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**AN AUTISTIC SPINE: THE IMPORTANCE OF DISABILITY REPRESENTATION IN  
THEATRE**

By:

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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**May 5, 2023**

## **Abstract**

### *An Autistic Spine: The importance of psychological representation in theatre*

The goal of this thesis is to discuss the ways in which the current theatre industry is alienating disabled actors and creatives. The stigmatization around disability in any field is contributing to the added misunderstanding and misrepresentation of disability on stage and in film. This is done through a dramaturgical exploration of the history and present of disability representation in theatre; followed by the summary and analysis of a live theatrical recital with scenes from plays with psychological themes. To add to the message, the recital was also performed and run entirely by people with cognitive or physical disabilities.

*Keywords:* Disability Representation, Theatre Industry, Psychology, Dramaturgy

## **Dramaturgical Exploration**

Double majoring in psychology and theatre has given me a newfound interest in how the two subjects are related; because of this, my project is focused on the intersection of theatre and psychology. The world of theatre is ever-changing, as is psychology, but for over a century, it has been mainly focused on character and creating complex and dramatized versions of the human mind. There are many levels to how these two topics converge, but in my project, I will be focusing on three main ideas. Firstly, I will look at actors with psychological disabilities or conditions and how they implement that into their character work. Secondly, I will analyze plays that deal with psychological themes or conditions. Lastly, I will focus on how psychology has developed over time and how that has affected the complexity of characters in theatre as well.

Actors with disabilities in general deal with a lot of stigmatization and frustration around their ability level which can lead to many issues with not getting cast in roles including roles featuring disabled characters. In this context, I will be defining disability as someone with a physical or psychological impairment that makes interacting with the world difficult in some way. In a 2020 study called *The Ruderman White Paper on Authentic Representation in Television in 2018*, Nissim and Mitte found that approximately 56 characters with a disability were played by a disabled actor by 2018. That number is unreasonably low considering the number of disabled characters that have been created throughout history. The number of non-disabled actors playing disabled characters should be lower than that of disabled actors. However, as an actor with disabilities myself, I have experienced people telling me that it is too hard to accommodate for me and that is why I did not get cast in certain roles.

This stigma around disabilities has been around for a long time but as researchers continue to study disability and people are getting diagnosed more frequently it has become a

larger issue in some ways and a smaller issue in others. Stigmatization of disability is something that has and continues to change due to misunderstanding and general problems with understanding difference in society. Throughout history, there have been many interpretations of disability and difference. Humans generally seem to create an “us” versus “them” dynamic that isolates the people who do not fit into the regular mold. This has led to many systemic issues like racism, ableism, and ageism, among other things.

In terms of psychological disability specifically, the problem changes but is still present. Psychological disabilities have a different kind of set stigma around them outside of the theatre world that can affect things like school, applying for jobs, friendships, relationships, and many other aspects of everyday life. This happens because, for a long time in Western history, certain psychological disabilities or conditions were thought to be religious possession or punishment or just insanity. An article from PBS explains different time periods and their reactions to psychological disorders from 400 BC until 1992. For much of the periods covered it says there was a true belief that people with these conditions were either possessed, cursed, or insane. Although, things that were considered more minor, like depression, were often seen as an imbalance of black bile or even just an extremity of normal.

Although many of those beliefs have changed today, there is still a societal stigma that people with psychological conditions are too different or cannot take care of themselves. *The Disability History Museum* explains the stigma around disability by saying “When someone learns today that she will have a disability or a condition understood as disabling, when a parent-to-be learns that his child will have a physical or cognitive impairment, when television reports that a public figure has become disabled, certain specters are likely to arise -- emotionally freighted, irrational, even mutually contradictory -- of what the life of a person with a disability

must be like.” This fear is because of a series of myths around disability that are continuously seen as truth even though there is considerable contradicting evidence. One is the idea that people with these disorders are reliant on others or are not self-sufficient. This can contribute to the problem in the theatre world of disabled actors not getting cast or being labeled as difficult to work with. The core issue is misinformation about psychological or physical disabilities and how that correlates with ability on stage or in the workplace.

Interestingly, these conditions are found frequently in characters for many reasons but from my research, it seems the most common rationale is that it makes the characters more interesting to watch and that going to see plays especially plays with these kinds of characters can improve things like empathy and pro-social behavior. The thought that going to see theatre might improve these kinds of skills was researched in *The Journal of Experimental Psychology*. They found that there was increased empathy among audience members, especially for groups depicted in the given play (Rathje et al. 2021). This theoretically means that the more shows that have disabled characters and actors the more empathy and understanding there will be for the disabled communities.

I chose plays that relate to psychological conditions that I have in some way so that I can play them accurately and hopefully increase empathy and understanding for the conditions of the characters in audience members. I have chosen a total of five plays to research and perform parts of. The shows I am focusing on for this project are *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, *Arcadia*, *Proof*, *Eurydice*, and *Rabbit Hole*. Each of these plays includes characters with explicit or heavily implied psychological conditions. These aspects carry a different weight in each play, but they are all integral to the plot.

First, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, a play by Simon Stevens and a novel by Mark Haddon, is about a boy with Autism who discovers his father has been lying to him for most of his life about the death of his mother. Autism is a neurological disability that some researchers suggest has to do primarily with sensory issues related to the brainstem (Rivera-Bonet, 2023). However, it is a spectrum, meaning no two Autistic people have the exact same experience, and is known to cause other limitations in things like social situations, understanding subtlety and sarcasm, and communication abilities in some Autistic individuals.

As an Autistic person, *Curious Incident* did not feel cheesy or overdone in the portrayal of a character on the spectrum to me. In fact, it felt very validating and accurate to my experience when I first saw it live in many ways. For example, trouble with self-soothing, the struggle to understand subtlety, a passion for my interests, and a need for routine. However, because Autism is a spectrum disorder, some people say that it does not speak to their experiences with Autism or that it is actually overdoing the Autistic experience. However, because it is a circumstance that some people have had, I believe it makes it a realistic one at least to some degree.

This play not only shows a condition like Autism in an accurate way for me personally but also shows aspects of the disorder that are not typically shown but are very true to many people's experiences with Autism, like special interests. Jordan and Caldwell-Harris (2012) explain special interests as "Special interests are frequently developed by individuals with autism spectrum disorder, expressed as an intense focus on specific topics." Special interests can include topics, hobbies, ideas, or things that the Autistic person specializes in. In *Curious Incident*, the main character Christopher has special interests in train schedules, detective work, and math. These things make it so Christopher can understand pieces of the world to make his experience existing in it easier.

The specific scenes I have included in my project talk about the Autistic experience through Christopher's eyes. The first two scenes I have chosen are related and will be performed consecutively. They both take place in Christopher's school while he is talking to his school counselor about how hard it is to understand facial expressions. Psychologically, kids with Autism do sometimes have trouble understanding facial expressions or conversational intricacies like idioms so Christopher's confusion in the explanations of these concepts makes a lot of sense.

Another scene I chose focuses more on Christopher's special interest in detective work. In this scene, he goes hunting for his book that his dad took away, and instead, he finds a box of letters from his mom. This moment is crucial to the plot of this play and in Christopher's character development. He discovers that not only has he been lied to, which is generally difficult for Autistic people to understand, but his whole worldview is different because he believed his mother was dead. Stability is something that is extremely important for many Autistic people and especially kids and teenagers on the spectrum. That stability changed for Christopher when he found out about his mom which led to him running away because he felt he could not trust his dad.

The final scene I chose shows the way Christopher self-soothes which is something that is very important for Autistic people. *The Child Development Clinic* defines self-soothing as "any behavior an individual uses to regulate their emotional state by themselves." Self-soothing is often used when the person is in a moment of severe distress. This concept can be generally difficult for people on the spectrum to do because it involves thinking ahead and in the past to see what could be calming. Christopher momentarily struggles with that in this scene as well but then he thinks back to his time with his school counselor and uses her words to ground himself in his thoughts.



The next play I'm focusing on is *Arcadia* by Tom Stoppard which is about the cyclical aspects of time through mathematical, historical, and scientific lenses. It explores how the past can be and is interpreted in the present. This play has many themes of different kinds of balance versus chaos. Some of these include certainty vs uncertainty and harmony versus dissonance.

Although none of the characters in *Arcadia* are directly said to have any psychological conditions, Valentine and Thomasina are both characters with a strong love for math and science that is almost equivalent to a special interest. This is similar to the lived experience of people with autism because these characters are passionate about these two topics in a way that to some people might feel excessive and in terms of their stage time and lines, it is a majority of what they talk about. The pattern of communication for Autistic people with special interests is similar to the way Valentine and Thomasina talk about these passions they have.

Third, *Proof* by David Auburn is about a woman named Catherine who, following the death of her mother, was put in charge of caring for her father from a young age. This dynamic negatively affected her because she never got to deal with her grief from the loss of her mother and she had to watch as her father's depression slowly deteriorated him in front of her. In a situation like this people can develop many psychological issues including trauma, trust issues, other mental health problems, and in some cases things like obsessive compulsive disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder.

Catherine resents her father for what he put her through, and the experience seems to have caused trust issues and an avoidant attachment style. Attachment styles are behaviors people typically develop in childhood based on experiences that can affect relationships and friendships later in life. A person with an avoidant attachment style is very independent and has trouble with things like intimacy and trust which I believe describes Catherine's character.

In both scenes that I chose from *Proof*, Catherine shows how her trust issues and worries have developed because of her father. In the first scene I chose, the explanation she gives of how she took care of her father accentuates Catherine's lack of understanding when it comes to loss and of how her childhood affected her life moving forward. Psychologically, Catherine's experience with needing to hide her emotions to support her father seems to have impacted her ability to trust and show emotion as an adult.

The second scene I chose for my project explores the burdens she now must face as an adult due to her childhood and the burdens she endured in her childhood. She gets upset that everyone she interacts with who has heard of or met her father tells her how much they admired him when she had very different experiences and feelings toward him.

Catherine displays her emotions about this dynamic she had with her father, the grief she never processed from her mother, and her developed trust issues towards new people in her life through independence and self-sufficiency. This shows her avoidant attachment style which is something that can affect or cause so many psychological conditions. Throughout most of the play, Catherine is worried about inheriting her father's depression, but in that worry, she shuts herself off people and causes other issues and eventually gets into a kind of depression state as well. Her attachment style she developed as a child inevitably leads her to deal with all the things that she was worried about in the first place.

Next, *Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl, which is a retelling of a myth, Orpheus, from his wife's point of view. This play tells the story of choices and how they affect relationships, mental health, and in this case even life. Throughout the story, Eurydice is seen slowly losing herself. After her death, Eurydice begins to forget who she is, who her husband is, and how she got to where she is now. This weighs on Orpheus and he begins to feel like he is fighting for her love

and even her life for no reason. Eventually, Orpheus and Eurydice distance themselves from one another, and Orpheus moves on.

The scene I chose from this play is a letter from Eurydice to Orpheus. In this letter, Eurydice is providing information for Orpheus' next wife on how she can be a good wife to him. She admits that she was not the best wife she could have been to Orpheus and that he deserved better.

Admitting that she was wrong is something many people struggle with especially when they have psychological conditions that make it hard to see other people's perspectives.

In a 2007 New Yorker article, *Eurydice* was said to be “an anxiety dream of love and loss” (Lahr 2007). I believe this perfectly encapsulates how Eurydice feels throughout the show and how this play comes across to the audience. In a psychological context, Eurydice seems to not know exactly what she wants with Orpheus, and because of that the choices she makes push him away. Although she loved him when they got married, dying and returning to her father in the underworld made her rethink that and consider if he deserved better.

Lastly, David Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole* which discusses grief through the loss of a child. In the show, Becca and Howie Corbett lose their 4-year-old son to a high schooler named Jason who accidentally hit him while driving. Life after death is a big theme in this show and is a topic that can be very difficult for many people in real life as well. The loss of a child, especially to something unexpected is life-changing and can cause many different mental health issues. Being on the other end of that and being the one who accidentally caused the death of someone's child is monumental in a different way, especially because of how young Jason is in the play. Jason clearly feels terrible for his mistake and wants to make it better but there is nothing he can do. The depression and guilt he feels are different from the depression and guilt felt by Becca

and Howie but they are all feeling these emotions and going through this crisis in their own ways.

I chose a letter Jason writes to Becca and Howie as the scene from this show because it shows his remorse and urgency to show his guilt. He also demonstrates how he deals with intense emotions and situations with humor in his letter. In a study from *The National Library of Medicine*, it is found that teenagers dealing with depression or suicidal ideation often use humor to cope with those feelings and make them feel less intense (Lee et al. 2020). In other words, humor, specifically self-deprecating humor, is something that many teenagers use to mask their true feelings and pretend to be happy. Jason uses this method because he is having trouble understanding his feelings and how he believes he is supposed to feel or act.

Jason's depression, even though it is caused by something hopefully nobody in the audience had to go through, is relatable in other ways. Chronic depression can be considered a disability and one that many people experience. In my experiences with depression, I have had months or even years of my life where doing anything felt almost impossible. I think this is similar to how Jason is feeling, but due to his unavoidable guilt, it seems he feels like he has to keep going because he does not feel like he is allowed to be sad. Though the guilt stems from a different place, many people with depression experience guilt in feeling their emotions. Pulcu et al. (2013) explain "People with major depressive disorder (MDD) are more prone to experiencing moral emotions related to self-blame, such as guilt and shame." What Jason is going through is hopefully not a common experience, but the emotions and depression he has are very relatable for many people with depression.

Not only does Lindsay-Abaire write Jason's character so well that it feels as though he understood what it was like to be in Jason's position, but he also shows both sides of the story in

a way that lets the audience feel empathy for both the parents and Jason. In my research it seems like many plays will pick a side in these kinds of situations so that the audience knows who to feel bad for. However, from my analysis, it seems Lindsay-Abaire wants the audience to feel for both sides and either choose their own opinion or continue to see both sides of the situation.

All the plays I am exploring for my project interconnect with each other and specifically, they all go back in some way to *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*. I decided to find plays that connect back to *Curious Incident* because Christopher's experience with the world and his disability is the one that I relate to most and thus it acts as the spine of my project. I struggle with understanding facial expressions, subtlety in conversation, and understanding why people lie which are all things Christopher deals with as well. This has made many roles I have played difficult for me to understand at first, but through a great deal of character analysis, I have always gotten to a place where I understand them deeply. For much of my life, theatre has been an escape from trying to understand myself and getting to understand and be someone else for a while. That is why I wanted to create this show, to be able to perform as other characters, but be present with myself as well; something I do not normally get to do on stage.

Though I experience depression, anxiety, grief, and feeling burdensome for the people I love, like all the other plays I am focusing on, being Autistic is the core of how I perceive the world. When I was young and did not know I was Autistic, I went to New York and saw *Curious Incident* on Broadway. That experience made me feel seen and I finally felt like I was not alone in how I understood the world. I am unlike Christopher in many ways, but the similarities were and are still present enough for me to see part of myself in him.

In general, psychology and theatre have a lot of overlap and it is important to me as a double major to show and analyze that connection. Throughout history, there have been mental

illnesses and psychological conditions both in the world and in theatre specifically. However, these afflictions have been seen as problematic, curses, insanity, or even possession throughout history which has caused stigmatization and misunderstanding. Using these societally rejected conditions in theatre and media, especially by encouraging actors that actually have a condition or disability to play the disabled characters, is a way to move towards ending or at least challenging the stigma.

## **Unhiding Script**

### **Scene Order and Parts:**

Scene 1 (School 2 & 5 from Curious Incident)

Ella: Christopher

Jayce: Sean

Scene 2 (1 & 5 from Proof)

Ella: Catherine

Rinny: Hal

Scene 3 (Map of House 23 from Curious Incident)

Ella: Siobhan/Christopher

Rinny: Judy

Scene 4 (Eurydice)

Ella: Eurydice

Scene 5 (Rabbit Hole)

Ella: Jason

Scene 6 (London 44 from Curious Incident)

Ella: Christopher

Jayce: Sean

Scene 7 (Arcadia)

Ella: Valentine

Rinny : Hannah

Scene 8 (Curious Incident)

Ella: Christopher

Jayce: Ed

## **2. SCHOOL**

CHRISTOPHER. I find people confusing. This is for two main reasons. The first main reason is that people do a lot of talking without using any words. Siobhan says that if you raise one eyebrow it can mean lots of different things. It can mean 'I want to have sex with you.'

SIOBHAN. I never said that.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes you did.

SIOBHAN. I didn't use those words Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER. You did on September 12th last year. At first break. And it can also mean 'I think that what you just said was very stupid.'

## **5. SCHOOL**

CHRISTOPHER. The second main reason I find people confusing is that people often talk using metaphors. These are examples of metaphors:

VOICE THREE. I am seriously going to lose my shit.

VOICE FOUR. He was the apple of her eye.

VOICE THREE. They had a skeleton in the cupboard.

VOICE ONE. We had a real pig of a day.

VOICE TWO. The dog was stone dead.

CHRISTOPHER. The word metaphor means carrying something from one place to another and it is when you describe something by using a word for something it isn't. This means that the word metaphor is a metaphor.

SIOBHAN. Wow. That's clever.

CHRISTOPHER. It's true.

SIOBHAN. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER. I think it should be called a lie because a pig is not like a day and people do not have skeletons in their cupboards. And when I try and make a picture of the phrase in my head it just confuses me because imagining an apple in someone's eye doesn't have anything to do with liking someone a lot and it makes you forget what the person was talking about.

## Proof Act 2 Scene 5

**HAL:** You're still here. (CATHERINE *is surprised. She doesn't speak.*) I saw Claire leaving out front. I wasn't sure if you— (*he holds up the notebook.*) This fucking thing... it checks out. I have been over it, *twice*, with two different sets of guys, old geeks *and* young geeks. It is *weird*. I don't know where the techniques came from. Some of the moves are very hard to follow. But we can't find anything wrong with it! There might be something wrong with it but we can't find it. I have not slept. (*He catches his breath.*) It works. I thought you might want to know.

**CATHERINE:** I already knew.

(*beat.*)

CATHERINE: I'll do it.

HAL: No, you—

CATHERINE: He's my father, I'll do it.

HAL: You can't.

CATHERINE: Why not?

HAL: You don't have the math. It's all just squiggles on a page.

You wouldn't know the good stuff from the junk.

CATHERINE: It's all junk.

HAL: If it's not we can't afford to miss any through carelessness.

CATHERINE: I know mathematics.

HAL: If there was anything up there it would be pretty high-order. It would take a professional to recognize it.

CATHERINE: I think I could recognize it.

HAL: (*Patient*) Cathy . . .

CATHERINE: *What?*

HAL: I know your dad taught you some basic stuff, but come on.

CATHERINE: You don't think I could do it.

HAL: I'm sorry: I know that you couldn't. (*Beat. CATHERINE snatches his backpack.*) Hey! Oh come on. Give me a break.

(*CATHERINE opens the backpack and rifles through it.*) This isn't an airport.

(*CATHERINE removes items one by one. A water bottle. Some workout clothes. An orange. Drumsticks. Nothing else. She puts everything back in and gives it back. Beat.*)

CATHERINE: You can come tomorrow.

(*Beat. They are both embarrassed.*)

HAL: The university health service is uh very good.

My mom died a couple years ago and I was pretty broken up. Also my work wasn't going that well . . . I went over and talked to this doctor. I saw her for a couple months and it really helped.

CATHERINE: I'm fine.

(*Beat.*)

HAL: Also exercise is great. I run along the lake a couple of mornings a week. It's not too cold yet. If you wanted to come sometime I could pick you up. We wouldn't have to talk . . .

CATHERINE: No thanks.

HAL: All right. I'm gonna be late for the show. I better go.

CATHERINE: Okay.

(*Beat.*)

HAL: It's seriously like twenty minutes up to the club. We go on, we play, we're terrible but we buy everyone drinks afterward to make up for it. You're home by four, four-thirty, tops . . .

CATHERINE: Good night.

HAL: Good night. (*He starts to exit. He has forgotten his jacket.*)

CATHERINE: Wait, your coat.

HAL: No, you don't have to—

(*CATHERINE picks up his jacket. As she does, a composition book that was folded up in the coat falls to the floor. Beat. She picks it up, trembling with rage.*)

CATHERINE: I'm paranoid?

HAL: Wait.

CATHERINE: You think I should go jogging?

HAL: Just hold on.

CATHERINE: Get out!

HAL: Can I please just—

CATHERINE: Get the fuck out of my house.

HAL: Listen to me for a *minute*.

CATHERINE: (*Waving the book*) You stole this!

HAL: Let me *explain*!

CATHERINE: You stole it from *me*, you stole it from my *father*— (*HAL snatches the book.*)

HAL: I want to show you something. Will you calm down?

CATHERINE: Give it back.

HAL: Just wait a minute.



**HAL:** I had to swear these guys to secrecy. They were jumping out of their skins. See, one email and it's all over. I threatened them. I think we're safe, they're physical cowards. (beat.) I had to see you.

**CATHERINE:** I'm leaving.

**HAL:** I know. Just wait for a minute, please?

**CATHERINE:** What do you want? You have the book. She told me you came by for it and she gave it to you. You can do whatever you want with it. Publish it.

**HAL:** Catherine.

**CATHERINE:** Get Claire's permission and publish it. She doesn't care. She doesn't know anything about it anyway.

**HAL:** I don't want Claire's permission.

CATHERINE: I'll do it.

HAL: No, you—

CATHERINE: He's my father, I'll do it.

HAL: You can't.

CATHERINE: Why not?

HAL: Y

You

CATHERINE: Yeah?

HAL: Sure. Just like you.

CATHERINE: Still. I don't think I should spend another winter

HAL: If here.

CATHERINE: (Beat.)

HAL: There is nothing wrong with you.

CATHERINE: I think I'm like my dad.

HAL: I think you are too.

CATHERINE: I'm . . . afraid I'm like my dad.

HAL: You're not him.

CATHERINE: Maybe I will be.

HAL: Maybe. Maybe you'll be better.

(Pause. HAL hands her the book. This time CATHERINE takes it. She sits. She looks down at the book, runs her fingers over the cover.)

CATHERINE: It didn't feel "amazing" or—what word did you use?

HAL: Yeah, amazing.

CATHERINE: Yeah. It was just connecting the dots.

Some nights I could connect three or four. Some nights they'd be really far apart, I'd have no idea how to get to the next one, if there was a next one.

HAL: He really never knew?

CATHERINE: No. I worked after midnight. He was usually in bed.

HAL: Every night?

CATHERINE: No. When I got stuck I watched TV. Sometimes if he couldn't sleep he'd come downstairs, sit with me. We'd talk. Not about math, he couldn't. About the movie we were watching. I'd explain the stories.

Or about fixing the heat. Decide we didn't want to. We liked the radiators even though they clanked in the middle of the night, made the air dry.

Or we'd plan breakfast, talk about what we were gonna eat together in the morning.

HAL: Also exercise is great. I run along the lake a couple of mornings a week. It's not too cold yet. If you wanted to come sometime I could pick you up. We wouldn't have to talk . . .

CATHERINE: No thanks.

Those nights were usually pretty good.

I know . . . it works . . . But all I can see are the compromises, the approximations, places where it's stitched together. It's lumpy. Dad's stuff was way more elegant. When he was young.

(Beat.)

HAL: Talk me through it? Whatever's bothering you. Maybe you'll improve it.

CATHERINE: I don't know . . .

HAL: Pick anything. Give it a shot? Maybe you'll discover something elegant.

(A moment. HAL sits next to CATHERINE. Eventually she opens the book, turns the pages slowly, finding a section. She looks at him.)

CATHERINE: Here.

(She begins to speak.)

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We go after-hirty,

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her—

1?

**CATHERINE:** You want mine? Publish. Go for it. Have a press conference. Tell the world what my father discovered.

**HAL:** I don't want to.

**CATHERINE:** Or fuck my father, pass it off as your own work. Who cares? Write your own ticket to any math department in the country.

**HAL:** I don't think your father wrote it.

*(beat.)*

**CATHERINE:** You thought so last week.

**HAL:** That was last week. I spent this week reading the proof. I think I understand it, more or less. It uses a lot of newer mathematical techniques, things that were developed in the last decade. Elliptic curves. Modular forms. I think I learned more this week than I did in four years of grad school.

**CATHERINE:** So?

**HAL:** So the proof is very... hip.

**CATHERINE:** Get some sleep, Hal.

**HAL:** What was your father doing the last ten years? He wasn't well, was he?

**CATHERINE:** Are you done?

**HAL:** I don't think he would have been able to master those new techniques.

**CATHERINE:** But he was a genius.

**HAL:** But he was nuts.

**CATHERINE:** So he read about them later.

**HAL:** Maybe. The books he would have needed are upstairs. *(beat.)* Your dad dated everything. Even his most incoherent entries he dated. There are no dates in this.

**CATHERINE:** The handwriting—

**HAL:** —looks like your dad's. Parents and children sometimes have similar handwriting, especially if they've spent a lot of time together.

*(beat.)*

**CATHERINE:** Interesting theory.

**HAL:** I like it.

**CATHERINE:** I like it too. It's what I told you last week.

**HAL:** I know.

**CATHERINE:** You blew it.

**HAL:** I—

**CATHERINE:** It's too bad, the rest of it was really good. All of it: "I loved your dad." "I always liked you." "I'd like to spend every minute with you..." It's killer stuff. *And* you got the notebook! You're a genius!

**HAL:** You're giving me way too much credit. (*beat.*) I don't expect you to be happy with me. I just wanted... I don't know. I was hoping to discuss some of this with you before you left. Purely professional. I don't expect anything else.

**CATHERINE:** Forget it.

**HAL:** I mean we have questions. Working on this must have been amazing. I'd love to just hear you talk about some of it.

**CATHERINE:** No.

**HAL:** You'll have to deal with it eventually, you know. You can't ignore it, you'll have to get it published. You'll have to talk to someone.

Take it, at least. Then I'll go. Here.

**CATHERINE:** I don't want it.

**HAL:** Come on, Catherine. I'm trying to correct things.

**CATHERINE:** You *can't*. Do you hear me? You think you've figured something out? You run over here so pleased with yourself because you changed your mind. Now you're certain. You're so... *sloppy*. You don't know anything. The book, the math, the dates, the writing, all that stuff you decided with your buddies, it's just evidence. It doesn't finish the job. It doesn't prove anything.

**HAL:** Okay, what would?

**CATHERINE:** *Nothing.*

You should have trusted me.

(*beat.*)

**HAL:** I know. (*beat.* CATHERINE *gathers her things.*) So Claire sold the house?

**CATHERINE:** Yes.

**HAL:** Stay in Chicago. You're an adult.

**CATHERINE:** She wants me in New York. She wants to look after me.

**HAL:** Do you need looking after?

**CATHERINE:** She thinks I do.

**HAL:** You looked after your dad for five years.

**CATHERINE:** So maybe it's my turn.

I kick and scream, but I don't know. Being taken care of, it doesn't sound so bad. I'm tired.

And the house is a wreck, let's face it. It was my dad's house...

*(beat.)*

**HAL:** Nice house.

**CATHERINE:** It's old.

**HAL:** I guess.

**CATHERINE:** It's drafty as hell. The winters are rough.

**HAL:** That's just Chicago.

**CATHERINE:** Either it's freezing inside, or the steam's on full-blast and you're stifling.

**HAL:** I don't mind cold weather. Keeps you alert.

**CATHERINE:** Wait a few years.

**HAL:** I've lived here all my life.

**CATHERINE:** Yeah?

**HAL:** Sure. Just like you.

**CATHERINE:** Still. I don't think I should spend another winter here.

*(beat.)*

**HAL:** There is nothing wrong with you.

**CATHERINE:** I think I'm like my dad.

**HAL:** I think you are too.

**CATHERINE:** I'm... *afraid* I'm like my dad.

**HAL:** You're not him.

**CATHERINE:** Maybe I will be.

**HAL:** Maybe. Maybe you'll be better.

*(Pause. HAL hands her the book. This time CATHERINE takes it. She sits. She looks down at the book, runs her fingers over the cover.)*

**CATHERINE:** It didn't feel "amazing" or— what word did you use?

**HAL:** Yeah, amazing.

**CATHERINE:** Yeah. It was just connecting the dots.

Some nights I could connect three or four. Some nights they'd be so far apart, I'd have no idea how to get to the next one, if there was a next one.

**HAL:** He really never knew?

**CATHERINE:** No. I worked after midnight. He was usually in bed.

**HAL:** Every night?

**CATHERINE:** No. When I got stuck I watched TV. Sometimes if he couldn't sleep he'd come downstairs, sit with me. We'd talk. Not about math, he couldn't. About the movie we were watching. I'd explain the stories.

Or about fixing the heat. Decide we didn't want to. We liked the radiators even though they clanked in the middle of the night, made the air dry.

Or we'd plan breakfast, talk about what we were gonna eat together in the morning.

Those nights were usually pretty good.

I know... it works... But all I can see are the compromises, the approximations, places where it's stitched together. It's lumpy. Dad's stuff was way more elegant. When he was young.

*(beat.)*

**HAL:** Talk me through it? Whatever's bothering you. Maybe you'll improve it.

**CATHERINE:** I don't know...

**HAL:** Pick anything. Give it a shot? Maybe you'll discover something elegant.

*(A moment. HAL sits next to CATHERINE. Eventually she opens the book, turns the pages slowly, finding a section. She looks at him.)*

**CATHERINE:** Here.

*(She begins to speak.)*

*curtains*

**This is Christopher!**

## **23. MAP OF HOUSE**

SIOBHAN. "The next day, when I got home from school, Father was still at work so I went outside and looked inside the dustbin.

But the book wasn't there.

I wondered if Father had put it into his van and driven to the dump and put it into one of the big bins there but I did not want that to be true because then I would never see it again. One other possibility was that Father had hidden my book somewhere in the house. So I decided to do some detecting and see if I could find it.

I started by looking in the kitchen.

Then I detected in the laundry room.

Then I detected in the dining room.

Then I detected in the living room where I found the missing wheel from my Airfix Messerschmitt Bf109G-6 model under the sofa.

Then I went upstairs but I didn't do any detecting in my own room because I reasoned that Father wouldn't hide something from me in my own room unless he was being very clever and doing what is called a Double Bluff like in a real murder-mystery novel, so I decided to look in my own room only if I couldn't find the book anywhere else.

I detected in the bathroom, but the only place to look was in the medicine cabinet and there was nothing in there.

Which meant the only room left to detect in was Father's bedroom. I started by looking under the bed.

There were 5 shoes and a comb with lots of hair in it and a monkey wrench and a chocolate chip cookie and a magazine called *Men Only* and a pair of underpants from TJ Maxx with a little bit of pee left in them and a Scooby-Doo tie and a wooden spoon, but not my book. Then I looked in the drawers on either side of the dressing table. But these only contained aspirin and nail clippers and batteries and dental floss and tissues and a spare false tooth and a tampon but my book wasn't there either.

Then I looked in his wardrobe. In the bottom of the wardrobe was a large plastic toolbox, which was full of tools for 'DIY' which means doing-it-yourself, but I could see these without opening the box because it was made of transparent grey plastic. Then I saw that there was another box underneath the toolbox.

The other box was an old cardboard box that is called a shirt box because people used to buy shirts in them."

*Christopher finds these things including, finally, the shirt box.*

"And when I opened the shirt box I saw my book was inside it."

*Christopher finds his book.*

"Then I heard Father's van pulling up outside the house and I knew that I had to think fast and be clever.

I heard Father shutting the door of the van.

And that is when I saw the envelope.

It was an envelope addressed to me and it was lying under my book in the shirt box with some other envelopes. I picked it up."

*Christopher finds the envelope.*

"It had never been opened.

It said:"

JUDY. Christopher Boone, 36 Randolph Street, Swindon, Wiltshire.

SIOBHAN. "Then I noticed there were lots of envelopes and they

were all addressed to me. And this was interesting and confusing. And then I noticed how the words Christopher and Swindon were written. They were written like this."

JUDY. Christopher. Swindon.

SIOBHAN. "I only know 3 people who do little circles instead of dots over the letter *i*. And one of them is Siobhan. And one of them was Mr. Loxley who used to teach at the school. And one of them was Mother."



**EURYDICE** Damn you! I'll push you in the water!

**BIG STONE** Too late, too late!

**EURYDICE** There must be a pen. There are. There must be.

*She remembers the pen and paper in the breast pocket of her FATHER's coat.*

*She takes them out.*

*She holds the pen up to show THE STONES.*

*She gloats.*

**EURYDICE** A pen.

*She writes a letter.*

**EURYDICE** Dear Orpheus,

I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. I was afraid. I'm not worthy of you. But I still love you, I think. Don't try to find me again. You would be lonely for music. I want you to be happy. I want you to marry again. I am going to write out instructions for your next wife.

To my Husband's Next Wife:

Be gentle.

Be sure to comb his hair when it's wet.

Do not fail to notice  
that his face flushes pink  
like a bride's

when you kiss him.

Give him lots to eat.

He forgets to eat and he gets cranky.

When he's sad,  
kiss his forehead and I will thank you.  
Because he is a young prince  
and his robes are too heavy on him.  
His crown falls down  
around his ears.

I'll give this letter to a worm. I hope he finds you.

Love,

Eurydice.

*She puts the letter on the ground.*

*She dips herself in the River.*

*A small metallic sound of forgetfulness—ping.*

*The sound of water.*

*She lies down next to her FATHER,  
as though asleep.*

*The sound of an elevator—ding.*

*ORPHEUS appears in the elevator.*

*He sees EURYDICE.*

*He is happy.*

*The elevator starts raining on ORPHEUS.*

*He forgets.*

*He steps out of the elevator.*

*He sees the letter on the ground.*

*He picks it up.*

*He scrutinizes it.*

*He can't read it.*

*He stands on it.*

*He closes his eyes.*

*EURYDICE'S GRANDMOTHER walks by slowly in  
the background.*

*Stirrings of music from the 1930s.*

*She looks refined, lost in thought.*

*She walks as though she is walking toward  
something delightful—*

*she can't remember its name.*

*No one notices her.*

*The End.*

## SCENE FOUR

(Lights up on Becca in Danny's room. She sits on Danny's bed reading the letter from Jason.)

(Lights up as Jason Willette enters.)

JASON

Dear Mr. And Mrs. Corbett, I wanted to send you my condolences on the death of your son Danny. I know it's been eight months since the accident, but I'm sure it's probably still hard for you to be reminded of that day. I think about what happened a lot, as I'm sure you do too. I've been having some troubles at home, and at school, and a couple people here thought it might be a good idea to write to you. I'm sorry if this letter upsets you. That's obviously not my intention.

Even though I never knew Danny, I did read that article in the town paper, and was happy to learn a little bit about him. He sounds like he was a great kid. I'm sure you miss him a lot, as you said in the article. I especially liked the part where Mr. Corbett talked about Danny's robots, because when I was his age I was a big fan of robots too. In fact I still am, in some ways (ha-ha.)

I've enclosed a short story that's going to be printed in my high school lit magazine. I don't know if you like science fiction or not, but I've enclosed it anyway. I was hoping to dedicate the story to Danny's memory. There aren't any robots in this one, but I think it would be the kind of story he'd like if he were my age. Would it bother you if I dedicated the story? If so, please let me know. The printer deadline for the magazine is March 31st. If you tell me before then, I can have them take it off.

I know this probably doesn't make things any better, but I wanted you to know how terrible I feel about Danny. I know that no matter how hard this has been on me, I can never understand the depth of your loss. My mom has only told me that about a hundred times (ha-ha.) I of course wanted to say how sorry I am that things happened the way they did, and that I wish I had driven down a different block that day. I'm sure you do too.

Anyway, that's it for now. If you'd like to let me know about the dedication, you can email me at the address above. If I don't hear from you, I'll assume it's okay. Sincerely,  
Jason Willette

(beat)

P.S. Would it be possible to meet you in person at some point?

(Jason exits. Becca picks up the story and reads it.

#### 44. LONDON STREET AT NIGHT

CHRISTOPHER. What time is it?

SIOBHAN. 7 minutes past 2 in the morning.

CHRISTOPHER. I can't sleep.

SIOBHAN. It's because you're scared of Mr. Shears. You're being silly.

CHRISTOPHER. There's nobody about. You can hear traffic.

*Christopher wanders down the street.*

SIOBHAN. What cars are there?

CHRISTOPHER. A Fiesta. A Peugeot. A Ford Granada. A Mini Cooper.

SIOBHAN. What colours are they?

CHRISTOPHER. I can't tell. I can only see orange and black. And mixtures of orange and black.

SIOBHAN. Look at the things people have in their front garden.

CHRISTOPHER. Oh yes. Is that an elf?

SIOBHAN. It's a gnome. And a teddy bear. And a little pond, look.

CHRISTOPHER. And an oven.

I like looking up at the sky.

SIOBHAN. Me too.

CHRISTOPHER. When you look at the sky at night you know you

are looking at stars, which are hundreds and thousands of light-years away from you. And some of the stars don't exist anymore because their light has taken so long to get to us that they are already dead, or they have exploded and collapsed into red dwarfs. And that makes you seem very small, and if you have difficult things in your life it is nice to think that they are what is called negligible which means they are so small you don't have to take them into account when you are calculating something. I can't see any stars here.

SIOBHAN. No.

CHRISTOPHER. It's because of all the light pollution in London. All the light from the streetlights and car headlights and floodlights and lights in the buildings reflect off tiny particles in the atmosphere and they get in the way of light from the stars.



SIOBHAN. I have to go.

CHRISTOPHER. Don't.

SIOBHAN. I have to.

VALENTINE: Oh yes. Further. (*And then getting ahead of her thought.*) No – really. I promise you. I *promise* you. Not a schoolgirl living in a country house in Derbyshire in eighteen-something!

HANNAH: Well, what was she doing?

VALENTINE: She was just playing with the numbers. The truth is, she wasn't doing anything.

HANNAH: She must have been doing something.

VALENTINE: Doodling. Nothing she understood.

HANNAH: A monkey at a typewriter?

VALENTINE: Yes. Well, a piano.

(*HANNAH picks up the algebra book and reads from it.*)

HANNAH: '... a method whereby all the forms of nature must give up their numerical secrets and draw themselves through number alone.' This feedback, is it a way of making pictures of forms in nature? Just tell me if it is or it isn't.

VALENTINE: (*Irritated*) To *me* it is. Pictures of turbulence – growth – change – creation – it's not a way of drawing an elephant, for God's sake!

HANNAH: I'm sorry.

(*She picks up an apple leaf from the table. She is timid about pushing the point.*)

So you couldn't make a picture of this leaf by iterating a whatsit?

VALENTINE: (*Off-hand*) Oh yes, you could do that.

HANNAH: (*Furiously*) Well, tell me! Honestly, I could kill you!

VALENTINE: If you knew the algorithm and fed it back say ten thousand times, each time there'd be a dot somewhere on the screen. You'd never know where to expect the next dot. But gradually you'd start to see this shape, because every dot will be inside the shape of this leaf. It wouldn't *be* a leaf, it would be a mathematical object. But yes. The unpredictable and the predetermined unfold together to make everything the way it is. It's how nature creates itself, on every scale, the snowflake and the snowstorm. It makes me so happy. To be at the beginning again, knowing almost nothing. People were talking about the end of physics. Relativity and quantum looked as if they were going to clean out the whole problem

between them. A theory of everything. But they only explained the very big and the very small. The universe, the elementary particles. The ordinary-sized stuff which is our lives, the things people write poetry about – clouds – daffodils – waterfalls – and what happens in a cup of coffee when the cream goes in – these things are full of mystery, as mysterious to us as the heavens were to the Greeks. We're better at predicting events at the edge of the galaxy or inside the nucleus of an atom than whether it'll rain on auntie's garden party three Sundays from now. Because the problem turns out to be different. We can't even predict the next drip from a dripping tap when it gets irregular. Each drip sets up the conditions for the next, the smallest variation blows prediction apart, and the weather is unpredictable the same way, will always be unpredictable. When you push the numbers through the computer you can see it on the screen. The future is disorder. A door like this has cracked open five or six times since we got up on our hind legs. It's the best possible time to be alive, when almost everything you thought you knew is wrong.

*(Pause.)*

HANNAH: The weather is fairly predictable in the Sahara.

VALENTINE: The scale is different but the graph goes up and down the same way. Six thousand years in the Sahara looks like six months in Manchester, I bet you.

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CHRISTOPHER. I don't know if I got all the questions right because I was very tired and I hadn't eaten any food so I couldn't think properly.

*Ed nods. There is some time.*

ED. Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER. What for?

ED. Just ... thank you. I'm very proud of you, Christopher. Very proud. I'm sure you did really well.



## Project Documentation

For my show, I chose to include scenes from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, *Arcadia*, *Rabbit Hole*, *Eurydice*, and *Proof*. I chose to include these shows for many reasons, the main reason being they all include implicit or explicit mental disorders or disabilities and are personally relevant to me. In organizing the scenes, I found connections between the scenes from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* and the other scenes and ordered them based on the connections. The connections and order will be later addressed in the script breakdown.

I chose to work with Claire Foster (Scripps 2023) as my director for this production because I have worked with them before and I knew they would be able to help me make what I envisioned into a reality. I also worked with Rinny Williamson (Scripps 2023), Jayce Garner (Pomona 2023), Drew Liptrot (Pomona 2023), and Emma Lemire (Pomona 2023) for this production. I chose to work with this incredible group of people because they all bring something unique to the show and they all have a passion for theatre and the creative process. Everyone in the show is also neurodivergent or otherwise disabled in some way which worked really well for my project. Rinny and Jayce performed in the show with me and did an outstanding job of mirroring my energy and having a willingness to try things and work together. Myself and this group of creators work very well together and I think the show went as smoothly as it did because of the people in it.

### SCRIPT/SCENE ANALYSIS HERE:

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* was originally a book by Mark Haddon. In his article he wrote for Penguin Publishing on why he created the novel, he explained “When I was putting Christopher together I drew upon a long list of beliefs, habits, quirks and behaviours



which I borrowed from friends and acquaintances and members of my own family.” Haddon took inspiration from those around him in the creation of Christopher and the novel in general. This is interesting because Christopher is never described in the book in terms of what he looks like so he could be anyone. Similarly, Connor Curren who played Christopher in 2021 on The West End, said about the show “I feel like this show kind of has everything going for it and... it’s really for everyone I think. It’s really just anyone can sort of relate and anyone can sort of take pieces away from this show that they can hold dear to their heart.” I think that is what Haddon had in mind when creating the novel so that the actors in the play version agree means he did a good job of making Christopher and the story universal.

*Rabbit Hole* by David Lindsay-Abaire was created based on a piece of advice he received from a professor to write about his biggest fear. After many years of processing that advice, he had a son and it finally made sense. He said in an interview, “When I thought about what it would be like for me to lose my son, I experienced the grip of fear in the most profound way.” This was the inspiration for the show and explains why there is so much visible pain from the characters. He was experiencing the deep fear of wanting to protect his son and knowing maybe one day it would be out of his control. This show was turned into a movie with Nicole Kidman in 2010 and has received many positive reviews.

*Arcadia* by Tom Stoppard is a play at its surface about understanding the past through a lens of the present, but under that, it is a show about creativity through math and science and exploring the unknown. Stoppard wrote *Arcadia* because he became interested in puzzles and mathematics such that he wanted to understand them to the best of his ability. He said in an interview with Elisabeth Angel-Perez from Sorbonne University, “When I was younger I probably felt I had to know pretty much everything about a play before I was even able to begin

writing it. By the time I was writing *Arcadia*-and more and more since then-my feeling is that you have to find out what you are writing by writing it, which is really not easy.” This explanation shows that he broke his typical pattern of writing because he had a pure interest in the subject. He even got a scientific advisor while writing the show to make sure he was staying accurate. I think this demonstrates the passion that exists both in the creation of the show and in the show itself. I think Stoppard is quite similar to his character, Valentine.

*Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl reframes the classic tale of Orpheus through the lens of the female protagonist. Ruhl says in an interview with *The Metropolitan Opera*, “*Eurydice* is one of the most personal plays I’ve ever written... if you think of memoir as telling your life story, then I don’t think this is a memoir in that traditional way. Instead, it’s like taking significant fragments of your life and placing them within, or pushing them through, a giant myth that is much bigger than yourself.” She very much sees herself in *Eurydice* and in this story, so she told it to have more conversations with her past and present self as well as with her dad who passed away when she was young.

Lastly, *Proof* by David Auburn is a show about a family that is gradually falling apart using a series of mathematical theory. He said in an interview with Terence Smith from PBS News Hour, “In that I was helped a lot by reading popular books and spending time with mathematicians. We even had some come in to meet and talk with the cast and talk to them, so that was really the fun part of doing the play, getting as much of the kind of world of mathematics into the play as possible and putting it up on stage.” I think his passion for telling this story is similar to Stoppard’s and also explains the energy of the show because he had that energy himself.

## **Scene Breakdown**

### CURIOUS INCIDENT (Scenes Two and Five)

In both of these scenes Christopher is at school and his counselor, Siobhan, is reading something that he wrote about not understanding people. Psychologically, kids with Autism do sometimes have trouble understanding facial expressions or conversational intricacies like idioms. Christopher explains this difficulty well and these two scenes together create an arch for the rest of the show.

### CURIOUS INCIDENT (Scene 23)

In this scene, Christopher is looking around the house for his book. In doing this, he finds something he was not prepared for, a box of letters. These letters are from his mother, who he was told is dead, but he does not quite figure out that they are from her in this scene. This scene is interesting from a psychological perspective because Christopher is displaying one of his special interests, exploring and being a detective, as well as showing his problem-solving skills. This scene will set up the letter scenes from Rabbit Hole and Eurydice.

### CURIOUS INCIDENT (Scene 44)

After finding the letters, Christopher goes to find his mom because he is angry with his dad for hiding the letters from him and telling him his mother was dead. In this scene, he is in London, he has been to see his mother, and now he has run away because his dad came to get him. Siobhan kind of acts as a voice of reason and a comfort person for Christopher even when she is not there physically. In this case, Christopher imagines what Siobhan would be saying if she was there and has a conversation with the imaginary Siobhan to calm down. He shows that he is able to understand what comforts him which is very important for kids with developmental disorders in particular. This scene relates to the scenes in Proof and Arcadia in how Christopher makes sense of the world and of social situations.

### PROOF (Act 2 Scene 5)

Catherine is feeling the burden of her father's research and having taken care of him. She is getting frustrated with all the people telling her they loved her father or they respected him when she took care of him and that is the reason he kept going for so long. This relates to *Curious Incident* in that Christopher does not understand people, as he states in the first scene, and Catherine is getting frustrated because people do not see her father the way she did.

### EURYDICE (Letter to Orpheus)

In this letter, Eurydice is apologizing to Orpheus for the way she behaved but is also writing instructions to Orpheus' next future wife on how to be a better wife than she was. Eurydice is displaying the ability to understand what she did wrong, it took her the whole play to get to this point, but that just makes it even more believable that she has actually accepted what she did wrong. She does seem to have some insecurities as well, for example feeling like she is not good enough for Orpheus. This feeling is similar to how Christopher's mom felt in her letters. She left because she cheated on Christopher's dad but also in her letters, she stresses that she feels Christopher is better off without her.

### RABBIT HOLE (Scene Four)

Rabbit Hole focuses on understanding loss, specifically of a child named Danny. In this scene, Jason is writing a letter to Danny's parents. This letter explains how Jason deals with loss even of someone he did not know very well in how he uses humor and emotion in the letter. It also shows how grief can take a long time to heal from by Jason saying that even though it has been eight months since the death of their child, they are still probably feeling the loss. This letter also relates to the letters from Christopher's mother in how she talked a lot about how

Christopher is still probably confused about why she left. This is a different kind of loss, however, Christopher's mother still addresses it in a similar way to Jason.

#### ARCADIA (Scene Four)

In this short monologue, Valentine talks about the beauty of nature and why and how it works so well. The way he talks about it shows his passion for physics and the way stuff works which is something that comes up a lot in *Curious Incident*.

#### **Character Breakdown**

Christopher Boone from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* serves as the storyteller and the protagonist of the show. In the novel, it is supposed to be Christopher's book that he wrote. Everything is seen from his perspective and his actions and emotions are what move the plot forward. There are many ups and downs in energy throughout the show because the energy of the play matches the energy and emotions Christopher is experiencing. For example, when Christopher finds the letters from his mother, at first the text and stage directions move very quickly because he is trying to figure out what is happening. Then everything slows down as he is realizing and processing the information. Christopher is the start and end of the show. In many ways, he is the conflict and the resolution.

Much of Christopher's identity and defining features are intentionally left out of the show to make it more relatable for any audience member. What the audience does know factually about the character is that he has a love for schedules, trains, math, mystery novels, and animals. These things all come up as important aspects of the plot which further establishes that the show is inherently Christopher's. His attitudes, emotions, and actions are what direct the show.

Jason Willette from *Rabbit Hole* is a complex character. He serves as both a sort of scapegoat for the main character, Becca, to take her feelings out on and as an aid in the

resolution of the show when Becca forgives him and herself for what happened. Jason is a 17-year-old high school senior who accidentally hit and killed Becca's 4-year-old son with his car. Throughout the show, he is trying to cope with what happened and trying to get forgiveness from Becca and Howie, Becca's husband. Though it is never explicitly said, Jason's dad is heavily hinted to have passed away throughout the show. In coping with the guilt of accidentally killing someone, Jason's grief seems to come back as well. This adds to his desire for forgiveness and helps Becca to see that in the end.

Valentine Coverly from *Arcadia* acts as the voice of reason and of modern science and mathematics in the show. His passion for knowledge and explaining information reminds me of the passion I saw in Tom Stoppard's interviews. I think he may have put a lot of his own character in creating Valentine. By the end of the play, Valentine has explained many theories of mathematics and science and he ends by explaining to Hannah how she can not always go back and fix things through a final mathematical theory. This connects to the other time period that exists in the show in which one of the characters dies in a fire the night before her 17th birthday and helps to resolve the show.

Eurydice from *Eurydice* is the protagonist of the show and is constantly moving the show forward in her journey. During the course of the show, she tries to remember her life on Earth and her lost love, Orpheus. The more she remembers, the more her opinions on staying in the underworld change. In the end, she decides Orpheus deserves better and she has died for a reason so she sends him a letter telling him not to look for her anymore. Releasing him and accepting where she is now helps to restore a sense of balance at the end of the show.

Catherine from *Proof* is the protagonist and is constantly seeking understanding in her current situation, her past, mathematical theories, social situations, and her own mental health. In

seeking this understanding, she finds new information which moves the plot along throughout the show. The audience knows that Catherine took care of her dad for 5 years and is recovering from the stress of having to care for someone who was slowly degrading mentally. She is worried she will become her father because they were similar in many ways and she does not want to end up like he did. This ends up getting to the resolution of the show when she discovers she will be alright no matter what happens because she has people who love and care about her.

#### OBJECTIVES/TACTICS FOR EACH SCENE HERE

#### **Project Execution**

To prepare for each show we did a series of warm-ups. We started with a warm-up inspired by the Linklater Method which included stretching the body and jaw, vocal warm-ups utilizing humming, and progressive muscle relaxation. These all helped with physical readiness and for our readiness for energy, we did the shake-out technique starting at eight and working our way down to one. During the show and in preparing for the show, I used Strasberg's acting technique method of "Sense Memory" or drawing on past experiences to better understand the character. I think this was the best way to go about this show in terms of acting technique due to my relationship with each character and scene on a personal level. Feeling the emotions of the characters in order to better understand them is what has generally worked best for me in the past and in this show.

Right before the show went up, I had a family emergency come up and the emotions for that were still raw when the show started. Under the circumstances, I am incredibly proud of my performance and what I accomplished. I think the energy of both shows kept the audience engaged and was fun to be in. I felt like everything was well prepared and blocked in a way that made it easy for the audience to see and understand every piece of the show. From what I saw

and from what others have told me, the warm-ups really helped everyone be able to vocally be clear and understood the whole time.

The space itself felt filled at every minute of the recital, there was never a dull moment. I think this matched the energy of the show itself and the story I was telling. Working with Rinny and Jayce on stage, I felt supported the whole time. I knew that they were there for me if I needed them and I could be there for them if they needed me as well. In the last scene of the show, which was a line of dialogue from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, Jayce's character Ed, who is Christopher's father, tells Christopher he is proud of him. I added this because it was my way of telling myself that I am proud of myself and what I created. However, at that moment I could see that it was not just me telling myself but Jayce and Rinny and everyone there who came to support me were feeling it too. I believe that was the best moment of the show because it was when it felt the most like everyone in the theatre understood what the story was and was with me, supporting my message.

### **Self Evaluation**

The show was overall a success. I am happy with the choices I made and I feel that it accurately told the story I was going for. The use of intentional mess mirrored the experience of overstimulation as well as the way my mind works. The overwhelming number of thoughts that constantly swirl through it feels messy and jumbled so getting to represent that physically was exciting. I think that physically representing Autistic masking and having others and myself take the paint off and put it on me at different points in the show was a great way to help the audience understand the message of self-discovery. Allowing myself to no longer conform to what other people want of me was an important journey for me as a disabled and neurodivergent person and actor especially so sharing that journey with the audience was special to me.



Due to extenuating circumstances, I was unable to start rehearsals until two weeks before the show went up. This made the process much faster than I had planned for and some things had to be changed to accommodate for that time period. The main change we ended up making was we had to cut one scene. Originally, there were two scenes from *Proof* that we put in sequence, however, the first scene was dense and required one of my castmates to memorize much more than was possible in two weeks so we cut it to make the show more manageable for the time frame. Though at first it was a slightly disappointing change for me, it ended up working in my favor and making the flow of the recital more clear for the audience.

I think the show was a huge success and I hope to do a longer version one day with more shows and maybe include some of my own written work as well. The feedback I got from everyone I talked to was extremely positive and some told me they would like to see a longer version as well. I am especially proud of myself for doing this project because I have gone through a lot during my college career and I believe one of my biggest achievements is beginning to unmask. My journey in college and even during the course of this project has included many ups and many downs but being able to include what I believe is my biggest achievement in another incredible accomplishment, my Senior Thesis, feels like the right way to bookend this chapter of my life.

Scene changes were handled by myself, Rinny Williamson, Jayce Garner, and Drew Liptrot, who helped as the running crew. Due to the nature of the Senior recital, the show is meant to be shorter than 30 minutes in length. This meant that scene changes had to happen quickly and there could not be much of a set or visual difference between each one. A way that we clarified when it was a new scene was by having a brief pause between the end of one scene and the start of the next to indicate a new character.

One scene change that was particularly exciting to me was the change between the end of the *Proof* scene and the start of “Map of House” from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*. I found this one enticing because, at the end of the *Proof* scene, Catherine is looking for something to talk to Hal about from the book. When she finds it she just says “here” which is the last line of that scene. To transition into “Map of House,” which is a scene where Christopher is describing how he looked for his book, Rinny– who played Hal– handed me the end of a piece of ribbon when I said the line “here” and the scene change happened while the scene was already going. What I mean by that is in describing how Christopher found his book, I followed the trail of ribbon that Rinny was leaving for me that eventually led directly to the physical book. This helped to create the mess on stage, which as I said before was very representative of my experiences, and it helped to create movement during “Map of House” which otherwise would have been still.

Below is a photo from the show that includes the mess on the stage that I discussed earlier as well as what I wore:



## Artist Statement

Dear Audience Member,

Thank you so much for coming to watch my show. Unhiding is a piece I put together based on my own experience with Autism and mental health struggles. Each scene was selected because it holds personal meaning for me. Throughout my life I have been bullied, told to hide my differences, and belittled. This caused me to start masking my Autism and other neurological differences. In recent years, I have decided to start actively unmasking and being authentically myself all the time. The problem with that is many people do not like how I act when I am not trying to blend in. Since I started unmasking, or unhiding as I am calling it, I have lost people I thought were friends. Each experience with losing someone has made me stronger in the long run and helped me to see what kinds of people I should be surrounding myself with. When I was thinking about the creation of this piece I thought a lot about how my struggles have interacted with theatre specifically. This is when I began to ask, why is representation so hard to achieve in theatrical spaces? The answer I found in my research was, people with disabilities are often seen as difficult to work with. This whole show is produced and played by people who either have invisible disabilities, mental or physical health struggles, or neurodivergence. We are here to take down that belief and hopefully begin to end the stigma around difference and disability. If you struggle with mental health or disability, I urge you to join the fight and continue to be authentically your wonderful selves no matter what space you are in. You and your differences make you special. You are loved.

With Love,  
Ella de Castro

## Special Thank You:

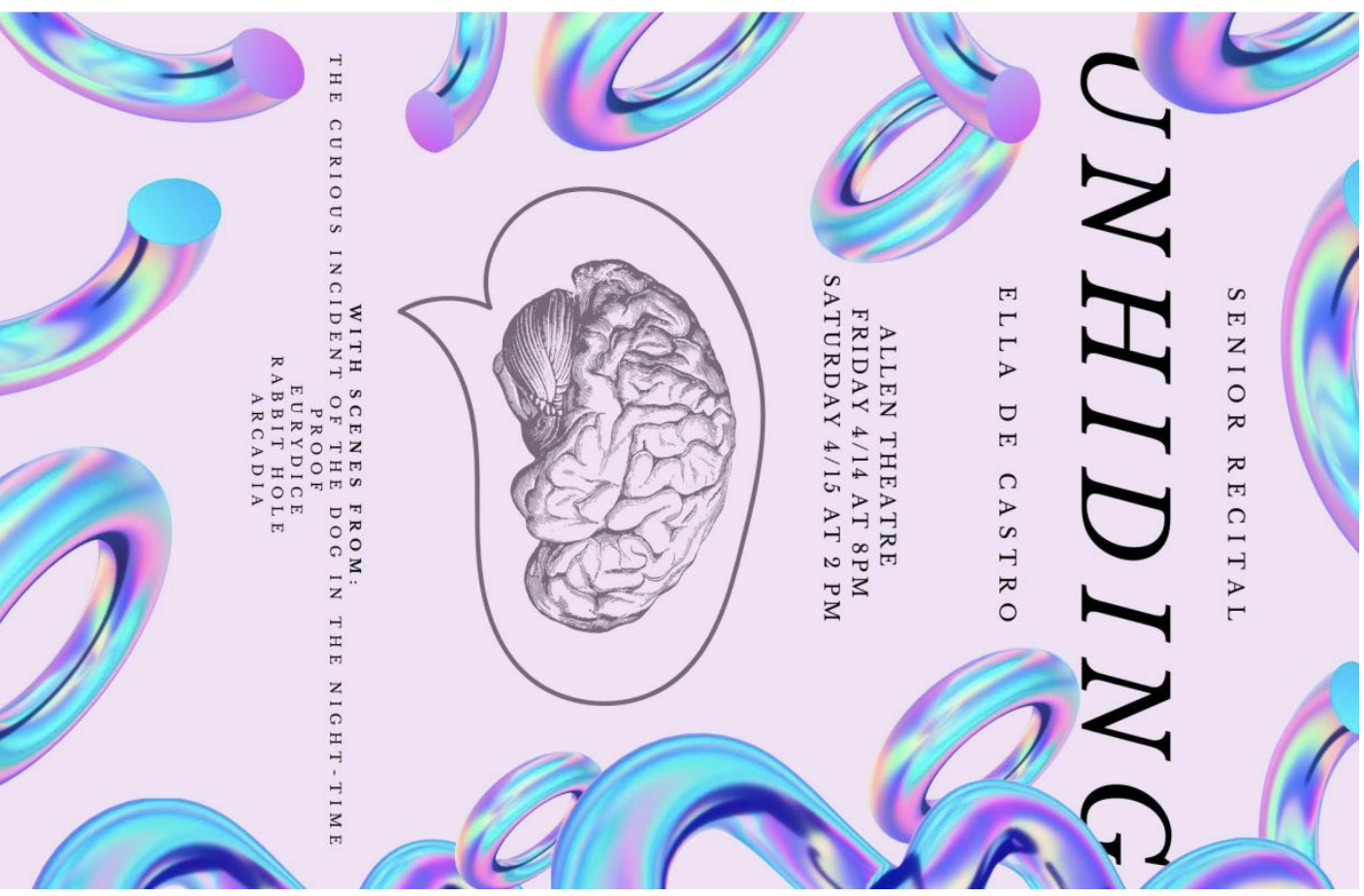
I want to thank my friends and family for supporting me in my endeavors and letting me be myself. You are the reason I can do this. I also want to thank Claire and Rinny for agreeing to do this show and supporting my wild ideas.



Please scan this qr code for resources related to the show if you want to learn more!

There are also hotlines linked there if you need support.

4



The Seaver Theater Complex and this production are situated on the unceded ancestral homelands of the Gabrielino Tongva Peoples. We recognize and honor the past, present, and future Elders and stewards of these homelands, who are the rightful and *current* caretakers of this land. This acknowledgement serves to honor the myriad cultures, languages, and traditions of all Indigenous Peoples and First Nations--those that are still being practiced, and those that were forcefully taken and destroyed by colonization. This acknowledgement is the first step in carrying out our moral imperative to build relationships with, support, and amplify the voices and rights of all First Nations and Indigenous Peoples. We have much to learn from the rightful communities of these lands. We need to protect, honor, and celebrate the history and ongoing legacy of the Peoples of the land on which we stand. This has always been, and always will be, Indigenous land. Learn more about the Gabrielino Tongva Tribe, Indigenous Sovereignty, and land stewardship by investigating some 5C-based programs, resources, and initiatives which include the Indigenous Peer Mentor Program, Native Initiatives, and the Tongva Living History Garden, which is within walking distance from the Pitzer College campus.

### Cast List

Ella de Castro\* SC '23  
 Rinny Williamson SC '23  
 Jayce Garner PO '23

### Production Team

Ella de Castro\* SC '23  
 Claire Foster SC '23  
 Drew Liptrot PO '23  
 Emma Lemire PO '23

\*In partial fulfillment of Senior Thesis

Unhiding is a compilation of scenes from five different plays. One play is repeated throughout and acts as the "spine" of the piece. Directly following this 30-minute performance will be an artist talk, during which you can ask questions or listen to an explanation of why these plays were selected and their significance. This show has intense themes so we encourage you to take care of yourself and if you need to step out, please feel free to do so at any time.

## Scene Order

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time  
 Proof  
 The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time  
 Eurydice  
 Rabbit Hole  
 The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time  
 Arcadia  
 The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

*Content Warning: Grief, Loss, Anxiety, Profanity, Alcohol, Abusive Situations, Mental Health Struggles, Ableism*

### Brief Summaries

*Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* adapted by Simon Stevens from a book by Mark Haddon is a show about a young Autistic boy, Christopher, who at the start of the show is accused of killing his neighbor's dog. Throughout the rest of the show, he becomes a sort of detective trying to find the real killer. In looking, he discovers that his mother, who he was told passed away, is alive and well and had been sending him letters. He then goes on an adventure by himself to find her.

*Proof* by David Auburn is a show about a woman named Catherine and her journey with grief, mental health, trauma, and her worry that she is becoming her father. Catherine's father was a professor of mathematics at The University of Chicago and she took care of him for the majority of her life until his death which occurred just before the start of the show. This play explores many mental health issues related to being a mathematical genius and having to grow up too quickly

*Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl reimagines the classic tale of Orpheus and Eurydice through the eyes of the heroine. In this show, Eurydice dies suddenly on her wedding day. Throughout the story, she struggles with trying to remember her lost love and reconnects with her father in the underworld. This play revitalizes a classic love story through the lens of loss, memory, and letting go.

*Rabbit Hole* by David Lindsay-Abaire is a play about grief and dealing with the loss of a child. *Rabbit Hole* explains the feeling of searching for peace and maybe even happiness in what feels like an eternal darkness of unimaginable loss. This show deals with social pressures, grief, depression, forgiveness, and guilt.

*Arcadia* by Tom Stoppard is a play about trying to explain the past through understanding the present. This play is set in the same location in two different timelines and deals with themes of chaos, mental health struggles, and philosophy.

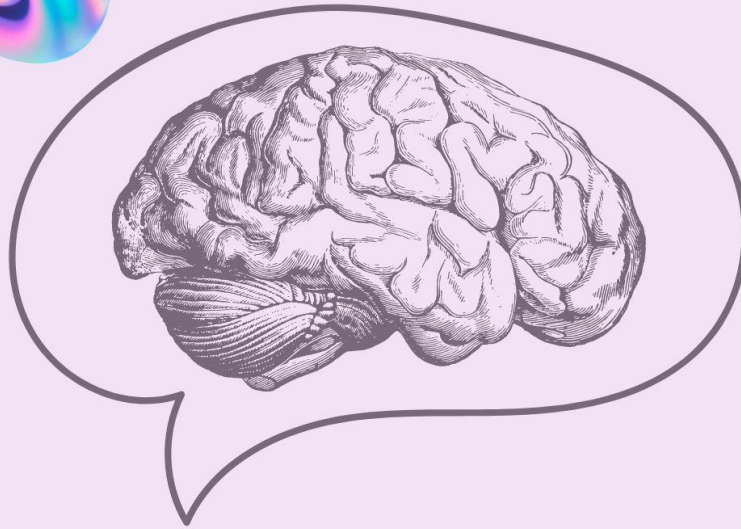


SENIOR RECITAL

# *UNHIDING*

ELLA DE CASTRO

ALLEN THEATRE  
FRIDAY 4/14 AT 8PM  
SATURDAY 4/15 AT 2 PM



WITH SCENES FROM:  
THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME  
PROOF  
EURYDICE  
RABBIT HOLE  
ARCADIA

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