Charlotte’s First Monologue on Helen of Troy

I chose to stage this particular moment because it highlights the dream/fantasy state that I am attempting to create. This is the first of the four parts in *A History of Helen of Troy*. Each of these acts as a prelude as to what will occur in the upcoming scenes.

This first scene will act as an introduction of the characters and what they mean to Charlotte throughout the entire show. She will be reading the report from on top of her bed with a single spotlight on her. As she is reading her “report” and the qualities that Helen of Troy possessed, each of the other characters will make their entrance into a tableau onstage. The line that the character enters on is very specific to their character in that they will be linked to that specific quality that Charlotte is trying to obtain.

“Everyone loved her.” – Harry enters from stage right and sits in his recliner. A spotlight illuminates him as he sits down. The significance of him being introduced on this line is because of how difficult his relationship is with his daughter. He does not provide her with a lot of love, causing her to seek it elsewhere. This is the first character other than Charlotte to enter the stage, and I want the audience to recognize him as her father, as this does follow the prologue and he has already been introduced. Because he is the first to enter, the audience will interpret him as having the most significant impact on her life.

“Everyone wanted her.” – Freddie enters from stage left and sits on the table. A spotlight illuminates him as he sits down. He enters on this line because he is the object
of Charlotte’s affection throughout the show. She wants him to make her feel desired. Because Freddie enters on this particular line, the audience will be able to infer that he will have something to do with love and romance in Charlotte’s life. Since his character has not been introduced yet, I want the audience to infer what his relation to that statement is.

“Everyone wanted to have her.” – Franklin enters from stage right and sits on bench. A spotlight illuminates him as he sits down. This line pertains to Franklin because their friendship is ruined due to Charlotte’s fixation on the idea that Franklin wants her. Franklin has also not been introduced in the play yet. Similar to Freddie, I want the audience to infer what his relation to this line is.

“And they would have done anything for her.” – Gary enters from stage left and sits in his counselor chair. His entering on this line is ironic due to the fact that he gives up on Charlotte’s case and leaves her to suffer with her illness. I want the audience to first be confused by Gary’s character, for his place in Charlotte’s life is not as easy to piece together as the others. This line, along with his area resembling a counseling office, will hopefully lead the audience to infer that this man is looking out for Charlotte’s best interests.

“Even die.” – Heather is illuminated by a spotlight at the top of her ladder. She comes out on this line because there is a parallel between her character, Charlotte’s mother, and Helen of Troy. They are all characterized as beautiful and wanted. In a way, Heather serves as a mother figure to Charlotte throughout the entire piece. Heather’s placement on the ladder is different from all of the other character’s places. She does not have a station on the stage. I want this realization to occur to the audience, making them realize that perhaps Heather is not on the same level as all of the other characters. Because I interpreted her as not real from the start, I want to create a clear distinction from the other characters in the opening tableau.

As Charlotte continues the rest of the monologue, the entire cast sits in place. Once Charlotte begins the line “How everyone must’ve been so happy”, the cast will slowly stand as “Interlude for Piano” by Peter Bradley Adams begins to softly play. The cast, besides Charlotte, will then subtly sway side to side, representing the movement of thoughts throughout Charlotte’s mind. I want the audience to feel as if they are in a different state than reality; much like what happens in Charlotte’s mind due to her disorders. The music will increase in volume as the cast’s swaying becomes more prevalent. This will create the overwhelming mood for Charlotte as well on the audience.

After Charlotte says, “To steal her back”, the swaying and music will immediately cease. All of the spotlights besides Charlotte and Heather’s will go out. Heather says her lines from the top of her ladder. Blackout. I want the audience to experience a feeling of “the calm after the storm” after the music ceases. Then they will be left to infer why it is only Charlotte and Heather left onstage, alluding to the voices and images that Charlotte hears and sees in her head. The location of Heather on the ladder and Charlotte on the bed will make the audience see Heather as a higher figure, someone superior to Charlotte, perhaps someone that she wants to be.
Moment Two: Scene 11, Freddie’s Monologue

I chose this scene in order to show my concept integrated in the “fantasy” scenes. In scenes of this nature, what occurs onstage is really occurring inside of Charlotte’s head. I wanted to convey this as a journey for the other character involved; from the descending into her thoughts, to the fading off as a dream.
I staged this scene in order to demonstrate how all of the dreamed or imagined scenes will work. Charlotte will be wearing the same grey costume that she wears the duration of the show. Freddie will be dressed in the color version of his neutral outfit. Charlotte will be sitting at the foot of her bed as Freddie delivers his monologue, imagining all of this actually happening. She will show her reactions as to what she is thinking with her facial expressions. 

**During first words of Freddie’s monologue**, “Um. Hi. Charlotte”, he will be at the top of the ladder in his color costume. This will indicate to the audience that this is existing in an alternate state than what we have seen previously. Freddie will then descend the ladder “falling” into her fantasy. This abrupt entrance from a different location will at first baffle the audience, as Freddie has not entered from the ladder before. He will reach the same level as Charlotte and begin talking to her, however she will be turned away from him, appearing to be dreaming up his entry into her room. The audience will be able to feel dreamy and immersed in a fantasy. 

**On “Um. Okay I know this is awkward and everything”,** he will cross to the runway, behind Charlotte’s bed. He will be delivering this as if she has been waiting there for him all along (very Sleeping Beauty/Snow White/Disney princess fantasy). He is now on the same plane as her, and she continues to not look at him. This is another instance that the audience will be able to note that what is occurring is not real. **On “It’s not like this happens everyday”,** he will sit on his knees on the bed right behind Charlotte, who is now facing the front, acting out her reactions as to what he is saying. I am keeping contact very minimal between the two, as I want to maintain the idea that this is Charlotte’s mind at work to the audience. I want them to feel the distance and unattainable feelings that Charlotte is experiencing. **On “Maybe you’d let me kiss you”,** Freddie touches Charlotte for the first time. He runs his hands up and down her arms, then pulling her in his arms from behind. After his last line, he will turn her around and kiss her. This first touch shows the height of Charlotte’s spell, when she can actually feel, see, and hear Freddie in her room. I want the audience to feel as if the fantasy versus reality cloud has been broken, and I want them to question themselves. Do they believe if this is real or not? **He will then slowly peel away,** exiting down the runway, leaving Charlotte reaching out to nothing, perhaps being slightly aware that there was nothing there to begin with. I want the audience to note Charlotte’s reaction to Freddie’s exit down the runway, or her mind. She does not accept it. When she reaches out and finds nothing, she is upset. I want the audience to sense a shift in Charlotte’s character.

The ultimate intention of this scene is to show the arc of Charlotte’s character. She imagines instances similar to this throughout the course of the show. Towards the beginning, she is blatantly unaware between fantasy and reality. However, as we near the end of the piece, we see that she may actually be aware of how sick she is. Little moments like her reaching out to Freddie indicate this.
Conclusion

I immediately saw part of myself in this piece as I read it for the first time. I think that everyone can. The pain experienced throughout *Everything Will Be Different* is not uncommon to the rest of the world. Everybody has experienced loss. Everybody has broken down. Everybody has experienced longing, whether it is for beauty, love, or simply comfort. I personally connected deeply with this piece because of my own struggle with anxiety. Some days will go by where I feel so much contempt towards myself because of the way I am. I desire to be normal and stable, but I cannot be. I produced a show for people feeling the exact same way Charlotte and I do.

After watching my production of *Everything Will Be Different: A Brief History of Helen of Troy*, I want my audiences to feel empowered, shocked, and even unsettled. I will expose the ugliest features of mental illnesses for those who are unaware, and I will also demonstrate that grace and salvation will come to those affected. I want the audience to leave with more self-awareness after recognizing the people in their lives and how their actions and thoughts affect them.