On Directing: Mirror, Mirror

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1 – Introduction

As a theater practitioner whose departure from the safety of an educational institution is swiftly approaching, I am constantly looking at my professional choices to evaluate how they contribute to my identity. Does this work represent my views? Does this work showcase my talent and challenge me to continue to develop it? Does this work have a message that is important to me? *Mirror, Mirror* presents messages of value and acceptance that are harbored in the many layers of my identity. Layered identities define us as humans – mine being as woman, daughter, partner, student, director, queer, etc. *Mirror, Mirror* by Sarah Treem propels me to share the values of acceptance and facilitate difficult conversations in the face of our intersectional identities including religion, politics, gender, socio-economic status, and possibly other identities that remain unacknowledged.

With the metaphor of reflection in the mirror, Treem presents conversation points for the unacknowledged biases rooted deep within our culture. *Mirror, Mirror* provides questions rather than answers while promoting inclusion and acceptance in the face of identities that have not previously existed together in harmony.

Treem has taken a stance in the nationwide fight for civil rights of my generation, with *Mirror, Mirror* serving as a forerunner for the movements almost 10 years before the groundbreaking national decisions granting civil liberties to the LGBTQ communities. As this fight extends into the Hollywood spotlight with Caitlyn Jenner, Laverne Cox, *Men’s Health Magazine*, etc., identities that were previously considered *faux pas* to discuss or view in public are being displayed in mainstream media. Treem mapped this road before our country had reached it and I am ecstatic to have her words to
bring that story to light in my own community. Her words reflect the mosaic of a human identity that we all work to build day-in and day-out.

I chose *Mirror, Mirror* as a means to an end because the text holds themes that I find at the forefront of politics nationwide in universities and on the governmental level – bullying, sexual identity, gender identity, feminism, eating disorders – all of which are rampant causes of adolescent depression, self-harm, and often suicides. This is not to say that these issues do not effect adult populations, but that media highlights adolescent struggles more often than those of adults. Treem highlights the adolescent populations by framing her story in fairytale. She provides context and a safety net for the audience by disguising difficult subject matter in benign familiarity.

In a macro sense, America must protect its citizens whether they are black, white, pink, male, MTF, gay, short, or crazy. It is our responsibility as free citizens to support one another – a great responsibility. As a citizen enjoying these rights and as a part of historical civil rights decisions, I also feel a personal responsibility to use this moment in history as an educational opportunity. Using my medium of choice, the theatre, I can facilitate and further the conversations happening on the national level and bring them down to the micro community of our university, our student body, and our audiences. Bringing the opportunities for dialogue on gender identity, sexuality, preferred pronouns, etc. to the table allows those participating to feel comfortable to ask questions, express grievances, and hopefully move towards accepting formerly discordant identities.

As I move out of the university setting and into the professional setting I am to present myself a queer artist-advocate. *Mirror, Mirror* provides a platform for both artistic expression and advocacy to permeate the university audiences with this
production. Secondary programming with the production allows me to sponsor the thematic issues Treem presents in her text and further my artistic identity as artist-advocate.

This production of *Mirror, Mirror* was conceived as a platform for conversation based on Rose’s exploration of her gender identity. The binary of male/female inspired my work in the rehearsal process to focus and push the boundaries of everyday binary identifiers. The main character Roy/Rose evolved from one that I considered transgendered to one identifying as gender fluid to one who does not identify within any construct – at least with what Treem provides with the ending of the text. These interwoven ideas of Roy/Rose’s journey, mask and countermask as tools for physicalizing the concept, and the troublesome ending of *Mirror, Mirror* are clearest in hindsight as ones that require further exploration. It is safe to say that crafting the Roy/Rose character has taken the longest journey from pre-production to the final product.

Despite having loose ends of storyline and unaddressed thematic issues among other technical problems, the script provides a springboard for conversation, opportunities to explore difficult subject matter, and challenges for a director to put these stories on stage in a cohesive manner while respecting the playwright’s intention and providing entertainment.

My goal upon embarking into this process remained the same even in hindsight: to open the door for conversation. With the use of supplemental programming, reliance on the text, honest performance and the framework of fairytale, I believe the expectations of audiences were set, met, and then expanded. My expectations for this process
fluctuated throughout the twists and turns in the artistic process once in rehearsal with young actors and hearing their insight on characters very close to themselves. However, as a scholarly process, *Mirror, Mirror* provided the platform to make research-based directorial decisions, begin conversation, and receive feedback on the work.

Throughout the process, my focus was dedicated to four major areas of the text: the style Treem uses within the guise of fairy tale and magic, mask/countermask tools stolen from the style of *Commedia Del’Arte*, Roy/Rose as a character, and the problematic ending of *Mirror, Mirror*. Each of these foci will be discussed in chronological detail from pre-production through reflection to track each concept in the process. In culmination, I continue to reflect on my experience directing in the university setting with young actors in training and on directing as a whole. These views are presented in conclusion of this document in reflection.
2 - Pre-Production Research

The preliminary research that remained informative to production follows. My research focused on development of gender and sexuality in adolescent populations. I also explored digital and social media’s impact on developing American teens and its role in structuring our identities. As indicated by its title, Mirror, Mirror has roots in the Snow White trope. I explored the evolution of the archetypical characters and enchantment within fairy tales and how the idea of magic is integral to this text for its success. This research inspired conceptual and design meetings in pre-production then continued to evolve into practical tools in the rehearsal room.

Our Nation’s Reflection: Recent Civil Rights Turmoil

Our country’s recent movements to provide civil protections for all human beings have put marginalized communities into focus, specifically the LGBTQ communities and the gender queer communities. America prides itself on tolerance of all peoples and a progressive mindset – a melting pot. Yet in the lifetime of the United States, this is the first time LGBTQ communities are contenders in the modern day civil rights movements. America is finally starting to view these populations as human beings who deserve the same liberties as any other group. This is reflected by the recent federal marriage equality legislation and LGBTQ protections: any pair of consenting adults may wed, regardless of gender identity.

Thanks to this historical decision, LGBTQ visibility is at an all-time high among Hollywood A-Listers. Neil Patrick Harris is ‘that funny gay guy’ and Ellen DeGeneres is ‘the one who did it first.’ Caitlyn Jenner’s story has gotten more publicity than the last
Super Bowl. Aydian Dowling’s *Men’s Health Magazine* cover floored readers to see a FTM trans-man on the front of their monthly subscription. While this visibility has grown exponentially in the last months, opinions of the country continue to be mixed.

My personal stance reflects my identities as a partner in a same-sex relationship. I like to think now we can just call it a relationship, or just marriage, instead of same-sex marriage. Our country’s reflection is beginning to look more tolerant, accepting and inclusive. Sarah Treem uses characters of *Mirror, Mirror* to echo this sentiment and ask questions such as: “why can’t one be simultaneously gay, devoutly religious, and captain of the football team?” She uses the character of Badger to explore the spiritual and interpersonal transformation that occurs when identifying with a queered community. Oftentimes these intersections of our identities carry incongruent beliefs and stigmas. By putting a multitude of incongruent identifiers into the box of ‘fairy tale,’ Treem makes it bulge and burst and rip at the seams in a reflection of the United States of America as it begins to outgrow itself.

Fairy tales are designed to emphasize and highlight archetypes – symbols, or motifs, and very typical examples of familiar people – the masculine prince, for example. With few variables in the identities of characters of fairy tale, they are easily recognizable and audiences can anticipate their endings – happily ever after in a heterosexual love story. But in *Mirror, Mirror*, ‘real’ teenagers grapple with fragments of fairy tales that just don’t seem to fit them. The masculine prince, as we all know, gets the princess and lives happily ever after. But what if the prince doesn’t want the princess? Treem gives a heaping dose of fairy tale to each character as a representation of societal norms and expectations of the American teenager. They have to learn to navigate the spaces in
between their archetypes – what does it mean to be a devout Christian and queer? What does it mean to be financially poor and happy? What happens when your archetype doesn’t fit anymore?

These are questions our country is currently wrestling with. As humans, we are comfortable if we are able to compartmentalize. If we can check a box and identify you, it means you are safe from persecution – you are no longer dangerous, weird, or queer. If you do not fit within the box, there is something against the norm about you and the lack of understanding that comes with that is often expressed with hatred. In *Mirror, Mirror* Treem takes us through a journey of misfit archetypes and promotes acceptance for those who do not fit within the box. Her text was ahead of its time approximately 10 years ago before the LGBTQ communities were at the forefront of political debate. It is increasingly timely now with the battle for civil rights in the crosshairs of politicians in the United States today.

**On Treem: A Bridge Over Troubled Waters**

Sarah Treem, a Yale School of Drama graduate in playwriting, wears various hats today: television writer, playwright, and screenwriter. In HBO’s *The Affair* or Treem’s award-winning stage play *We Were Young and Unafraid*, she often addresses a central conflict of gender differences. These conflicts are frequently fueled by religious and political differences between men and women, but also by individuals who do not identify at one end of a binary or the other, that is, male or female; Republican or Democrat, etc. Treem states in an interview for *The Writer*, “I was aware when I was young that a lot of the canon that was taught was geared towards men… I felt when I was
a kid that things were supposed to be equal, but when I got out of school, that just wasn’t true.” (Littlefield) She notes that there is a distinct disconnect for women in the professional world when treated as lesser than their male counterparts. Women are diminished as the lesser of the male/female binary.

A large portion of Treem’s work is female-centric, capturing intimate life choices on love, life, children, sexuality, or careers. Many of her texts are born from personal experience working in a male-dominated field and her experience as a minority. Her voice can be seen directly in *House of Cards*, exploring the same situation through a woman’s perspective and then being forced to “think like a man.” (Littlefield)

*Mirror, Mirror* is a fascinating milestone in Treem’s career – as it is one of her least female driven plot lines. *Mirror, Mirror* is not guided by a predominantly female cast or focused on women’s issues. Arguably, it does not even address them – Treem forgoes addressing body image and eating disorders with Libby and self-harm with Gretchen. She also allows for Libby, as a rape victim, to be brushed off and forced to reconcile with Costen, her assailant, in the final scene. But by adopting fairy tale structure, *Mirror, Mirror* explores gender relationships and sexuality and how those are directly linked to our teenagers. Treem forces high schoolers on the brink of graduation to explore the physical, mental, sexual, political, and socio-economic facets of identity, even when the magic mirrors show them the ugly truths of these stigmas.

Film and TV are being heavily criticized in the last years for their misrepresentation of ideals. This can be how people look – how thin/fat, what they wear/don’t wear; unrealistic relationships; unfathomable dramatics. The media is often to blame for body shaming and for misogynistic behaviors.
Although more relentless for women and girls, there is an attractiveness standard for men and boys as well. A muscular ideal has been advanced for males in the media in general (Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein & Striegel-Moore, 1986) and on music television, in particular (Signorielli et al., 1994). Video games and the ads that promote them also advance a muscular ideal for males. Scharrer (2004), for example, found that the musculature of males was more pronounced than that of females in the video game ads, tight fitting clothing was donned by one in every four male characters, and 12 percent were shown wearing no shirt. Media images of women in advertising, video games, and television programming are unavailing in their endorsement of thin beauty as evident in the physical appearance of the characters as well as conversations about body size and shape. A far greater number of male characters are heavyset, out of shape, or overweight, but the media advocates musclecularity for boys and men. (Comstock 183)

Treem uses the stage to make an exhibit of the above incongruities between male and female perception in the media. Her dialogue elicits a visceral response when these ideals are dropped in casual conversation and then left unaddressed – particularly with her female characters, Libby and Gretchen – to make a point of how engrained these horrors are to young women in America. Perhaps that is what makes Mirror, Mirror so appealing to me as a director, as it is Treem's first published play and her unfiltered ideas as a young, emerging professional. It is both a challenge against the stigmas that are so deeply rooted in our culture due to the media and digital world, as well as a balancing act of the numerous thematic questions in production.

**Exploration: Gender Identity as a Performative Cultural Institution**

Each human being is born with some combination of genital markers that immediately marks them with “M” or “F.” From that moment, there are sets of expectations that are dumped on your head.

A girl is named girl even before she knows that this is what she is. In language, ready-made connotations are just waiting to be picked up: her domain is pink, she is sweet, passive, physical, spontaneous, beautiful, and so on. The boy, on the other hand, is approached with an entirely different set of terms: sturdy, smart,
Sex and gender are two very different notions – sex is biological; gender is a social construct. Sometimes these two things do not mirror one another. As Buikema states, “the notion of images and texts precede people.” (82) These cultural precedents vary across societies, but their basis is similar. We expect men to be strong, rigid providers and women to be demure, soft-spoken, and in service to husband and family. There is a certain way men are expected to dress, walk, and talk. And when one strays from these expectations, their performance of their gender is perturbing to us. Gender as performance: it is a character that we don that meets the social and cultural expectations of our society.

If examining gender as performance in the literal sense, one can look at art forms like drag, defined as any clothing carrying symbolic significance, but often referring to the clothing associated with one gender worn by someone of the opposite gender. If drag is a performative art of donning the opposite or mix of genders, then the ‘given’ gender on a daily basis must also be performative. Even in theater we see a multitude of roles that require men playing women and women playing men. *Peter Pan* is a classic example that has had Pan historically played by a woman. Marjorie Garber, Harvard professor and author who focuses on gender and sexuality, makes valid points on why it is practically easier to have a woman play Pan – it would be too hard to fly a grown man in most theaters, men often do not physically look like a young boy, and having a young boy play...
that role is unreliable and hard to legally navigate with time commitments, and so on. But really:

> Why is Peter Pan a woman?’ asks Majorie Garber, and her answer is: because a woman will never become a man. According to her, the tradition of a woman playing Peter Pan is a symptom of a fundamental asymmetry in the cultural perspective in which gender is given form. The same asymmetry can also be found in the psychoanalytical perspective about sexual identity. (Bleeker 170)

A woman will never become a man, Pan’s ultimate goal – to never grow up. These performative identities are set hard and fast in our culture that we have to have a woman in drag play a classic literary character. Yet, campy drag in a dark bar may make that same theatregoer of *Peter Pan* disgusted or uncomfortable. Is it that the context is uncomfortable or is drag considered too far from what is acceptable for most people in terms of gender norms? It is an interesting conundrum with a blurry line as to where our culture begins to reject its own constructs.

Treem exploits the gray area of gender norms using fairy tale tropes to make Rose’s performance less problematic – as a guise to allow Rose to move freely through her world in drag without being found out. Her ability to remain unrecognized by her former best friends and own sister is unrealistic. But with fairy-tale magic, Rose has a free pass to don a homecoming dress and perform the female gender flawlessly in the eyes of her classmates. It is not drag, but functions similarly to Peter Pan’s character being played by a woman – we just buy it as an audience.

With little production history of *Mirror, Mirror*, this is an exploration for the collaborative team to define the text’s identity and how it functions for us today. Defining what is male or female and how those performances work for us in the Pacific Northwest in 2015 is key to figuring out the performance on stage. Defining the male and female,
 Exploration: Media & Social Identity

Performed gender is only one facet of an intersectional identity. One may also choose to perform a cultural identification on St. Patrick’s Day, claiming one’s distant Irish roots. One may perform the role of wife but forgo the role of mother, or perform the role of instructor, grandparent, son, healer, etc. The performance of an identity includes a plethora of labels at any given moment in time. As a student one might perform student in the student-teacher dichotomy while also performing the identities of woman and Latina all at once. The construction of one’s performance across various mediums (the digital world of social media, for example) is often overlooked.

With technology advancing daily, we now have Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Oovoo, and any other app out there at our fingertips all the time. Identities are extended from real life into digital life from the moment the online profile is established on any of these various networks. One must choose male, female, other, or no response. Then pick a birthdate, then a photo, then add a quote, and so on.

These decisions are key in the process of discovery for adults and teens alike. There is pride in adding a new position or career, or changing your relationship status. Cooper and Dzara find Facebook key to development specifically in the LGBTQ youth community:
Buhrmester and Prager developed a “model of self-disclosure” in which adolescents can achieve “identity development” and “intimacy development” both through the process of revealing their thoughts and feelings to their peers. Today’s generation of youth possesses a new and different tool for self-revelation through Facebook. … For the Facebook user, self-revelation is not merely an act of sharing personal details, but is also an active construction of one’s perception of who one is. Through Facebook, the user creates a social artifact expressing one’s self. (101)

It is a process for these youth to explore and begin to disclose facets of their identities previously unexplored.

The same pair then makes a valid argument regarding the detriment of social media:

Each of us represents a multiplicity of identities, from those of a sibling, son or daughter, classmate, or employee, among others. Facebook can create a conflict about how to present oneself in a way that is not detrimental to oneself in any of these categories. Popular news stories have told of those who lost their jobs, were denied promotion, or were not hired due to their Facebook profiles. In addition, gay individuals may experience family members wanting to “friend” them. Each of life’s roles may be seen as having scripts, along with acceptable norms and guidelines. What is acceptable for one role is potentially not for another. These challenges are present for everyone. For an LGBT individual, the negotiation of these may be even more crucial, and even potentially hazardous…(104)

Is social media a necessary evil in the search for identity? Maybe, because it asks questions never considered (Relationship Status, Interested in?) and it teaches boundaries by forcing teens to recognize what they choose to post and who might see it.

In particular, social media provides an outlet for youth that have no other option for exploring their sexual and gender identities, particularly in an environment like Treem’s in Mirror, Mirror: deep south, religious, private school. The combination of geographic political opinions paired with strict religious opinions is toxic to a queer youth who does not fit into the expectations of his/her culture. Mary L. Gray, Indiana University’s voice on gender and sexuality studies thinks:
If access to visible community of sexual and gender difference is central to the story of urban queer cultural formation, where, when and how do rural youth seeking support for their sense of gender or sexual difference acquire a vocabulary for specifically LGBT identities? And, with the rapid but unequal incorporation of new information technologies into the lives of rural youth and their support agencies, what difference might the Internet’s increasing presence – and presumed ubiquity – make to the possibility for queer visibility between rural LGBT and questioning youth? (Gray 290)

In this case, social media is not an evil, but strictly necessary to development. Alexander and Losh agree:

For many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, particularly those in rural or isolated areas, the Internet has been an important, even vital venue for connection with others and for establishing a sense of identity and community. Particularly in a queer diaspora where notions of community and contexts of identity are central, these must often be constructed through information steadily gleaned sometimes at great personal and political cost, from places outside one’s home of origin. (Alexander 39)

To ignore the presence of social media in the lives of young adults today is arguably irresponsible. When examining Treem’s purpose with *Mirror, Mirror*, it is easy to seek and impose social media into the world of these teenagers. Want to find someone? Look at their Facebook. Want to know where they’re from? Check their LinkedIN. Our cyber lives are an integral part of our identities, whether we want to admit or not. I have a hard time forgoing this element of production and design, however, Treem validates this choice with the framing of a fairy tale structure that allows the audience to feel elevated from an everyday life full of cell phones, apps, and social media. While no longer informative to concept or design, social media is an aspect that must be considered as a facet of the modern teenager and recognized as an aspect that sets this fairy tale kingdom apart from real life.
On Fairytale – A Vital Framework

Treem’s framework and safety net allows this story to thrive by echoing archetypical fairytale tropes in character and moral compass. Characters’ names resonate with iconic children’s stories like Snow White/Rose White and the Black Queen/Gretchen Black. She also uses the convention of magical mirrors to show inner beauty (or ugliness in most cases) of evil witches and gruesome characters. Bruno Bettelheim explains that fairy tales “teach little about the specific conditions of life in modern mass society… But more can be learned from them about the inner problems of human beings, and of the right solutions to their predicaments in any society.” (5) He goes on to explain that we find meaning and coping skills as children thanks to fairytale and fable. Using fairytale precisely for this purpose, Treem gives audiences a coping mechanism for dealing with unfavorable material. “The fairytale simplifies all situations.” (Bettelheim 8) Bettelheim also notes a marked similarity found in Mirror, Mirror,

Fairy stories do not pretend to describe the world as it is, nor do they advise what one ought to do. … The fairy tale is therapeutic because the patient finds his own solutions, through contemplating what the story seems too impy about him and his inner conflicts at this moment in life. … The fairy tale clearly does not refer to the outer world, although it may begin realistically enough and have everyday features woven into it. The unrealistic nature of these tales is an important devise, because it makes obvious that the fairy tales’ concern is not useful information about the outside world, but the inner process taking place in an individual. (75)

From Bettelheim’s assessment, my first inclination is to argue that Disney on Broadway is a form of theatre that is purely for enjoyment. However, these tales are also based in fairy stories and myth at their core. So is the distinction really one that is hard and fast? Probably not. But Treem’s use is aligned with how Bettelheim advises fairy
stories to exist, that is with mere suggestion of the world, focus on inner conflict, and
gentle hints towards resolution.

Bettelheim’s distinction between fairy tale and fable is that fairy tale will never
confront us (the audience) directly or tell us outright how we should choose resolution, as
fable will. However, it does strive to convince us through appeal to our imagination and
the attractiveness of an array of outcomes, which entices us. (34) With that notion, Treem
chooses fairy tale over fable, offering solutions that (despite the abrupt/unfulfilling
ending) span the spectrum of satisfaction. Libby’s issues are never addressed, Roy/Rose
remains with his/her desired friend group as an accepted member once again; Costen
remains unchanged, much like his opinions/political/religious views, etc. Treem never
declares any character or stance as correct or incorrect, but ushers the audience towards
the favorable outcomes. This is a consideration when directing as to how each outcome is
exhibited to audiences – for our purposes, what is most favorable?

In Bettelheim’s *Uses of Enchantment*, he directly addresses the Snow White tale.
He explains that the queen’s consulting in the mirror, as Snow White’s beauty begins to
eclipse her own, is the evil queen’s validation of self-worth in direct reference to the
ancient theme of Narcissus. (202) This danger of being consumed by self-love and self-
loathing is echoed with Treem’s character of Gretchen. She is threatened by Rose and
dives deeper into the mirror when her self-worth dwindles. In Grimm’s version of *Snow
White*, the evil queen is forced to wear red-hot shoes and dance in them until she perishes.
Bettelheim points out that “before ‘happy’ life can begin, the evil and destructive aspects
of our personality must be brought under our control. … untrammeled sexual jealousy,
which tries to ruin others, destroys itself.” (214) Gretchen’s attempted destruction of
Rose through all means available will and does become her demise in *Mirror, Mirror*. She is, however, rescued by Rose in the final scene in the boys’ bathroom, as Rose chooses to pull Gretchen from Oedipal jealousies.

The framework provided by fairy tale stories not only provides a satisfying pattern of fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation, but also allows for suggestion of favorable outcomes while allowing audiences to feel empowered with their choices. *Mirror, Mirror* lacks a direct moral lesson, but exhibits a spectrum of endings from Costen to Rose/Roy with which audiences identify. This presents both opportunities and challenges in directing with the ability to steer the ship into the imposed concept, but also allows for unintended lack of clarity. The structure of the ending is no help in this matter.

The resolution of fairy tale is predictable and recognizable, but as aforementioned, Treem’s ending breaks the mold of predictability. She does not give us the satisfaction of the prince and ‘princess’ (Badger and Rose) ending up happily ever after. Nor does she resolve the villain for the audience – the bad guys are supposed to lose. But Costen returns to his friend group and is accepted without repercussions of his attempted rape, dissenting comments, or harassment of Rose. Treem does not leave an ending tied with a bow for the audience of *Mirror, Mirror* but breaks the mold of the fairy tale structure she’s established to leave the audience asking questions. As a director, these may not be the right questions – the meta questions of theme and connection to the human race – but logistical questions on lost plot lines. This will be a challenge to guide the audience into asking the larger questions and smoothing over the bumps of Treem’s ending.
This chapter provides analysis, insight, and inspiration from early in the creative process. These ideas were presented to the production designers for discussion and inspiration during pre-production. From this starting point both designers and director are able to establish common thematic threads, a shared language regarding this production, and create a cohesive design in support of the production’s concept.

This text presents an array of challenges to the director, as there are structural problems with the storyline. Treem leaves unresolved plot points and unaddressed thematic ideas, especially with the women in this text. Libby is written to have bulimia and severe body dysmorphia, however, Gretchen chastises her for it, and her recovery is not supported by her boyfriend Hoyt and ignored by all other characters. Gretchen has issues with self-harm, burning herself with cigarettes to make unfavorable reflections in the mirror disappear. She addresses Costen’s attempted rape of Libby and then sweeps the notion under the rug. The director must consider these holes in the plot, but not be overwhelmed by them. Instead, the focus is on Roy/Rose and how her journey weaves a broken friend group back together through compassion and acceptance of their flaws.

*Mirror, Mirror* is a broken fairy tale story about Roy/Rose, who finds her identity and redemption in a society that has shunned her. Rose begins the journey as Roy – a closeted gender queer young man that has not been home in over one year. Extracting from only that statement, there are a multitude identities available to the reader – sex, gender, age, the identity of home and every assumed role that goes with each. Subtly, Treem throws these check boxes at us from the very beginning. As the intersectionalities in identity amass, Treem asks the audience to consider, “Who am I?” with Rose: “Mirrors
are strange things. Sometimes they seem to have minds of their own. Especially when you’re young. And don’t know what you’re looking for.” (Treem 7)

The audience is the keeper of Rose’s secret and the text moves into exploring more of the mosaic identities of this group of friends. Gretchen brings beauty ideals; Badger brings hyper masculinity and the need to exercise his gender role to repress hidden sexuality. Costen brings socio-economic status and explores gender roles through male aggression and over-sexualizing common situations. The rest of the group of friends make up the counterparts to each facet of economic status, gender identity, sexual fluidity, and are all in search of his or her identity.

Roy’s return to his old high school’s Homecoming dance as Rose, a young woman who just moved to town, brings this identity struggle to fruition for her friends. While at the Homecoming dance, and back at school on the following Monday, she drops small hits of her secret, keeping the audience on edge that at any moment she may be found out. And the consequence as the audience sees it through Costen, the bully, is violent. The point-of-no-return comes at the end of Act I when Rose slips up while talking to Badger, her former love. She asks about Roy, “Did you love him?” (Treem 36) Act II then sprints towards the climax of Mirror, Mirror. For this reason, it seems though the act division is strictly to denote a shift in time to the Monday following the Homecoming dance, rather than a break required for the audience.

Rose brings us the climax of the central action when her secret is revealed during the play-within-a-play a la Hamlet. Hoyt’s Syphilitic Love is his tainted view on relationships that sets up Badger and Rose as leading man and lady to share a jaw-dropping kiss; a kiss that Badger recognizes as Roy. Rose reveals her story to Badger in
the locker room, “I’ll tell you a story. About a prince…” (Treem 69) With this recognition of his feelings for Roy/Rose Badger is forced to examine his own identity.

Treem’s convention of the mirrors reveals the identities of the students. The audience is presented with an actor who looks, dresses, moves a certain way – but not until they are in front of the bathroom mirror to we get to see their inner secret, the dark thing they’re hiding or afraid of. Gretchen, for example, is the most popular girl in school, in designer clothes, happy, confident, and well off. But when she looks in the mirror, she is a hideous mean witch. Mirror, Mirror is both title and the literal invocation of fairy tale magic for these characters. Figuratively the title functions as metaphor for the reflection of one’s identity – how the rest of the world sees each other.

Treem’s use of fairy tale provides a dramatic device that lets the audience track change in each character. As Gretchen’s reflection continues to decline into an uglier and scarier witch her journey has defined checkpoints at which we see her regress. As soon as her reflection changes to a beautiful young woman, the audience knows her self-realized identity. Fairy tale also allows the audience to take in the comedy in this dark tale when asked to examine their values on homophobia, abortion, discrimination, and love. Treem uses fairy tale for forgiveness where a realistic approach would fail – why do Roy’s best friends and sister not recognize him? How do mirrors show anything but an exact reflection? To achieve a successful production about identity, one must hone in on the magical aspect of these mirrored reflections. It is not so much what the audience sees exactly, but how each character reacts to their passing image.

The magic of the story is rich and just below the surface. Set in a private religious high school in the south in the present day, but beginning with ‘once upon a time...’, the
audience already knows the story is not quite real life and suspends disbelief for the next hour and a half. All the audience gets to know is that the mirrors have been misbehaving and their expectations of fairy tale characters and the archetypes they represent. At first glance, this looks like a realistic play about teens. However, the magic that bubbles through the seams as they rip open is what makes the world rich with the possibility to harken back to its fairy tale roots. Thematically, identity and the struggle to define it, embrace it, and honor it is one that is made exponentially more difficult for youth today with social media, print media, and reality TV. The uphill battle becomes steeper and even more unattainable when it becomes one to look like the Kardashians, or to have a wardrobe entirely dedicated to Hollister, or to hide who you truly love. The institution of a uniform for teens in private schools is aimed to eliminate some of those pressures, but it truly makes the mold into which one can fit even smaller and one can become further ostracized when one doesn’t fit. Not fitting in is only highlighted when you are compared to a uniform pool of peers. To further shrink the mold, we’re dealing with characters in a socially conservative climate. With staunch religious beliefs as a major facet in these students’ world, we shrink the mold again. All of those adolescent and young adult struggles with self-identity are manifested in the mirrors of *Mirror, Mirror*. They are our compasses for true identity.

Identity, and its acceptance or rejection, is the overarching thematic idea Treem presents with *Mirror, Mirror*. Then, using mirrors, Treem shifts the perception of identity by dividing perceived identity and known identity, that is the identity that is imposed upon each character from the outside world and the self-identified. The convention of the mirrors separates these two facets. What we see outwardly is not always what we are.
Much like a magical mirror cannot lie about one’s inner beauty, you cannot escape your true identity with makeup, outlandish fashion, or a gay reformation camp – the mirror can also see the inner ugliness. The lens of perception encompasses upbringing, background, locale, and current social stigmas promoted by media.

If one considers a shattered mirror it shows only a fragment of who you are. A broken piece of glass only reveals a sliver of your total reflection. Consider that mirror is representational of identity for these characters. What caused each teen’s mirror to shatter? A nasty comment from a bully or perhaps denial of some aspect of self. Maybe your parents were unaccepting of a choice you made. Then what brings it back together? Self-realization and acceptance. So in all reality, no one’s mirror is complete, but as we grow up, it pieces together to become closer to a full reflection. Ask yourself: How do you want the world to perceive you and how does that differ from what’s inside? Using these ideas, *Mirror, Mirror* speaks to a production that exploits the perceived versus true identity for our current young adults who are trying to figure themselves out amidst the flurry of YouTube, Tinder, the Kardashians, and *Top Model*. Acceptance via open discussion of these stigmas and issues is what triumphs for Treem in this play.

Looking at *Mirror, Mirror* through the lens of identity is fitting, as the text addresses body image, socio-economic identity, sex and sexuality and the peer pressure that leads to bullying surrounding those issues. There is not one person who can say they never experienced a battle with one or any combination of these pressures. There are those young adults that we are educating that may still be going through these struggles. Because of the universality in theme, *Mirror, Mirror* will be able to find roots in our community. With equality and bullying at the forefront of national discussion, this is the
prime time to further the discussion within an educational setting. According to University of Portland’s anti-discrimination policy, gender and sexual identity are protected. But there are no further policies beyond that statement. How to handle those discriminatory acts are not documented. Let us continue to bring these issues to light in a time when the University, nation, and world are in flux and moving toward a more inclusive and liberal view of the world. To even further the moment of opportunity, we are still in an uphill battle for the LGBTQ community, but large progress was made when the Pope of the Catholic Church spoke out to include truly everyone in his blessing. His words helped to move a large hurdle aside within the religious community for the LGBTQ population. Being under the umbrella of a Catholic university gives us yet another opportunity to enable conversation without our corner of the world.

With a plethora of thematic opportunities as a director, it is easy to fall into the trap of tackling each issue. This would result in a lack of clarity for the audience regarding take-aways – the questions they leave considering or what the production wanted them to ‘get.’ My focus will be on Roy/Rose’s journey through this world and how their self-discovery paves the way for fellow characters to reconcile (or not) with their intersectional identities. The design elements of production are aimed to highlight Roy/Rose’s journey and create the fairy tale world that is necessary for Treem’s characters to thrive as archetypes.

**Lighting Design**

Em Douglas, lighting designer, will have the duty of establishing location and tone. The script dictates locales including two bathrooms, men’s and women’s, the gymnasium at homecoming, the auditorium, and Moonlight Lake. Each location must be
accessible simultaneously to any of the others – that is, the men and women’s bathrooms are being used at the same time, or the gym and a bathroom, etc. This challenge is made to both the lighting and set designers, but with lighting we are able to establish time and tone at each location. The lighting designer also has the task of creating two distinct spaces without having them overlap despite physical size of the space.

The Homecoming dance in the gymnasium is tonally cool. It sets the mood for romance and potentially fits into the theme of Homecoming (Night in Paris, Hawaiian Homecoming, etc.) It is dim and mysterious, allowing for Rose to be highlighted as she slips in and out of the room. Perhaps there is a disco ball. During the Homecoming dance, lighting is crucial to creating the dream waltz between Badger and Rose. When isolated and connected to one another, Rose and Badger have to feel like they are in a different time and place where everything that is meant to be can happen. Then the gym has to snap back to the regular Homecoming dance lighting. The auditorium/gymnasium after Homecoming is lit with giant industrial lights that you find in every old school (see fig. 1).
It has the sense, if serving as the auditorium, that there are standard lights that always come on as general lighting for the apron of the ‘stage’ without having hung a plot for a production. There is nothing fancy that changes for Hoyt’s play. It is rehearsal and student-run with little to no-budget.

The bathroom is one of the most important places as it is visited frequently as an escape for these characters. The lighting is industrial and standard for a school. Stalls are shadowed and never have enough light to work within them. The mirrors are highlighted and maybe lit from behind or the sides. This should feel completely opposite to the gym and ball, weathered and yellowed.
Early conversation with the sound designer has led to a discovery illuminating the mirrors as an integral part of the bathrooms rather than a fixture. If the mirrors are to become the voice in the back of the character’s head, they must shift the tone of the room when they speak. With plans to have a sound cue in which the audience hears the fear or criticism each student sees in the mirror, the lighting should support the aural cue and change the tone of the room. In binary fashion, if the room is light and pink, it should become evil and green with the aural cue.

The lakeside picnic at the end of Treem’s text is of vital importance – the fairy tale ending when all is right in the world. Moonlight is key. It should feel as if moonlight is radiating and spinning around the room with sparkle dust resting on everything in its path (see fig. 2). This is the point at which reflecting the light off of actual mirrors would be ideal, sending the sparkle and shimmer out into the house to involve the audience in the feeling. It is cool but loving, a spring night in the south. It is full of promise and friendship. It should highlight audience as another identity within the story and flood the room in inspirational fashion. I imagine a dying star that grows to shine at its most brilliant before disappearing into darkness.
Sound Design

Designing sound around location is vital to the shifts between areas of the school. This proposes a challenge for student sound designer. The challenge is one the includes selecting music that does not place us in a specific place or time, as the audience must believe in the fairy tale structure, but still guides the story in tone. Sound effects are also required to create the magic of the world.

There is always music at a ball! So for the Homecoming dance, we need dance music. The song selection is full of contemporary choices found on top of the charts radio in the south within the last year. However, after speaking with the sound designer in
When in the gymnasium, the music is immediate. When shifting to the bathroom, the gym sounds are removed, down the hallway in a defined direction, but still present so that we know we have not left the building. Monday at school is aurally full of noisy feet in linoleum-lined hallways, chatter of students, and tardy bells ringing from overhead. From within the walls of the bathroom, it is again just out in the hall in our already established direction. From the auditorium and during rehearsal it is more of a vacuum. If the scenic design involves a true auditorium that is autonomous of the gymnasium, we would make the assumption that the room has its own acoustics and muffles outside noise.

Once we reach the lakeside, there is a much less realistic soundscape. It lives somewhere between angelic and cartoonish. It is abstracted and transformative, not necessarily a shift in style to cartoon, but something no longer recognized as this world.

**Scenic Design**

Creating the world of this high school will be the window into the pressures experienced by the characters. Heightened reality ripples with magic from the epicenter of the action, the mirrors, and will permeate the world in waves. At the epicenter lies the antithesis of flowing waves – cold, hard mirrors with the potential to shatter and harm. With Professor Larry Larsen, these concepts were explored and designed to
accommodate the immediate shifts in location and provide the necessary conventions to perform those changes.

The action happens with a permeable fourth wall. Roy/Rose is able to move through the fourth wall and open the storybook the first page for us with his “Once upon a time…” invitation to his story. The audience is an observer to this magically real world from this point onward until the final scene at the lake. The lake is an all-encompassing place that invites the audience to live happily ever after with our characters and to see his/herself reflected in the journey.

The locations in the world of the play are in a southern prep school. Scenically, this feels like a place with heritage and tradition. The characters talk about cotillion class and having parents in the church. It is a place of varnished wood, trough sinks and heavy wooden doors. It is an old auditorium with velvety seats; a multi-purpose cafeteria, gymnasium and dance hall, with low-budget decorations put up by the student council. (see fig. 3-4). Institutional. (Potentially the auditorium and gymnasium are one and the same with minimal changes, as they are not seen in the same act together.) This is a castle in its own right.
Fig. 2 Barre Auditorium from Corey Brownell “Pro-Basketball Meets Vermont’s Gyms”; University of Vermont; uvm.edu: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 3. Oh la la! Paris Themed Homecoming; Stumps Spirit Ideas; stumpsspirit.wordpress.com, 13 Sep. 2007: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.
The bathrooms are stalled and unisex, avoiding the use of urinals so that two bathroom units do not have to be made. With aged trough sinks it feels institutional and recycled. Both also possess mirrors, of course. (see fig. 4-5).

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Fig. 4 Bathroom by Autumn Driscoll “Resource-conscious School Nearly Done”; Connecticut Post; ctpost.com, 23 Jul. 2013: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.
The final scene transformation is designated as a moonlit lake surrounded by trees. It is an escape, most importantly. The sense of moonlight and the last midnight is key. The boys hang mirrors from the trees to reflect the light from the water and back again, making thousands of moons. Not a recognizable location, and maybe not even a real place, this is our fairy tale ending. The egg cracks open and the magic spills out (see fig. 6-7). Until this time, the audience truly functions as spectator. They are removed enough from the story that I invite them to pass judgment. Until the end when they have formed opinions on the characters and stories and the world suddenly involves them. It asks them to accept and let preconceived ideas wash away in the serenity of friendship. It asks them to take note of what they’ve judged. It asks them to participate.
Fig. 6 Moonlight, pinterest.com: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 7 Broken Mirror, homes-kid.com: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.
Costume Design

In opposition to this identity of cotillion, tradition, lineage, and simply ‘the way things are done’ are the modern princes and princesses designed by Professor Gregory Pulver. Costumes will harken back to the characters’ fairy tale roots. Gretchen Black is the evil queen (see fig. 8). She is restricted and constricted. She should have to put effort into her movement equal to the effort she puts into her physical appearance. She is hollow, soulless and compassionless.

Fig. 8 Once Upon A Time Dresses by Hillary Timlin; Alyce Paris; alyceparis.com, 10 Oct. 2013: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.
Her opposing counterpart is Rose White. Rose begins our story as Roy and transforms in front of our very eyes. Roy begins in his everyday-as-Roy attire – simple, modern, a feminine boyish. What he is ‘supposed’ to be.

However, as Rose, she is Cinderella. Treem’s text indicates her dress is long and white, the color of moonlight. Moonlight has a pale blue or purple tint to my mind’s eye and would prefer Rose feel like the modern Cinderella at the ball we recognize (see fig. 9). Rose’s dress is flowing and enchanting. It is smooth and cool and holds a secret, in more way than one. The image of Rose we get for the first quarter of the script is the tail of her dress slipping around the corner just out of reach.

The men in this story are varying degrees of princely. Thinking of the idea of a prince as representation of wealth and a shield to actual feeling. Badger Biers lives as
both Rose and Gretchen’s counterpart. He is the hidden Prince Charming, defying what he is expected to do and following his heart. He is a jock, captain of the football team. He is hiding his true self and putting on a show to keep up with Gretchen. The Letterman jacket is reminiscent of a royal garment (see fig. 10-11).

Fig. 10 Prince Charming; flickr.com, Sept. 2013: Web, 10 Apr. 2015
Costen is the extreme princely prince on this spectrum of men. He is the richest kid in school and is sure that everyone knows it. He has the most adornment (see fig. 12). He is peacocking for everyone to assure his masculinity and sexuality. He is comfortable in what he wears, as he is projecting an image he feels to be ideal, unlike Badger who is striving to fit into another’s ideal.
Libby is Costen’s counterpart that just doesn’t fit. They are pieces of two different puzzles. Libby is wearing Gretchen’s last season gown. She doesn’t quite measure up to Gretchen. That is not to say this dress is ill fitting, but it is not meant for her body. Libby is obsessed with her weight to the point of bulimia/anorexia, so there are opportunities to highlight the places this woman would not like about her body – it is form fitting along her waist, etc. Libby is duller than Gretchen, a charity case and uncomfortable projecting
the image of the popular girl. She and Costen should be in tension and opposition despite being dates to this dance. The more mismatched, the better.

Hoyt is the anti-prince. He is the brooding, tortured artist. He is an outcast, a beatnik and too smart for his own good. He is a mix of Andy Warhol and James Dean and fights the mold of prince (see fig. 13-15). If anything, he is the youngest prince that the lineage has given up on since he will never marry or carry the crown.

Fig. 13 James Dean, “Dr. Macro’s High Quality Movie Scenes”, doctormacro.com: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.
Fig. 14 Andy Warhol by Ricart, ricartgallerymiami.com: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 15 Beatnik, pinterest.com: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.
Laurel is Hoyt’s counterpart. Hoyt does not see this and neither should we. It is not apparent that these two pair off, but we should see the struggle on Laurel’s part to match Hoyt in breaking the mold. As indicated in the script, she wears a kimono (see fig. 16). This costume choice can expand to more of a sari feel with draped and jeweled wraps to look of any other ethnicity than the actress’s own. She is less free than Rose and far more realized than Libby. Laurel can move far easier than Gretchen and is comfortable in her skin. Her struggles are emotional, unable to share her true feelings for Hoyt. If confinement finds its way into her costume it should be at the heart and neck.

Fig. 16 Fashion Kimono, “Raya Fashion with a Twist”, jewelpie.com, 2 Aug. 2013: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.
Honey is introduced the following Monday at school. Her attire is part uniform of the school and part her own flavor. She is one of the seven dweebs (dwarves) and her inspiration comes from Dopey. She wears a green windbreaker as indicated in the text, and thick-rimmed glasses. She is goofy and has not grown into her own skin yet. She is good girl, religious, and a follower of tradition. A bright jacket is as far out of the mold as she is comfortable going. Honey plays by the rules. She is a stage manager.

Donne and Ronnie are the Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dumb of this tale. They are a unified pair that should be yin and yang. They are downright goofy. They are effeminate and striving to assert their masculinity with rodeo and confederate flag belt buckles.

Each of these characters moves from the ball (Homecoming) into the Monday following at school. They carry their individualized aspects with them as small accents to their school uniform (see fig 17-18). Uniforms in a religious school in the south involve a plaid of some variation with the typical options: skirts or long, unisex shorts for women; a jumper dress and tall socks with loafers. The options for men include khaki pants, long, unisex shorts, collared shirts, tie, bowtie, and/or sweater. All of the men except Hoyt have clean haircuts that do not touch the collar line and are either clean-shaven or well-manicured. Hoyt has longer, unrulier hair. The women who conform have their hair in ponytails, braids or barrettes. Well-groomed and wearing little makeup. Gretchen has makeup caked on and has modified her uniform to show her cleavage and be shorter than regulated (see fig. 19).
Fig. 17 The New School Uniform, Bishop Barrington School; bishopbarrington.net: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 18 The Stars of NYC Prep by Danielle Nussbaum, “Teen Vogue Daily”; teenvogue.com, 6 Jul. 2009: Web, 10 Apr. 2015.
Reflecting On Design Elements in *Mirror, Mirror*

Each design element in pre-production was focused on the needs required by the script in adherence to the given circumstances. Throughout production, these designs continued to evolve, as each actor was able to discover truth in the dissonance of perceived identity and true identity. In particular, Laurel’s costume design expanded from a kimono, as indicated by Treem, to a boho layered hippie chick as the actor playing Laurel discovered what the voice in the back of her head was and how she moved through her mask and countermask.

As the production became cohesive with actors and design elements, the biggest challenge became the practicality of making each design element work in time. Having such a short text to begin with and episodic scenes that may be anywhere from 3 lines to 4 pages creates problems addressing transitions. Reflecting back on production I viewed
transitions as practical things that were required for the logistics of the story. However, those logistics became a hindrance in the pace and tempo of the story. Rather than use them as practical moments, they needed to be moments of storytelling to continue the energy and plot throughout. Professor Larsen’s designs presented an opportunity for this to occur: however, I failed to utilize it. To return to this production, an adjustment in transitions would prove invaluable for tempo and energy continuing to build up until the climax of the plot.

Professor Larsen’s scenic design provided both opportunities and challenges in directing. A major challenge presented in the design was the balance between the importance of the mirrors being centered downstage of the action and the directorial challenge to direct around an obstacle at the apron of the stage. The mirrors proved to be vital to production, but created sightline issues for scenes in the bathrooms. With slight adjustments nearing the opening of the production such as narrowing the frame width and adjusting the height, Professor Larsen was able to mitigate these issues. The scenic design served a multitude of purposes such as establishing location and a multitude of entrances and exits. The grand drape and false proscenium in Professor Larsen’s design proved to be invaluable in production. It served as bookends for the opening and closing direct addresses delivered by Roy/Rose and established the school auditorium when closed. A majority of scenes with Hoyt and Laurel take place in the school auditorium and with the ability to stage those scenes in front of the grand drape and in front of the proscenium, I was able to have a completely separate space from the rest of the world. I do feel that the set design was too realistic in hindsight and added to the incongruity of
style as discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Please reference Appendix B for the ground
plan of Professor Larsen’s scenic design for production.

Early production discussions with the sound designer established the convention
of the magical mirrors. With the designer’s assistance, we imposed a convention onto the
mirrors that when students are viewing their reflection we can hear their innermost fear;
the voice in the back of their head. Instead of relying solely on the actor’s response to
unseen horror in the mirror, we will have an aural indicator of their inner demon. Each of
the actors was tasked with discovering what the voice in the back of their characters’
head says and had that recorded in their voices. The evolution of this concept with the
designer will be discussed in further detail in section 4 – Style: Fairy Tale, Magic
Mirrors & the South.

Working with this particular designer fostered invaluable design opportunities.
Without our pre-production meetings, the voices of the mirrors would have never come to
be. However, I feel that while a concept I would tackle again, the execution for this
production was rushed and poor. The actors had established the voice in the back of their
head and a phrase that went with that fear. Recording sessions were hurried and in the
end, the sound cues were over-edited to sound otherworldly and were unable to be heard.
This was both due to sound balance and to editing. However, working with a student
designer was a lesson in how precise a director must be in order to achieve the desired
result, as different interpretations of atmospheric sound can conjure conflicting effects.

There was also a struggle to gain the sound cues on time for technical rehearsal
and to have the dance music designed with finesse so that it tonally tracked with the text
and plot. In the end, I adapted and began locating instrumentals that had a beat the actors
could dance to while in the Homecoming dance. However, these were not correct for propelling the story forward in tone and they were not edited correctly to achieve the desired effect on location throughout the school. While these opportunities were valuable for learning and honing in my skills with cueing programs, the situation was at a disservice to the production.

While the sound designer’s execution of the magical mirrors was sub-par, lighting designer Douglas was able to provide support to the metaphor of reflection and facilitated the shift between mask/countermask with their take on the magical mirrors. Utilizing a stark contrast between pink and green saturated light on the mirrors, the world became full of evil as the aural cue of a character’s deepest fear played and turned an eerie green. The execution of this special effect was difficult as the frame of the mirror created large shadows on the actors’ faces and cast into the area of the stage that was the bathroom sand stalls. Douglas was able to adjust instruments at the last minute as the frames were raised and then whittled down in width. Please reference Appendix A for production images of Em Douglas’s lighting design.

With Professor Gregory Pulver’s designs, costumes were able to articulate each characters’ archetype in an immediately recognizable form to the audience. Upon entrances, the audience is able to identify each perceived identity and to which mold each character is to conform. Professor Pulver and I found Moonlight Lake to be a problem spot due to the quick transition and practicality of moving actors and changing clothes. For Roy/Rose, we both overlooked an opportunity to clarify Roy/Rose’s journey and visually support it by placing Roy/Rose in some combination of masculine and feminine garb. This could have given more clarity to the confusing ending, but we did not discover
this until once the production was opened. Through audience feedback and post-show talk back sessions the confusion of why Roy/Rose is wearing boy clothes again was illuminated and made Rose remain only a disguise for Roy. This was completely unintentional and would have been lost without the audience talk backs, also facilitated by Professor Pulver. Please reference Appendices C and D for character sheets and production images from Professor Gregory Pulver’s costume design.

While hindsight recognizes numerous missed opportunities provided by each design element, I feel that overall, as the cast and I developed clarity in rehearsal, each design element became more precise and was most reflective the characters’ journeys. Each element of design had surprises that became invaluable to production and remained a testament to my ability to create and utilize a convention, such as the grand drape, to establish clarity for the audience.
4 – On Style: Fairy Tale, Magic Mirrors & the South

Sarah Treem infuses a multitude of difficult thematic ideas into *Mirror, Mirror*. The sheer number of stigmas in the adolescent world is daunting. However, her imposition of fairy tale story as a framework gives way to an elevated style that serves as the buffer for difficult conversations. These elements of style are the fairy tale structure, the use a magical mirrors and the metaphor of reflection, and the culture of the South. 

*Mirror, Mirror* is challenging to direct under the stylistic rules of fairy tale, the idea of the South, and the convention of the magical mirrors. Treem utilizes fairy tale framework to create a recognizable pattern that the audience is able to follow. She sets us down in the magical kingdom of the South, complete with cotillion and debutante balls. And through fairy tale she establishes the convention of magical mirrors that reveal the innermost reflections into the characters. In order to direct this story, one must embrace these elements to establish a performance style that honors each element. However, I chose to embrace two parts of the frame. This provided ample time to hone in on the details of these two elements, but the production as a whole was still lacking without the third. 

The framework of a fairy tale story helps us to set the level of reality for the audience. Treem begins the story with two vastly different direct addresses. The first, from Roy, is a ‘once upon a time’ speech, setting us up for the framework of fairy tale, heightened reality, and magic throughout. He provides distance from the uncomfortable subject matter and safety from the danger. The second direct address comes from Gretchen, and I do not feel that I have yet figured out the purpose of her address that could not have been combined with Roy’s story. I struggled to answer this question and
subsequently failed to help the actor playing Gretchen to ground herself during this monologue – most definitely a failure on my part and resulted in confusion for the audience.

Direct address establishes a level of reality that is above the everyday – it is no longer a play where the audience is an unseen observer peeping into another world. Direct address recognizes the audience, our presence is known, and we’re challenged to keep secrets, pass judgment, etc. The direct addresses from Roy and Gretchen prep the audience to accept Treem’s convention of fairy tale. The audience learns of magic in the world of the play manifested through talking mirrors and magical disguises.

However, this production failed to follow the roadmap of a fairy tale and instead suffered from an imposed sense of reality in performance. I directed actors to perform truthfully as human beings – not truthfully as fairy tale characters. This is a foundational mistake leading to a lack of distinction between real in the world of the play versus real in our world – the audience’s world. A distinction would have created distance and allowed for a sense of safety as an audience member to feel as if, “oh, this isn’t me, I don’t feel like that” while still being an active participant to direct address and the experience of a living fairy tale.

Fairytales, as defined by Bettelheim, have a recognizable pattern: fantasy to recovery to escape to consolation. Directorially, this production would have benefitted from diligent mindfulness of this pattern and seeking opportunities to meet the audience’s expectation of structure. The framework of fairy tale would have allowed magical scenes, such as Badger and Rose’s waltz, to be accepted as pure magic without the confusion of ‘how real is real’ or seeking to know why Badger doesn’t recognize Roy in disguise.
Audiences know that we start a fairy story with ‘once upon a time’ and then usually ‘in a kingdom far, far away.’ The Deep South is the kingdom that is not so far away for *Mirror, Mirror*. In order for this production to be considered successful, I would have had to approach the idea of the South exactly as such – a magical kingdom that has glimmers of the south we know in the real world. If the south were allowed to be a fairytale kingdom, it would have permitted for humor and the level of reality to be uniform throughout this production.

Aspects of humor regarding cotillion, debutante balls, religion, and heritage (including racism and slavery) were lost due to my choice to ignore the South as a fairytale kingdom and frame for this story. At minimum, I missed some of the jokes as they sailed over the heads of an audience from the Pacific Northwest. Without the context of accents and the culture of the South, they were completely foreign and were hiccups in the performance for audience members. Even hearing cotillion mentioned without the framework of locale is jarring since it is not something we talk about every day. Many of Costen’s racist and homophobic slurs would have been explained and carried danger with them if we were really in the fairy tale kingdom of the South.

Due to the time constraints of the rehearsal schedule and level of training across the acting pool in the university setting, I chose to ignore the kingdom of the South in performance. I did not address an accent as the script does not demand it, however, it would have benefitted from this tool. Badger is the only character that has syntax that indicates a southern region, but not using the accent occasionally made his character seem of lower status or ignorant in comparison to his peers. But to re-allocate resources away from mask/countermask work, discussed in Chapter 5, seemed unwise as it evolved
to be the foundation of the actors’ work. In hindsight, this framing is vital to establish a world that matches the level of reality Treem calls for with a fairy story.

The text calls for a heightened reality in which nothing is unbelievable, archetypical characters are not masked as introspective human beings, but rather each lives a simple truth. Simple truths for each character are ideals or morals that are basely factual to the individual, regardless of our judgment or bias as actors and directors. For example, Gretchen does not weigh the options and moral implications of using drugs and having sex as a teenager at homecoming. The fact of the matter is, at homecoming, she gets drunk or uses drugs and has sex with her boyfriend. That just is how things work – a simple truth. Using a simple truth eliminates a heady debate by the actor and director regarding how to justify a behavior – it just is.

But simple truths were established too late in the rehearsal process to benefit the stylistic choices in this production and the performance became extremely presentational. There were major issues with staging: lots of flat lines born both out of the ground plan and my character choices lacking that idea of simple truth. With minimal obstacles in Professor Larsen’s scenic design in order to accommodate all of the locations required by the text, simple truths would have allowed for behaviors otherwise unjustifiable in everyday real life. Why would Libby stay in the bathroom with Gretchen after she pulled her hair and lit her dress on fire? In real life, she wouldn’t, but in the kingdom of the South she has to or else she won’t be popular.

The presentational style hindered the delivery of pertinent thematic information. If the overall style had reflected a fairy tale set in the kingdom of the South, the moments of reality could be used to yank the audience’s focus to important concepts – Libby’s
eating disorder, Costen’s racism and homophobia, rape culture, etc. and then return immediately to the fairy story. These snaps back and forth could marry with the physical character work of mask/countermask with the mask being fairy tale and countermask being real.

A successful example of the style marrying the concept of mask/countermask in production was the dream waltz between Rose and Badger. With hard snaps in sound and lighting design from the earlier mentioned cool, starry homecoming dance and house music to saturated pink lighting paired with an aural flood of strings and a magical waltz – a crystal clear delineation between reality and dream propelled Rose and Badger’s love story forward for the audience. The humor of the snaps and the sappiness of the love story were then shattered by the entry of another character into the scene, and back and forth and so on. Unfortunately, this production had an overall sense of imposed reality because it lacked simple truths and my staging attempted to create realistic interactions, instead of truthful, heightened interactions within the frame of a fairy tale story.

Within this frame Treem established the literal framing of the magical mirrors. We know from the backstory that after Roy mysteriously disappeared the mirrors infected one another and started showing terrifying images to their users. Gretchen sees an evil, wart-covered witch and Badger sees something hideous. The mirrors are used to examine the innermost secrets of the characters when they are alone in the bathrooms. For our production, Professor Larsen’s designs allowed for a physical frame with which the actors could interact. Logistically, the scenic design created a physical barrier between the audience and actor with sightline issues and a general aesthetic loss of audience proximity. However, along with Larsen’s false proscenium design, the action truly
happened in a frame within a box – much like opening a book to read a story, it can be closed and boxed up when it is complete.

When discussing the use of the mirrors with the sound designer, we established an aural component the mirror interactions that furthered the idea of a magical presence. Having the voice in the back of the characters’ head play when viewing their reflection promoted the heightened style of this story, despite the aforementioned technical challenges with the sound design. It aided the actors in their switch between mask/countermask when affected by their fears and created a sense of danger when alone with the mirror in the staging. This convention paired with Treem’s framework is one that I would pursue again.

Douglas’s lighting design enhanced the experience of the mirrors by having them glow a pale pink to entice the onlooker to view him or herself. But suddenly the mirror would snap to an evil green color paired with the sound cue of the voice in the back of their head as it expelled evil magic into the world. This pairing would need to be addressed at a technical level for timing and execution, but they remained technically successful elements that enhanced the intended style of the playwright. As previously mentioned though, the level of reality throughout the rest of the production created a rift with these moments, as they did not feel like a connected part of a whole.

The episodic structure of the script paired with stylistic challenges were factors I ended up competing against for this production, instead of embracing. As previously addressed, transitions in this production were born out of practicality to flip-flop between locales after short scenes rather than to heighten the style of the production. Transitions are large missed opportunities to enhance the fairy tale framework as intended by Treem.
Upon reflection, the goals of the technical elements need to be married with the goals of performance to create the kingdom of the South, heighten the level of reality in support of the root of our process: mask/countermask. These challenges, however, were not overbearing to the successes of this production. From audience feedback during post-show talk backs, the purpose of this production was still fulfilled in that they audience was responding the confusion the style created, but more so to the questions of gender and sexuality and the journey of the women in this production. For those reasons, these are not failures, but rather adaptations under the constraints of time that I would address if ever to direct this text again.
As previously mentioned, this process was about defining black and white in order to give way to playing in the gray areas. This applies to numerous facets of identity for these characters. The major contender in this process is the actor playing Roy/Rose, a character whose gender identity is seen at both ends of the spectrum of masculinity and femininity. As a company, the actors are tasked to define how gender functions as a construct within the real world. What does it mean when you check a box on an application for male or female? What expectations come along with that choice and how does one perform male or female? Defining what hyper-masculine and hyper-feminine look like allows exploration of the middle ground, the gender fluid or gender queer.

The binary definitions explored with the company expanded to privilege, race, economic status, and sexuality using a text by Murphy and Ribarsky entitled *Activities for Teaching Gender and Sexuality in the University Classroom*. This text has designs and objectives for exploring identifiers as above and their binary extremes. These exercises bring cognizance to our own identities that we may or may not have ever considered or previously denied. Sociometric-exercises include “privilege walks” in which participants blindly make judgments on their own identities to explore what aspects of those hold power and privilege.

The first meeting was the cast’s first exposure to the text and their characters. Withholding scripts from the cast until rehearsal was a purposeful choice in order to prohibit individual judgments on an actor’s own character. I did not want actors to make decisions regarding the level of reality in the world without discussion in the rehearsal room either. At first read of this text due to subject matter, there must be room for shock,
uncomfortable topics, and emotional space. As a director of young actors, this was an
opportunity to simply observe the room. In a professional setting, it is an opportunity to
be inspired by the choices being made that, perhaps, you had never thought of. However,
in this room, it was to weigh the amount that each person was connected with their
class, the material, and their gut reactions to both their own text and to what they are
hearing. In this room we used this time to collectively identify the plethora of
themes/issues *Mirror, Mirror* presents in priority order to the cast – what jumps out?

As early as the first week of rehearsals, with such an astute group of students in
the cast, they were already asking the questions about Rose and other characters. Is she
transgendered, gender fluid? Making a discovery? Why do we never resolve Costen’s
attempted rape? Why does no one care that Gretchen is harming herself? Why does she
do that? What role does God play in Badger’s life? With these types of questions
immediately surfacing after first read I thought my rehearsal plan was sound.

Immediately following the first rehearsal, we had to take a week off before our
next meeting. In that time, each actor was tasked with tackling a topic addressed by the
text that was pulled out during our first read – eating disorders, substance abuse, bullying,
sexual identity, racism, gender identity, perfectionism, etc. They were to return with 5
“gut-hits” as Jessica Wallenfels, the production dramaturg, called them – something that
punched you right in the gut when you heard or read it. One was a startling statistic, one a
personal account, another two that surprised them, and a freebie of their choice. I
anticipated that this meeting would be tense and awkward – no one wanting to talk about
these hot button issues – but I was entirely wrong and happily surprised. The
conversation took much longer than expected due to the willingness of each in the room
to share and respond to how these issues affect or speak to them both from insider and outsider perspectives.

I think this deeply influenced the start of the ensemble by bonding a room of people who may or may not be close with one another already. And by truly enlightening each person to the prevalence of these issues even if they had never personally experienced/witnessed them. Loaded with the information that made the issues real for these characters, I felt like we were then able to make light of and add comedy into the text. This dark comedy requires reverence for the subject matter, but also the ability to respectfully find humor within the structure so that it does not become a tragedy to the audience.

The aforementioned facets are hard binaries. That is they are either A, or B. One is either A) male or B) female. Rich or poor. There is no in-between. Defining what A and B look like, walk like, talk like, etc. allows exploration into what the shift between A and B looks like and where the danger of lingering in the middle ground comes from. When considering hard binaries in discussion with the dramaturg my mind went immediately to working physically with the change between A and B. Drawing from Commedia Del’Arte practices with physical mask, the idea of mask and countermask was the natural springboard. Starting immediately after our table work, we began to tackle the thematic binaries Treem presents.

In physical theatre practices, the idea of mask comes from a stock Commedia character built on archetype and stereotype. The grotesque physicality of a mask, the donned character, is extreme. Large gesture indicates the character archetype. For example, the miser character is heavy, he sags from his cheeks, and is stingy. These
characteristics are exaggerated and he often moves hunched over, closed off, and with a tight gait. The countermask to the miser is exactly as it sounds – the complete opposite. Physicality in the miser’s countermask would look tall, open, wide, and light. Stealing from the *Commedia* techniques, we made our own archetypes of the high school jock/captain of the football team or the cheerleading captain, the nerd or the beatnik and explore each mask with its countermask.

The initial play with this idea was unrelated to any one person’s specific character, but rather playing with the meta idea of archetype. The cast initially played with the lovers – wispy, light, pining. They had to mold themselves into the lovers as if they were made of clay, add a gesture, and then walk it around the room. Half of the cast took a turn sculpting the other, and then switched. They played with the archetype of the miser/grouch, and other *Commedia* stock characters before moving on to the captain of the cheerleading team as we began to get specific into our world of the play. Then the Captain of the football team/the jock, then the nerd or the brain, prince charming and the princess. And finally an evil creature of their worst nightmare!

From there the cast worked on countermask – the opposition to their archetypes. They were not assigned their own character’s archetype in the text with intention to allow some distance from the script and opportunity to observe others playing their part in jest and vise versa. We also worked with a scale of 1-10 levels to find actor neutrals at 1 and move all the way up to a 10 – the biggest, most outrageous, and unmanageable version of your character. Then we could scale back to a workable 6-7 that the actor could physically sustain in performance.
Bruno Bettelheim’s *Uses of Enchantment* provided fuel for the idea of mask and countermask within this script. As Bettelheim argues that fairy stories are a guise for the internal universal struggles of a character, I would argue that archetype is the vehicle for this struggle in *Mirror, Mirror*. The best realized example of this work is seen in the character of Badger. Badger’s mask and countermask were most supported by the text.

Badger lives two lives: one for the public and one for himself. And these are in constant opposition. During the process we deemed Badger’s public persona to be “Captain Badger,” leader of the football team, super masculine, strongman, devoutly religious. He latched on the archetype of a superman character in gesture – posed with hands on hips, chest puffed, and squared jaw angled strongly upward. The countermask to Captain Badger is a gentle, sensitive, gay man who has empathy and deeply cares for his friends. He is a man that knows love and has lost it. This Badger is deflated, leads with his heart and is soft in vocal quality, movement, and gesture. When Badger is in the presence of anyone except Roy, he has to keep up Captain Badger so that his gigantic secret of being a gay man does not expose itself. Badger snaps into his façade and then sinks out of it when others leave the room.

The actor playing Badger was forced to think about for whom he performs. With who, if anyone, is he real or vulnerable? This tension and effort it took to uphold Captain Badger physically exhausted the actor so that by the time he could drop the façade it was such a relief and it helped the audience understand his efforts. The actor playing Badger was willing to attack the character from the outside in and this work created a physiological response for him so that he did not have to manufacture emotion when the
time came – the tension and fear was real due to the physical effort it took to uphold his mask.

The most success came from Badger’s character, perhaps due to two factors – the actor being one of the most advanced and willing participants of the group and the clarity of the character’s mask and countermask in the text. Badger clearly lives two lives: the one he puts on for his family, classmates, and community as the straight captain of the football team, homecoming king, and devout religious man; and the true self that is a closeted gay man who is empathetic and sensitive to his friends and cohorts.

The snap into Badger’s façade was most often caused by Gretchen or Costen’s presence and was also the clearest to the audience. Gretchen and Costen’s characters put Badger in danger if he does not uphold his façade as “Captain Badger,” as we called him. Those moments when Captain Badger presented, it was a hard snap into this character.

However, on the other side of that, the point at which “Captain Badger” recedes, was blurrier. The hard and fast snap into his façade was not mirrored out of it, but was rather a slump into the true Badger. Clearing up the snaps both in and out of the mask/countermask and pulling the ends of the spectrum farther apart would have been beneficial for this character. For whom does Badger perform? And then why does Rose immediately break his guard down?

There are still plenty of questions to answer about Badger, but I do think the physical clarity between Captain and true Badger was strong work. And it behooved the actor to simply DO this. He felt the tension and stress of Captain Badger throughout his being by having to hold this frame up throughout scenes with Costen and/or Gretchen and then felt the ease of his friendships with Laurel and Libby and the love of Rose.
Using mask/countermask to explore Roy/Rose’s character drastically changed my view on this character through production. Originally considered transgendered in my mind, Roy became a character that discovered his gender fluidity throughout the story. I no longer feel that Roy is truly transgendered, but I do feel that based on the text, he will wear his dress again and feels pretty when living as Rose. Using the mask/countermask concept with the actor playing Rose, we found that the binaries for Roy/Rose are not as extreme as many of the other characters. The actor was adamant that performing masculinity and femininity for this character were one and the same. At first, this did not make sense to me, however, when looking at gender performance in the gray area between masculine and feminine we discovered that Roy/Rose has always performed a fluid gender identity. Roy had not yet discovered this gender expression, but when the actor playing Roy/Rose established the character’s back-story outside of the script as actor homework, he decided Roy had never fully identified as a gay man. He had previously dated women in high school and had sincere love for his ex-girlfriends. But with Badger, he had found true love, regardless of gender.

We used the idea of mask/countermask to explore masculinity and femininity with this actor. Rose as an extremely feminine and cartoonish woman became the extreme end of Rose’s femininity that only emerged when there was risk of being found out. For example, with Gretchen, who corners Rose in the bathroom just after her transformation at the beginning of the script. The alternative to her extreme femininity is Rose in her truest nature that exists only with Badger. This actor explored what felt most feminine and most masculine to him. An incredibly sensitive man himself, he struggled with exploring the extremes of both of these and running the risk of being disrespectful to
what he felt femininity looks or sounds like. The actor was concerned with playing
gender stereotypes, as he does not believe that they are accurate and finds them
personally offensive. So this was a much slower process to land than with Badger. With
the actor playing Rose, we spent more time exploring the real world ideas of gender
rather than what exits within the script. The actor took multiple rehearsals to settle into
what he established as his movement for Rose, his voice for Rose, and his presence.

The anomaly to this model of mask/countermask was Costen. His archetype was
clear: the hyper-masculinized bully. But within the script, Costen does not appear to have
an opportunity for the audience to see his countermask. There is not a time when Costen
exhibits sensitivity or kindness and there does not seem to be a character with which he
can be completely free. He is the character that has the most unfavorable suggested
ending and does not ever have what should be truthful connected moments with any other
human on stage. His façade is rough and crass. He has very strong opinions on politics
and religion that are based in traditional values that he holds in very high regard. This
made creating a character arc for Costen challenging. His mask was quickly established
based solely on his text which has racial slurs, derogatory statements towards women,
and references to rape, drinking and drugs. Costen is the villain. But without a journey,
without an opportunity for countermask, Costen proved to have a flat line character arc.

The actor playing Costen exhibited behaviors both in and out of rehearsal that
were worrisome and offensive to other cast members early on in the process. These
behaviors were ones that were not happening in the midst of rehearsing, but rather on
breaks and backstage. The actor was very immersed in his character due to a previous
personal trauma and became completely wrapped up in that experience. It unfortunately
filtered over to his personal interactions and created a great rift between the cast members. This was a situation I’ve never experienced in a rehearsal process, but my concern came both for the actor and for the cast. When the personal connection came to light in discussion with advisors, the actor was incredibly ashamed and apologetic. Thankfully, he was able to continue the process until the end of production. I feel that making this character strictly a villain, without carrying any countermask, contributed to the immersion of the actor into the character and the lack of empathy we both had for Costen. Costen as the only anomaly to mask/countermask is something I would like to explore in the future. Costen might always be performing his mask, the young man wrapped up in his history and tradition, and only have slight breaks into his countermask, which is a sensitive, broken human. In hindsight, Costen’s threat to Badger about the price of hospital bills when he talks about how mad his father would be if Costen doesn’t play on the football team might be that opportunity. Although brief, this is where we see Costen tremble and reveal his countermask with insight into his awful home life.

Mask/countermask work proved more difficult due the lack of clarity with other characters. Laurel, the invisible stoner, has the cool façade that crumbles when around Hoyt who would never love her. Hoyt is the brooding teenage poet that loses his composure and becomes frantic at the mere mention of his ex-girlfriend. And Libby, the perfectionist, strives to keep everyone happy and fit in – becoming the chameleon to whomever she trying to impress, but she is and buckling under the stress of the relationship.

Gretchen – was Gretchen. I struggled to get much of anything from this actor and had a really hard time getting her to just try something without rationalizing it out for
hours. Ideally, Gretchen is a stone temple when in the room with anyone else, and a limp human noodle when she is alone and the armor comes off. Like Rose says – you cry yourself to sleep each night, just like the rest of us. Each of these characters needed clarity to these changes in order to have a to make this stylistic choice work for the duration of the production.

By using the Commedia ideas of stock characters that we all know from teenage movies and television shows, we were able to identify each character’s mask and countermask, define when they switch and explore why. This model clarified interpersonal relationships for most of the characters and forced actors to justify choices with their backstory and actions during their actor homework. With young actors in the university setting in particular, being forced to physicalize their actions and have a shift in objective require a change from mask to countermask was integral to the clarity of their performances.
6 – Roy/Rose

The character of Roy/Rose remains the most difficult to understand in this production of *Mirror, Mirror*. His/her journey has the most unfulfilling ending, in my opinion, and she has the least amount of clarity from the playwright in regards to her life after the curtain closes. She is also the character that endured the most evolution during the process with the help from the actor, designers, and research. I originally pictured Roy/Rose as a transgendered woman who came out as MTF and is living her life as a woman. While this idea remained through early research in pre-production on teenagers, gender markers, and the influence of the media on the spectrum of gender identity that teenager accept, I had a shift in perspective when planning rehearsals around *Commedia* mask techniques.

Determining the mask/countermask for Roy/Rose was obviously male and female at the start. But really there are three characters in one: Rose, the disguise; Rose, the gender fluid human being; and Roy, the gender fluid human being. When Rose or Roy, the gender fluid human, the character is most comfortable and realized. When as Rose, the disguise, the character is on edge, performing, and can slip up to reveal Rose’s antithesis, Roy the boy everyone once knew. Once Roy dons the dress and wig in the first monologue the audience is being shown a costume. This version of Rose has to appear when there is danger – from Gretchen or Costen – who might recognize him. And immediately after Rose – when Roy slips up appears in order to cover up those slips of comfortability or references to inside jokes. I however failed to direct the actor to find these stages of Rose’s evolution and missed an opportunity to give the character a complete journey.
The actor playing Rose had a personal struggle with the character, as he did not want to put on the façade of femininity and make it offensive or ridiculous. So we landed on the ideas of elegance and grace as representations of femininity. This meant a daintier hand and narrow gait to the actor. The subtleties of these mannerisms feel like Rose-the-woman more than Rose-the-disguise to me in hindsight. Separating these characters in physicality would have added clarity to Rose’s journey so that the audience could see the enjoyment of the dress and looking pretty that are indicated in Rose’s lines. The actor was able to find balance of an awkward boy Roy that didn’t know how to hold a purse and whose feet were killing him that worked for when Roy slipped through his disguise. Moments like “Some people are just lucky” with Honey and when Rose is finally alone with Hoyt.

But considering what a gender marker means for a transgendered person made me think that one gender becomes tainted or rejected and the other idealized, depending on the individual’s identification. Perhaps Roy/Rose is not transgendered, as the character does not seem to reject either gender, but moves fluidly between the two. Roy is a human who discovers his gender fluidity after donning a disguise, until Rose sees herself in the bathroom mirror and tells her reflection that she looks pretty, then it becomes part of this person. No longer a disguise, but one manifestation of Roy/Rose’s identity.

This shift is one that I feel my production failed to discover: when does Rose move from a disguise for Roy into a truthful presentation of expression? The text is clear that Roy plans to continue exploring Rose as part of his gender expression in the future with lines like “I love this dress. I want to wear it again.” And “You look pretty.” But the ending of this production failed to support what Rose’s life after the curtain might be like.
The final scene in all its shortcomings failed to provide any textual evidence of the length of time that passed in the transition or what has gone on with Roy/Rose since. Without that guidance, I made the choice to have Roy/Rose still dressed in Badger’s clothes as we left her in the final scene in the school locker room. For the sake of a swift transition, Roy immediately enters Moonlight Lake in the same costume of khakis and oversized t-shirt – i.e. boy clothes. This decision was made based on practicality for Professor Pulver’s designs and the mechanics of the transition. However, it stunted the journey of Roy and created confusion around the purpose of Rose’s character. It appeared as if Rose was purely a disguise that was thrown out once Roy achieved his goals instead of indicating Roy/Rose’s acceptance of his gender fluidity.

In talkbacks, it was unclear to audiences why Roy remained in his boy clothes and asked what happens to Rose now? My choice was unsupported by the text and was made solely on necessity of time and resources. Reconsidering the ending illuminates the dire importance of finishing Rose’s story by merely indicating with costume what Roy/Rose looks like a person who is gender fluid. Will Rose live on? Or will Roy get to live his old life just as same old Roy? Neither Professor Pulver nor I recognized this incongruity until the production was up and running, but this is an easily made change that could clarify the character’s journey for the audience. We want Rose to have the fairy tale happy ending by completely her journey.

Roy/Rose’s journey also challenges the structural requirement of a fairy tale happy ending. The audience should expect the story of true love to prevail as this production re-defines it to be Badger and Rose. But Treem never tells us that Rose gets the guy. It is actually hindered by the text in the Moonlight Lake scene, as Badger and
Rose do not directly interact. For Rose, this ending leaves her unfulfilled. She has an incomplete love story and her identity is still in flux. A fairy tale princess typically has a true love and her future is previewed through the ending of her fairy story – marriage, happiness from now until ever after.
7–The Ending

Using *Mirror, Mirror* to bring up conversation and ask the questions I feel Treem was getting at was, in my mind, successful. Based on post-production talk-backs, student responses via social media, and in-class writing assignments from students, and even as early in the process of the actors’ questions – I think we started the conversations that I was hoping to. Talkback participants immediately recognized the confusion of the ending: what is Roy/Rose’s gender identity and journey? They pulled huge thematic topics on bullying, rape, body image disorders, and self-harm and then felt unfulfilled, as the end of the play does not address them. In fact, the women in this text are completely ignored by the ending.

In early analysis the ending presented problems in time and space – how much time has passed and where is Moonlight Lake? Is it a real place or is it an antithetical fairy tale kingdom to the South? How will we logistically put Moonlight Lake on stage? How do we get there – the scene jump is so abrupt? These questions swirled long into the rehearsal and production process and is an element of this production I consider a directorial failure. While the text lacks given circumstances of time and place, my staging also lacked a desired wrap-up to the fairy tale: a happy ending for each character.

Libby has a marked eating disorder that is addressed in nearly every scene in which she is present. She actively wretches on stage on various occasions and is surrounded by peers that not only do not support or encourage her, but also make fun of her disorder. With no adults in this world, the compass on how widely accepted this issue has become is lacking. To the audience’s knowledge, it is a non-issue and only a source of comedy. Libby is also presented as a character that has experienced a partnership, with
Hoyt, that is unsupportive and offers no resolution to her problems. But in the ending scene, they are written together with quippy dialogue that indicates their reunion as a couple. Hoyt once again makes a joke of Libby’s attendance of therapy and her eating disorder. This has remained a source of confusion for me – is this the playwright’s show of just how skewed the level or normalcy around the issue has become? Or is it a deliberate choice to not resolve Libby’s story?

Libby is written into the scene with the rest of the group, including Costen, her homecoming date and attempted rapist. Libby brings up this issue to Gretchen earlier in time and it is waived off as a rite of passage into popularity – Gretchen’s simple truth. However, it is never mentioned again and Libby is forced to participate in a jovial reunion of old friends – including Costen – without any acknowledgement of their past.

A similar situation stands with Gretchen, who has issues with self-harm. She burns herself with cigarettes and cuts herself with glass. Treem also alludes that she has also paid her dues to the popularity gods and has suffered under Costen’s tirades, too. But she is suddenly well again at Moonlight Lake and participating as a functional member of her friend group, never having her issues exposed or addressed.

Roy/Rose’s journey has been previously addressed and remains a major shortcoming of this production predominantly due to the staging of the ending. We know from Hoyt’s jokes about Libby’s counselor that time has passed – his reference is one previously seeded in dialogue as something Libby has refused to do while dating him. From this information I surmise that time has passed, but I do not know how long. The scene just before Moonlight Lake is completely disconnected and set in the boy’s locker room the Monday after Homecoming. Moonlight Lake is not a continuance or effect of
the last scene. The transition between these two scenes is best described as a dissolve out of Roy and Gretchen’s final moments in the mirror as the set cleared away and Moonlight Lake was revealed and then filled with the other characters, light, and sound.

My decision to place the final scene in the future meant I had to make decisions about each character’s journey beyond what Treem gives in the text. With staging, I placed couples in a tableau to indicate their relationship status – Hoyt and Libby had reconciled as a couple and were setting up a picnic. Laurel and Costen entered together as cousins, a reconciled familial relationship. Badger and Roy entered separately, but joined in the final tableau to indicate a continued relationship and tertiary characters (Honey, Donnie and Ronnie) participated in the group of the Seven Dweebs once again. Professor Pulver’s costume designs highlighted the complimentary couples in support of my final vision. Professor Larsen’s scenic design stripped away all the elements of the gym and school to create an open space with a painted drop background and Douglas used moonlit colors to enhance a dreamlike world.

Supported by design elements, the couples were clear and minor stories were reconciled. However, none of the women’s thematic issues are spoken of and their struggles are magically resolved. But the major flaw is in Roy/Rose’s journey once again. Considering resources and practicality, Roy’s costume lacks any sense of femininity and does not indicate that he identifies as gender fluid.

So, how to remedy this? I needed a larger and more choreographed moment to indicate the amount of time that is passing. This may be through scene change or through abstract movement to depart even farther from reality. Knowing how far in the future and if we are no longer in the kingdom of the South would be helpful mile markers for
the audience to track the journey. I would also like Roy/Rose to have indications of both genders in costume and mask/countermask to help identify his gender fluidity. Each couple or group needs a distinct ending point that is staged so that the audience is directed to recognize each pair – as it stands, the coupling off was missed in the staging. The scaffolding of these elements was present, but I did not spend enough time on each moment in rehearsal to stage each with clarity.

To guide the audience to yet another fairy tale land, other than the South, I would need to rely on the principles of mask/countermask and create a hard shift in the world. The kingdom of Moonlight Lake is the countermask to the South. It would have to be entirely physical due to the lack of supporting text for the scene. In hindsight, the ending brought up questions I had hoped to address (women’s issues and lack of resolution) but did not propel the discussion of gender identity, sexuality, and inclusion as much as I had hoped due to general confusion. Knowing that *Mirror, Mirror* is an early play in Treem’s career and that it was written in collaboration with her graduate cohort at Yale, I believe these issues were brought up by the collective and never came to fruition in the workshop setting of play development.

The rehearsal process and research into these current issues brings a multitude of possible resolutions to the structural issues of *Mirror, Mirror*. However, since not in a new play setting or development workshop, one must embrace and heighten the strongest elements of this text for a most successful production. A director must bring the important thematic concepts to the forefront and for my purposes those were intersectional identities of our youth – specifically gender and sexuality. These binary cultural structures lent themselves directly to techniques plucked from *Commedia*
physical theatre training and an established vocabulary to begin working with the company of actors. Despite struggling with style and the final tableau, *Mirror, Mirror* presented a cohesive set of performances that received uniform reactions from audience members at every performance.
With an array of successes and equally as many opportunities to improve, I am walking away from *Mirror, Mirror* feeling enlightened. Thoughtful reflection on process specific elements provides insight moving forward as a director and future educator and reflection upon my directing style and habits is a springboard to continue to learn.

This production was exemplary for me of working with young actors. I was fortunate enough to have an array of experience in the major roles, but I also had my share of little-to-no experience. A lot of this process in this setting and with this subject matter marinated and created the perfect storm for the emotions of these young actors. Dealing with issues specific to adolescents makes them accessible to these actors, but also makes them too close to home in some cases. For men who identify as gay and have had to live the double life prior to coming out – this was a struggle to keep this a character and not make it 100% personal. You want to tell your story and bring your truth as an actor always, but it can’t be your entire story. This was a balance that the actor playing Badger and I had to figure out throughout our process. He didn’t like the ending or the choices Badger made in some cases. But I had to push him to just do and not rationalize why it was wrong of him. You can’t judge your character.

I hit a major speed bump with the actor playing Costen, someone who has never acted in a university setting and has not been on stage in a long time. The issues with this actor became issues of control. Upon entering a scene, the actor was on 12 on the 1-10 scale and immediately shoved another actor. I had to immediately stop rehearsal, check in with both actors, and address the fact that we do not touch anyone without consent and choreography. As time went on, the actor was often unpredictable and out of control in
scenes in which there was any physical contact – mainly the waltz scene with Libby. The fact that a five-page scene was flopped right in the middle of other one page scenes was odd in general, but for the actor, that is a lot of stage time all in which the couple is supposed to be dancing at homecoming. Costen, as a character, is a sleaze. But the actor was taking it too far – being far too physically aggressive with his counterpart on stage. Having that brought up to me via the cast deputy meant I had to change staging. Things continued to escalate outside of the rehearsal room – from using lines and slurs from the script in real life and pushing for outside rehearsal time with his fellow actors, I knew there was something else going on with this actor.

From auditions and callbacks, I could tell that this was a dedicated gentleman to this process and was very excited to be a part of it. Was this coming out of overzealousness? Or something else? I had frequent meetings with the actor playing Libby, who was bearing the brunt of this. Multiple meetings ensued with the actor playing Costen outside of rehearsal time to address how this setting works for actors, then with advisor and designer Professor Pulver to discuss things in the frame of safety for himself and other actors, to finally having this go as high as production advisor. Despite these efforts, I was not getting through to the actor. This made HUGE rifts in the cast and I know made it very difficult for the actor playing Libby to participate in scenes in which she and Costen were in any contact at all. The blocking and the acting suffered immensely in the waltz scene, but I had to cut losses at that point in order for the actor playing Libby to feel and be safe in the scene without being swung around and falling out of her shoes, etc.
A lot of this process was emotional management, but I did have the support of a cast deputy to help in these awkward conversations with those cast members affected. For that I am grateful, but I could have gotten much more work done if we weren’t just trying to get to a place of trust again with actors in the fourth week. I do think, however, that between the gross inexperience of three of my actors and the struggles with interpersonal relationships between actors, no one stuck out like a sore thumb. I take pride in my ability to adapt to an actor’s strengths and embrace those assets that elevate their performance to match another who is more experienced. Even those actors in this production with no acting training and sometimes without the intuition to feel out the scene for what comes naturally, my work with them created a strong platform from which they felt comfortable to give 100% into their performances. Although not always the strongest choices for motivation, action, and objective, these students were able to forward their characters’ journeys and appear an integral part of the ensemble.

Successes in this production are certainly unifying an ensemble of actors at varying skill levels. However, I ran into some challenges with this goal across the whole production team. Working with a student sound designer proved to be a process through which I had to be continually adaptable and one that illuminated how much more I need to learn about sound design from the technical aspects to simply finding source material. Within the university setting, one often has student stage management teams, as well. This proved to be a situation that tested my patience and ability to be adaptable. Unfortunately, the student working on this production was extremely literal and has little feel for the finesse of simply calling cues. I ran into difficulty with note taking, rehearsal reports, and general communication with this individual that did not reach any acceptable
level by the end of production despite faculty support. The aspect of emotional management spilled over into the stage management and director dichotomy as this student does not handle stress or critique in a healthy way either. These management skills were tested in this relationship, but I remained adaptable as things continued to devolve as we reached opening night. Thankfully, the show went on and this individual was able to finish the process. I am able to say that my nature is to just do the task myself when presented with something that isn’t working. However, as a theatre artist, you are physically unable to do all of the jobs required of a collaborative team. So this forced me to problem solve and attack the situation from every angle, give every opportunity for learning to this stage manager, and offer every piece of advice I could. She received these opportunities well and I feel these were successful interactions despite the lack of improvement of the outcome.

I believe that directing in the university environment is a matter of picking your battles and balancing out your team. Picking the battles that will have the most result is key, especially in this setting when time is short and you are walking into a room of green actors who are looking to you for a learning experience. Balancing out your team will also help to enable growth within the company. Truly, there will always be limitations of space, budget, people, script, talent, etc. So there is not a huge divide between university and professional theatre in that aspect. But to enter a room with a group who are students looking to learn as opposed to actors who are looking for a leader to unify their crafts is a very different situation. The room of students is more about emotional management and compassion for their process. It is also about acknowledging their limitations early on, while in a professional setting there is much more room to push for expansion.
I still believe that my struggles and patterns as a professional director are recognizable – linking ‘the pinch’ and ‘the ouch’, especially in an episodic play. The through line is the key to a cohesive story and something I still need to continue to work for. I let composition suffer immensely in this production and need to continue to do fundamental check-ins. Would my show make sense in still images? Would there be a story/story arc? I am not at a point for those things to come naturally and must continue to perform check-in’s so that my work remains at the highest quality possible.

As a director I need to know how to do more things – I really need to learn more about sound design, as we are often tasked in smaller budgeted productions to do this on our own. I must also find more clarity in the function of my needs – why a door on stage right as opposed to stage left? These things also feel like they will get easier with time and experience, but for now, as a young director, it is simply going to take more time to check in and more prep to be solid in those options for design, etc. in production.

A director and an educator’s job descriptions are similarly leaders who cultivate ideas. Both roles require an organized collective of ideas that are built into a cohesive whole as an end product. For a director this is production; for an educator this is a textbook or a final project with students. Both require the utmost clarity of ideas and proposals. And both require attention to overarching thematic ideas – to what an educator may be teaching or to what a director is bringing to performance. My focus as a director has grown over the last years and begun to hone in on new works that focus on neglected communities and underrepresented voices. Moving forward as a director will require growth in all of these areas for me and continued production choices that inspire conversations and movement towards social change for civil rights and marginalized
populations. The ability to recognize an underrepresented issue within a community and the need for its presence in discussion on a larger scale is one I will continue to utilize. Choosing this production for the purpose of bringing difficult issues to light within our University’s culture was highly successful. I am overjoyed with the audience responses, respected post-show talk back experts from the religious and academic communities, and the inclusiveness that this production represented. With students, families, community members, religious leaders, professors, and friends outside of the university having a voice in this process, I am inspired to continue my journey as an artist-advocate and continue to choose projects with the intention to create inclusive community events like this one.
Works Cited


Works Consulted


Murphy, PhD, Michael J., and Elizabeth N. Ribarsky, PhD, eds. *Activities for Teaching Gender and Sexuality in the University Classroom*. Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2013. Print.


Appendix A – Lighting Design

Gretchen, Rose, and Libby behind the girl’s bathroom mirror

Rose and Badger at the homecoming dance
Roy’s opening monologue

Badger and Rose in *Syphilitic Love*
Roy and Gretchen in the boy’s bathroom mirror

Gretchen and Costen swarm Libby at the homecoming dance
Appendix B – Scenic Design
Appendix C – Professor Pulver’s Costume Inspirations

University of Portland

Rose Black - Homecoming
Rose Black – The Next Day

Gretchen Black - Homecoming
Costen Lyons - The Next Day

Laurel Buchanan - Homecoming
Badger Biers - The Next Day

Hoyt Monroe - Homecoming
Hoyt Monroe - The Next Day

Donnie and Ronnie - Homecoming
Donnie and Ronnie - The Next Day

Honey - Homecoming
Honey - Homecoming

Libby Sunday – Homecoming I
Libby Sunday – Homecoming I

Libby Sunday – Homecoming II
Appendix D – Realized Costume Designs

Rose’s homecoming dress

Roy’s opening monologue
Gretchen, Rose, and Libby’s homecoming dresses

Gretchen and Roy’s school day outfits