"Think of me as you did once, long ago."

Minnie Maddern Fiske: A Portrait

A One Woman Show by Debby Shellard

Presented December 5th and 6th, 1988 at 7:00 p.m.
Stadium II Theatre
MFA Showcase

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts Degree
Project Concept Statement

I plan to present a one-hour, one-woman show that chronologically follows the professional and personal life of Minnie Maddern Fiske from child star to adult actress to company manager and producer by utilizing narrative sequences, letters to family and friends, and personal antecedents interspersed with excerpts of her most famous women characters. The intent of the project is 1) to develop a well documented and entertaining portrayal of Minnie Maddern Fiske 2) to challenge my creative forces with a variety of characters also played by Mrs. Fiske 3) to heighten the audience's awareness of the important role she played in developing realistic acting as we know it today.

Minnie Maddern Fiske began her acting career at the height of the star system and throughout her lifetime participated in the development of American acting towards psychological naturalism, realistic movement and speech and ensemble acting. She promoted this new approach by introducing Henrik Ibsen's plays to the American stage and fought the ever-increasing monopoly of the theatrical syndicate. It is for all of these reasons that Minnie Maddern Fiske has had a significant influence on American theatre and is worthy of being explored and immortalized in a one-woman show.
I have chosen this one-woman show format for several reasons. I want to pursue a project from conception through writing, rehearsal and production. This project allows me to do this and have strong control over the final product. By portraying the actress Minnie Maddern Fiske, I have the opportunity to explore several characters while still maintaining a central focus to the project. Also, by choosing a deceased actress, whatever illusions of reality I want to create will be accepted by the audience for none of them will have a recollection or pre-determined visual image of her.

I plan to devote the summer of 1988 to researching and writing my background paper on Minnie Maddern Fiske as well as the first draft of the script. My primary resources will include a study of Minnie Maddern Fiske's personal papers at the Library of Congress, any film footage of her personal and professional life, a selection of plays in which she performed and her two books on acting and the stage *Mrs. Fiske: Her Views on the Stage Recorded by Alexander Woollcott* and *Views on Actors, Acting and the Problems of Production Recorded by Alexander Woollcott*. My secondary sources will include available dissertations and theses written about her, critical reviews of her performances, scrapbook accounts of her performances around the country in the Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute and Archie Binn's biography
Mrs. Fiske and the American Theatre that includes personal reflections of her life and work.

My rehearsal process will be eight weeks. I foresee my biggest challenge will be to skillfully blend narration with dramatic readings and monologues throughout the show to keep the dramatic action interesting to the audience. I plan to keep a detailed rehearsal log of all the problems and discoveries throughout the rehearsal period. Following the performance I will submit the final script with a bibliography, my rehearsal log, all background research and character analysis, a video tape and program copy of the performance, and a post-performance evaluation as documentation for credit in completing the creative project.

The following is a tentative schedule of completion dates for the project, pending approval from my advisor, and a list of my project committee.

- Project Concept Statement: July 29, 1988
- Research Paper: August 31, 1988
- First Draft of Script: September 9, 1988
- Character Analysis: September 31, 1988

**Project Committee Members**
- Dr. Rex McGraw - Acting Faculty
- Professor Marc Powers - Advisor
- Dr. Joy Reilly - Acting Faculty
Minnie Maddern Fiske: A Pioneer in American Acting (1865–1932)

by
Debby Shiliard

Background Research
One-Person Show
Minnie Maddern Fiske: A Pioneer in American Acting (1865-1932)

I. Acting Styles of the period
   A. Classic
      1. Star system
      2. Delsarte
   B. Emotionalistic
   C. Personality
   D. Transitional
   E. Modern School of Psychological Naturalism
      1. Criticism of intellect
      2. Criticism of voice

II. Early life of Minnie Maddern Fiske

III. Development of her acting method
   A. Why Ibsen
   B. Preparation of a role
   C. Rehearsal period

IV. Translating her theories to others
   A. Manhattan Theatre Company
   B. Advice to young actors
The movement towards realism in dramatic literature began at the end of the nineteenth century, slowly replacing the dominant influence of melodramatic playwriting. Through the influence of European realistic playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen, characters and situations became more true-to-life and America began producing plays with timely problems created by the industrial revolution. One American actress, Minnie Maddern Fiske, felt that the popular style of acting was inadequate for these modern characters with realistic problems. As a serious artist, Mrs. Fiske took it upon herself to pioneer a method for twentieth-century American acting which she used in her own performances and taught to other actors in her company.

In order to better understand Mrs. Fiske's approach to character development, one must review the acting styles present during the late 1800's. Most theatrical stars from 1860-1890 were now American born instead of European and were of four distinct styles of acting: classical, emotionalistic, personality, and transitional according to theatre historian Garff B. Wilson.¹

The classical school tried to maintain the European tradition established a century before with the United States tour of Edmund Kean. Epitomized in the acting of Charlotte Cushman and
Edwin Booth, the classical school approached roles with a highly conventionalized technical expertise. Specifically, these actors used broad movements, bold gestures, strong facial expressions and heightened speech to portray Shakespeare and other great standard dramas. Coming out of this classical tradition was Steele Mackaye, actor, regisseur and teacher who promoted the principles of Delsarte. In its purest form, the Delsarte system was concerned with action and gesture as a means of psychological expression. Unfortunately, these principles became distorted and misapplied causing more artificial movement than freedom as was originally intended.

The emotionalists, on the other hand, like Laura Keene and Mrs. Leslie Carter approached their characters intuitively and surrendered to their passions with overt grandiose gestures. Most had little technique and filled their performances with emotional outbursts and physical contortions. Mrs. Fiske had this to say about emotionalistic acting.

The actress who used to shake the very theatre with her sobs and sometimes actually knock over the lamp and tear down the curtains in the excess of her woe was a humiliating, degrading spectacle ... essentially ignoble.

Personality actresses were cast in roles that fit the public perception of the actresses themselves. In the cases of Maude
Adams and Ada Rehan, they always played wholesome and sweet characters.

The final group were the actors termed transitional for they attempted to keep the classical traditions as well as adapt to the needs of the twentieth century. Richard Mansfield and Otis Skinner were two transitional actors. Mansfield acted in a range of styles from classical Shakespeare to the violent emotionalism of the melodramatic Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He also contributed to the growing recognition of realism with his production of Ibsen's Peer Gynt. Otis Skinner demonstrated his classical training in the roles of Shylock, Falstaff and Petruccio as well as in the romantic costume dramas Kismet and The Honor of the Family.⁶

While Mrs. Fiske was influenced by these acting styles, she continued to search for something that would more naturally conform to the styles represented in these new realistic plays. This search lead her to the development of her own acting technique which became known as the Modern School of Psychological Naturalism. Her objective was to achieve psychological truthfulness in the portrayal of her characters. This truth would provide honest inner feelings expressed through speech and simplified, restrained external movement. The head should guide the heart.⁷
It is this intellectual dissection of the character that the critics either loved or hated.

Lewis Strang, a well-known critic of the day appreciated Mrs. Fiske's approach:

She goes straight to the source of all vital action and all enduring achievement - the infinite power of the mind. Mentally she comprehends ... the full scope of the drama, and the fact that she does comprehend so much makes possible the conviction, the positive appeal, the truth, and the suggestive power manifest in her acting.8

In direct opposition was the critic of the Boston Herald that commented,

Those who remember Minnie Maddern ... recall moments when she walked to and fro expecting the audience to see the working of her mind, which they did not understand at all. That was simply because she refused to train her face and to make certain that the emotion she wished to express was there. She was content, instead, to feel certain that she was experiencing the right feeling and would doubtless have considered it loss of, or the stupidity of, the public that could not understand.9

When asked to comment on the criticism of her intellectual approach in a press interview in 1901 Mrs. Fiske said,

Don't emphasize my mentality please. If my intellectual proclivities are hurled at the public much more they will begin to believe that I have no feeling to spur emotional expression, although I sometimes think I overstudy a part, that I analyze too much.10

Another criticism that haunted Mrs. Fiske throughout her
career concerned her vocal delivery. Many critics felt that honest inner feelings with only restrained outward expression led to slovenly, indistinct speech. Specifically acquired for a production of *Vanity Fair*, according to her husband, Mrs. Fiske developed an extraordinarily rapid, high pitched delivery that fit the character and unfortunately carried over into other roles. The Fiske's hired Victor Maurel, a famous opera baritone to diagnose the trouble and provide Mrs. Fiske with two lessons and some exercises. In his unpublished biography of his wife, Harrison Fiske wrote that "never a day passed while acting, studying, or vacationing that she didn't do her exercises."

Charles M. Bregg of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* exemplified the negative criticism concerning Mrs. Fiske's vocal delivery.

> It isn't artistic to speak in quick, staccato passages which completely obscure the sounds of words ... as if to add to this amazing defect, Mrs. Fiske has recently acquired the habit of talking with her back to the audience.

In response to the vocal criticism, Mrs. Fiske admitted to an early lack of appreciation of careful speech and openly praised Victor Maurel for his lessons and exercises. Vocal criticism did appear occasionally in reviews throughout her years on the stage. Toward the end of her career, Mrs. Fiske offered some acting advice to be recorded by Alexander Woollcott, a writer and close
friend. Her first concern was daily voice work, at least one hour a day. For without daily exercises "it is impossible to keep the instrument in proper condition ... to respond instantly to every tone requirement." This advice came from a professional actress after years of stage experience and a variety of roles. But it took Mrs. Fiske virtually twenty-five years on the stage to develop a style unique from those around her.

Minnie Maddern Fiske was born Marie Augusta Davey in New Orleans on December 19, 1865 to Lizzie Maddern and Tom Davey. That name was short lived for it was soon changed to Minnie Maddern, after Maggie Mitchell, a child star of the day. Raised in a theatrical family and practically brought up on the road, Minnie had this to say about choosing a career in the theatre.

I must tell you first, that you may understand better, that the theatre was not to me what it is to children who are taken into it when they are old enough to realize it. I was almost born in it. I do not remember a time when it was not my home. It held no glamour for me. I knew no fear of it nor any great emotion about it. I just loved it naturally as other children love brothers and sisters.

By the time Minnie Maddern retired from the stage to become Mrs. Harrison Fiske she had been performing as a professional actress for twenty-two years and was only twenty-five years old. Minnie's desire to return to the stage was met on February 15, 1894 for one benefit performance of Nora in A Doll's House. It had
been twenty years since Ibsen had written the play and this was its second performance in English on the New York stage. The New York News recalled her performance.

One of the marked features of her acting is the care she gives to detail. If she makes an entrance in street costume, she suggests her mood by the manner in which she doffs her gloves, wrap and bonnet ... Her characters are not commonplace or lackadaisical because of these details but are enhanced by the vividness of the picture.

With the success of Nora, Mrs. Fiske (her new stage name) left retirement and spent the last thirty-eight years of her life searching for truth and realism in the scripts and performers she chose to work with and most importantly in her own acting performance. It is in this labour of love that her acting method was designed.

When asked why Ibsen's characters intitially intrigued her Mrs. Fiske answered, "there was no special ardor of enthusiasm then. I came to play the other because, really, there was nothing else. I cannot play a love scene. Shakespeare was not for me or the standard repertory of the day." Being honest and candid were two of Mrs. Fiske's attributes. Whatever her reasons for her initial attraction to Ibsen's works she did, in another interview in Rochester, New York, share her views on Ibsen's creativity. She mentioned his unconventional methods, that in his works there are
no stage heroes, heroines, or villains, or worn-out stage tricks utilized in melodramas of the day. As in the dramas of life, the right character does not appear in the proper place but usually the wrong character does. Ibsen’s works have little action but instead “take up two or three threads of human life and follow it through the maze of incidents.” She added later,

Ibsen shows us only the last hours ... and that is why in the study of Ibsen I had to devise what was, for me, a new method. To portray them I must know everything that has gone on before ... When I do, the role will play itself.

It is this background search in character analysis that is the foundation of Mrs. Fiske’s methodology.

In preparing for a role Mrs. Fiske asked for the completed manuscript at least three months before rehearsals began. This was not to memorize the lines but to “compose” the role in her husband’s words. Mrs. Fiske immersed herself in this task. “I am imagining myself to be the character to be assumed. Eating, reading, walking up and down the stairs even, I am Becky or Tess as the case may be.” She started by going back to the childhood of the character, reconstructing the years up to the first page of the play, using any hints supplied by the playwright, and filled the rest with her imagination. She called these imaginary experiences and events "preludes“ and wrote them out at length. She felt sure
this background detail would assist her with the character's
thoughts, motives and actions found in the script. Next, she would
go through the script and clarify her character's relationship to
every other character in the play including psychological details as
well as movements to express them. If she was playing an
historical character she would also study the architecture of the
period or other important details. As mentioned earlier, not a
day went by during this preparation period when she did not also
concentrate on vocal agility.

Often these background preparations lasted more that several
months. Mrs. Fiske explored the role of Rebecca West in
Rømershøjøm at intervals for five years before she felt ready to
tackle it. In order to prepare herself for Hedda Gabler, Mrs. Fiske
spent a whole summer in Europe recreating Hedda's past and even
improvised a stormy love scene between Hedda and Lovberg. She
firmly believed that "if both actors had studied their part this way
the moment in the second act when these two come face to face
after all their years of separation is for each, a tremendous
moment ... the moment is electrical."

This dedication and sense of professionalism carried into the
rehearsal period as well. She imposed upon herself a regimented
schedule that she followed throughout her life. She was
consistently punctual for all engagements and rehearsals. She
carried her scripts in rehearsals for the first few weeks although
her lines were already committed to memory and quickly began
showing the glimmer of a finished product by the third week of
rehearsals. She never once missed a performance in her forty-
year career and fulfilled every engagement including one in Chicago
when she was suffering from a severe attack of influenza.²⁹

The group that benefitted the most from Mrs. Fiske’s theories
on acting and play production was the Manhattan Theatre
Company established in 1904 as a repertory company. Mrs. Fiske
directed many of the productions and side-coached the others
directed by Harrison Fiske. When a new play went into rehearsal,
some cast members would be pulled aside by Mrs. Fiske to set up
some private rehearsals. In those coaching sessions she would
demand a reason for every movement and speech they uttered
with encouraging words like ʺbe true, be natural.ʺ³⁰ Beatrice
Sturges wrote after watching her direct a rehearsal,

Nothing is too small for the eye of Mrs. Fiske - whether
it be the gesture of an actor, a detail in stage setting
or lighting, a tone of voice, or a strain of music - her
watchful care and artistic sense have made her company
a model one to see.³¹

It is important to note that Mrs. Fiske was training young actors
in principles similar to those being explored by the Moscow Art
Theatre in 1904. This was one year prior to the appearance of any Stanislavsky-trained actor in the United States in 1905.32

Mrs. Fiske had always wanted to start a dramatic school but never seemed to have the time to start the organization. However, Alexander Woollcott was able to record advice relayed to him by Mrs. Fiske in a series of interviews. Mrs. Fiske approached acting as a science. She believed that an actor should be able to re-create significant moments in the performance with consistency, unlike the actors of the emotional school who relied on intuition.

Anyone may achieve on some rare occasion an outburst of genuine feeling, a gesture of imperishable beauty, a ringing accent of truth; but your scientific actor knows how he did it. He can repeat it again and again and again. He can be depended on.35

Her strongest advice to young actors concerned life in the theatre itself. She felt intelligent actors could easily lose their creativity and imagination in the petty, stifling atmosphere of the artificial theatrical world. Actors must experience life in the streets, observe all types of people and become acquainted with many kinds of sorrow. "Go where you can find something fresh to bring back to the stage. It is as valuable as youth unspoiled."34

Minnie Maddern Fiske may not have been America's greatest actress nor the finest teacher of modern American acting. She did, however, play a major role in promoting naturalistic plays,
encouraging modern acting techniques through her own work and the work of her company, and raising the image of women in the profession. She continually asked the question "why" of her work, forcing herself to find the answers and thereby being more believable. Her intellectual approach to a character and research and preparation for the role, while taken for granted today, was unique during her era. She was a staunch supporter of Ibsen's dramas and introduced American audiences to five of his major plays. For all of these reasons, Minnie Maddern Fiske deserves recognition as an important figure of the American stage.
Endnotes


7Wilson, *Three Hundred*, p. 318.

8Wilson, *History*, p. 228.

9Wilson, *History*, p. 231.


13Wilson, *History*, p. 231.


15Woolcott, 1917, p. 95.


18 Binns, 1955, p. 56.

19 Wilson, *History*, p. 228.

20 Woollcott, 1917, p. 59.


22 Binns, 1955, p. 139.

23 Fiske, *The Unknown*, p. 3.


26 Wilson, *History*, pp. 5-6.


31 Wilson, *History*, p. 236.


33 Wilson, *History*, p. 229.

34 Cole and Chinoy, 1957, p. 508.
Project Bibliography


Character Analysis for Minnie Maddern Fiske

Who am I?
I am Minnie Maddern Fiske, a forty-two year old professional actress who has appeared on the stage since birth. I am of Irish descent and have the red hair and temper to prove it. I am married to Harrison Gray Fiske, publisher of the Dramatic Mirror who has remained my business manager, personal accountant and confidante. I have a strong sense for what is good theatre and am free with my opinions. Although I'm 5'5" tall I carry myself well and command a certain eloquent presence on stage. I am never late to rehearsals or performances and abhor others that are. Time is very important to me. Nine months of the year I spend on the road, so that I live out of a suitcase. The theatre remains my home and my companies are my only family. I have chosen this way of life and live for it. (For more specifics see research paper)

What time is it?
It is 4:00 p.m. on November 12, 1907. I am at the height of my career and I am enjoying much success.

Where am I?
I am in a Chicago hotel room trying to leisurely eat my supper before I am to entertain an audience in my room. The hotel is located in downtown Chicago adjacent to the theatre where I am performing. I always stay in this room when my tour comes through for it is a first floor room with a fire escape and I won't sleep anywhere else. The hotel room has a table and chair, study area and a spacious living room to entertain guests, as well as a bedroom, bathroom and efficiency kitchen. It was a beautiful afternoon and I enjoy walking back and forth from the theatre to the hotel.

What surrounds me?
The objects at my desk are very important to me. I always keep an ample supply of paper and writing utensils for I am constantly composing letters, entering expense ledgers, or making lists of things to do. I also keep a box of pins to pin these lists to my skirt so I remember to take care of the items listed. I have a picture of my husband for inspiration and my latest animal rights speech to read over as I eat my dinner. I must deliver it tonight. I keep a typewriter under the desk and compose on it as well. When I write a letter to someone, I always make a carbon copy so that I can send it again if for some reason it gets lost in the mail. I don't trust many of the hotel mail systems. I also keep a diary
with thoughts about events and people I've worked with in hopes of writing my own autobiography someday.

What are the given circumstances?

I am eating my favorite meal, milk and onions when I realize that the audience is already here and I'm not going to have time to read over my speech or even eat for that matter. Physically, I have just completed a matinee and so I'm weary and hungry. Psychologically, I want some rest time but I don't want to alienate my future audiences so I must be civil and polite. My temper gets the best of me in the beginning but civility wins out in the end. I do not believe in god but am a humanist and fight even more readily for any animal cause or injustice. Morally, I believe in the goodness of man and the power of the intellect. My formal education was only through high school and even that was spotty. My worldly education has been as an apprentice in the theatre and the road has been my teacher. My parents divorced when I was very young and my mother died quite early in my life. I was raised by my grandmother and aunt, without a lot of male relatives. I married at a very young age and divorced within a year. I've always felt that I should have done more to make that marriage work but fault my youth for the most part.

What do I want?

Overall, I talk to this audience because I want to leave my legacy in the theatre history books and be appreciated as a talented actress of my time. I want to entertain them with tales of the road and give them a closer look at the life of a "grand dame." I want to share my newly discovered secrets of acting and demonstrate their effectiveness to me. As all actors do, I want to communicate the human experience through an artistic form. Ultimately, I want to receive the acceptance of my expression through the audience's applause.

What's in my way?

Immediately, my hunger and weariness. Once those are put aside, I have to deal with the obstacle of a heterogeneous audience with varying levels of familiarity with me. Then I must deal with my own language skills, sometimes it's better to show them then talk about it. Also the obstacle of boredom, I can't lose energy or attempt this as if it is a lecture demonstration.

What do I do to get what I want?

First, satiate myself with one or two mouthfuls of soup. Next, I need to update the audience about myself and accomplishments. To add some variety to all of this I want to entertain them with a
few scenes from some of the plays I've performed in and illustrate my diversity as well as my new found acting method. I write myself notes to remember the animal welfare meeting, because I know I will forget once I get started talking. I also want to dispel any falsehoods about myself in order to remain well-liked by the audience. I will also try to create a sense of the first moment in these scenes to avoid the audience losing interest.
Character Analysis
for Hedda Gabler, Cynthia Karslake and Rebecca West
Using the Method of Minnie Maddern Fiske

Hedda Gabler

Background and Given Circumstances
Ibsen tells us that Hedda is twenty-nine years old. Her face and figure show breeding and distinction. Her complexion is pale and opaque. Her eyes are steel gray and express a cold unruffled repose. She has medium brown hair but not especially abundant. She smokes. In her youth she used to gallop by Tessman's house with her beautiful riding clothes on. She was always surrounded by admirers. She flirted a lot with these admirers trying to find a husband. She worried about becoming an old maid.

Tessman was one of these admirers. She used him last summer as an escort home from parties. On one of these walks home, she ran out of conversation topics and expressed an interest in a house on their route home. Now, after a six month honeymoon abroad with Tessman, she has finally returned home, to find that he has purchased the house for her thinking she really loved it. Upon her arrival last night, Hedda couldn't bear the decorations or the covers on the furniture placed there lovingly by Tessman's aunt so she insisted on unpacking all of her belongings and uncovering the furniture before she retired to bed.

The only person Hedda was ever enamored with was Mr. Lovberg. In his youth, he was a wild scholar who courted Hedda and visited her often in her home, recounting his exciting stories and adventures. Lovberg used to sit with Hedda in the afternoons, with her father, the General, across the room reading his paper with his back towards them. They sat on the corner sofa with the same illustration paper in front of them confessing wild passions that no one knew. Hedda would also goad Lovberg into answering her candid questions.

Hedda is trapped with a husband she doesn't love and pregnant with his child, a thought she finds unbearably offensive. She is also trapped in an environment foreign to her childhood, surrounded by people she would normally not choose to associate with. She is a creature without purpose, a parasite on society.

Relationships
Tessman's Aunt - Hedda senses the mothering nature of her and resents it. She doesn't want to be mothered or physically touched by her at all. Upon their return home last night Hedda made it very clear she was not willing to share their carriage with her and demanded that she find another way to the house so that
her luggage could ride with her. When Tessman's other aunt is dying she refuses to visit stating she hates any sickness, ugliness or death.

Mrs. Elvsted - poses a large threat to Hedda in that she is Lovberg's new flame and seems to have taken over with Lovberg where Hedda stopped. Hedda has always enjoyed tormenting and controlling Mrs. Elvsted. In school she used to pull her irritating mass of red hair. Hedda does everything in her power to break off the relationship between Mrs. Elvsted and Mr. Lovberg while pretending to befriend them both and gain their confidence.

Judge Brack - courted her in her youth but nothing ever materialized of it. Now he remains a friend of both Tessman and Hedda. She would never consider having an affair with him but she enjoys his company and the intellectual affair they seem to be developing. Hedda uses the Judge as a sounding board for her ideas and seems to be the most honest about her feelings with him. (As honest as Hedda ever gets!) He knows about her pregnancy. He doesn't seem to want to compete for Hedda but does enjoy sneaking in the back way and establishing a secret liaison with Hedda.

Tessman - Their marriage seems to be more of a business arrangement than anything else. Hedda does not love him. They do not stimulate each other. Their interests are very different. It was agreed that Hedda would be able to entertain often and keep an open house. Hedda assumed that Tessman would have enough money to support a lifestyle she was accustomed to, but that doesn't seem to be happening yet. She resents him for not making enough money and his lack of competitive drive. Hedda chooses not to use the term "love" in describing her relationship with Tessman. She enjoys manipulating him but will allow no physical emotions or gestures of intimacy.

Lovberg - They were comrades, greedy for life, enjoying the intimacy of their youth. Lovberg spoiled this intimacy by dragging it down to reality. * I found out later this meant making the relationship physical motivated by his needs rather than hers. She threatened to shoot him but was too cowardly to follow up the threat. They have not spoken since. Lovberg has been in town for awhile but has made no attempt to contact Hedda. This frustrates her and makes Mrs. Elvsted more of a threat because she realizes she no longer has the power over Lovberg she once had. She really wants to regain that power to shape his destiny and his immediate reactions.

Voice and Movement Ideas
- She moves like a cat, especially with Mrs. Elvsted, it's like she's a cat pawing at a mouse.
- When frustrated, she raises up her hands in clenched fists.  
- She talks a lot about impulses. Keep that in mind with movement.  
- She punctuates her ideas with drumming

Cynthia Karslake

Background and Given Circumstances

Cynthia Karslake is an American heiress who enjoys a lot of worldly goods. Her father was J. William Deane - an old established family. Her father left her fifteen or twenty million in his will. She was brought up in France and England and referred to as a "sporty" woman. She associated with a gay set in very gay places. She is twenty-seven years old. She is small and wellbred, full of love and excitement, especially for horse races. She loves the out-of-doors. She doesn't fear the opinion of others. She dresses elegantly.

She married John (Jack) Karslake, part of another wealthy family. Jack's father Henry, served a term in the Senate. Her husband owns the famous race horse, Cynthia K named after his wife. They were happy for six or seven months until his law practice kept him from taking her to the races. She threw a temper tantrum and divorced him for desertion. They had no children.

She has spent the last few months since her divorce in Europe. She is now planning to marry another wealthy young man from New York, Phillip Phllimore. He is a Supreme Court Judge and smokes Italian cigarettes. His Aunt, Miss Heneage has invited her to stay with them until the wedding.

Relationships

Phillip Phllimore - He has always been a good friend of Cynthia's. She was very lonely after her divorce. Phillip was there and that's how they came together. He's kind of dry and his interests are very different from hers. By marrying him, she hopes to pose a threat to Jack since they are both lawyers and of the same society circle.

Vida Phllimore - is Phillip's first wife. She and Cynthia see each other often at teas. She enjoys the fact that she now has her ex-husband. Vida does become a large threat to Cynthia when she makes a strong play for Jack in return.

Jack Karslake - She still loves Jack though she is too proud to admit it to herself or him. They really did have a strong love for each other when they married and she is carrying a lot of unresolved feelings for him into this next marriage. This worries
her. She has not spoken to him since she stormed out of his house six months ago. She wants to apologize to him for being rude and not being able to keep her temper. She also wants to make it clear that both of their future lives will be much better off if he does not appear anywhere that she is. John flusters her terribly and she would rather not be vulnerable. She is unclear how he feels about her.

**Voice and Movement Ideas**
- She is constantly walking and reading the newspaper at the same time.
- Her manner is wide-awake and keen.
- When she is uncomfortable in a situation, she talks herself into ease.
- Consider using a parasol or riding crop to suggest her interest in the out-of-doors and horses.
- Use gloves as a prop to punctuate her ideas

**Rebecca West**

**Background and Given Circumstances**

Rebecca comes from humble beginnings. Her father's name was Gamvik. Her mother's work kept her in constant touch with the district doctor, Dr. West. Dr. West immediately adopted Rebecca after her mother's death and she left Finmark and went to live with him. He was very harsh and half-paralyzed but Rebecca never left. She nursed him until his death because she felt it was her duty as a daughter. She did not receive an inheritance from him except a trunk full of books. Later she is confronted with the idea that because the Dr. was in town the year before she was born, that she was illegitimate and really is his biological daughter. She claims she is thirty years old but lies about her age because she is still unmarried and doesn't want to be considered an old maid. She is very intelligent and reads the paper every day to keep up with the latest political events.

After Dr. West's death she came to live at Rosmersholm, to care for her ailing friend Beata Rosmersholm and to care for the house, at Beata's request. There she met Beata's husband Rosmer, to whom she quickly was attracted. She soon realized that Rosmer was moving away from all his former beliefs and prejudices, towards a more liberal viewpoint, a viewpoint to which Rebecca heartily agreed. The only barrier stopping Rosmer from total freedom was his wife Beata. Rebecca realized that Beata was easily influenced and so she set to work to lure Beata into madness that
led her to suicide. Finally, after feeling she had no right to claim Rosmer, because she was barren and could not bear children, Beata threw herself off the bridge into the mill race.

After Beata's death Rebecca quickly changed the surroundings at Rosmersholm. She added flowers everywhere and remained a faithful, intellectually stimulating companion to Rosmer with the hopes he would grow to love her and they would soon marry. Her wild, uncontrollable passion for Rosmer soon faded into silence and peace. It has been six months since Beata's death and Rosmer cannot face Beata's death or forget it. He is still not able to physically walk across the bridge over the mill race because of his haunting guilt that he caused her death. It is this fact that forces Rebecca to realize her love for him is hopeless unless he can regain his all-important confidence of innocence again.

Rebecca truly believes she had a healthy spirit and a strong courage before she fell in love with Rosmer. She enjoyed her lack of scruples and personal ties. Her passion for Rosmer broke her spirit and warped her life forever. She lost her power of action through living with Rosmer. She is now haunted with the Rosmersholm myth of the dead returning in the shape of galloping white horses to claim their own.

Relationships

Kroll - is the brother of Beata and was Rosmer's advisor while a student at his school. He is a conservative and trained Rosmer in the old way of thinking. There was a time in the past when Kroll was sexually attracted to Rebecca and she knows this. This is the reason that Mrs. Kroll feels threatened by Rebecca. Kroll now wants Rosmer and Rebecca to marry so that people will stop suggesting there is an illicit affair between Rosmer and Rebecca. Kroll is also the only one aware of Rebecca's conniving ways and realizes she emotionalizes to cover her calculated moves.

Beata - idolized Rebecca while alive and literally gave up her life for Rebecca and Rosmer's happiness. She was seized with morbid passions and constant reproaches and knew she couldn't have children. She tormented herself and Rebecca just pushed it a little further. Rebecca suggested that Rosmer had fallen in love with her and Beata soon thought it was best if she killed herself so that Rosmer and Rebecca could marry. Rebecca now has problems competing with this dead image.

Ulrick Brendel - was Rosmer's teacher and influenced him with the more liberal view until he was dismissed from teaching. It is this relationship that gives Rebecca the idea that she may also be able to influence Rosmer and shape his views to share her more liberal viewpoint.

Rosmer - is forty-three years old. He was trained as a
clergyman and his family has always been first in the district. His father acquired Rosmer's ministry here for him. He has since left it to rethink his political position. He buries himself at his family home, Rosmersholm, studying genealogical research and politics. Rebecca shares these interests with Rosmer. They are loyal friends, free thinkers, and atheists. During Beata's life they lived in the same house as friends only, having no sexual contact, although Rosmer admitted to loving Rebecca almost immediately. Rosmer became much happier after Rebecca came to live at Rosmersholm. They were drawn together by their interest in the same books, ideas, and theories. Rosmer went out of his way to spare Beata's feelings. After Beata's death he was just beginning to live and make plans of spreading this new freedom. He wants Beata's memory to go away but he can't stop the feelings of guilt. To make matters worse, the papers are now printing stories about an affair between the two of them and it has hurt Rosmer deeply. He has asked Rebecca to marry him but by this point, Rebecca knows her love for him is hopeless unless he loses the guilt. She rejects his proposal and warns she will commit suicide the same way Beata did if he ever speaks of it again. By the end of the play, after Rebecca's confession, the two make the ultimate sacrifice to each other and jointly commit suicide by jumping into the millrace.

**Voice and Movement Ideas**
- She seems physical - she moves towards people when she talks to them and has a lot of physical contact, like taking their hands.
- Possible activities include crocheting and arranging flowers
- The window looking out towards the millrace is important.
- She clenches and wrings her hands.
- There is a strong reoccurring image of being swept up like a storm at sea - possibility to express this physically or vocally.
MEMO

November 29, 1988

TO: GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

FROM: DEBBY SHELLARD

Please be informed that my Master of Fine Arts showcase project is entitled "Think of me as you did once, long ago." Minnie Maddern Fiske: A Portrait. My faculty committee is the following:

Marc Powers, Advisor
Rex McGraw, Acting Faculty
Joy Reilly, HLC/Acting Faculty

They reviewed a draft of my script and approved it on 9/30/88.
Technical Needs for *Minnie Maddern Fiske: A Portrait*

**Set Pieces**
desk and chair from a hotel room
podium
loveseat with lace runners
brown leather chair
straight backed chair
coffee table with lace runner
halltree - for costume pieces
small table - for props
easel - for portrait

**Special Lighting Effects**
3 areas on stage DR, C, DL
running light on stand for changes - later cut
special to highlight poster
strobe light DL to show passage of time - later cut

**Props**
bowl and spoon and napkin
3 dollies and a small dish
2 letters with envelopes and stationery writing paper
diary
2 pieces of paper pinned to skirt
stereoscope
newspaper
picture in frame
riding crop
gun loaded with blanks and cleaning rag
books for desk
poster

**Costume Pieces**
beige blouse
blue skirt
corset and camisole
slip
high top brown shoes
hat with veil
shawl
watch on chain for use around neck
gloves

**Sound**
tape of "In the Gloaming" and tag ending
Minnie Maddern Fiske - A Portrait

Script and Beat Analysis

The set is divided into three areas with lights. DSR is a small desk and chair suggesting the study of a hotel room. C has a loveseat, 2 chairs and a coffee table representing a living room. DSL is a podium to represent a lecture setting. UL has a poster of Haskell's portrait of Minnie. UR is a small table and halltree for costume pieces and props.

(House lights down. Tape of Debby Shellard singing "In the Gloaming" begins as there is a fade up on the sketch of Minnie. The light fades to blackout and Debby enters from the dark to C stage. Lights up with Debby pointing gun directly at audience. Debby fires blank off R. Hedda monologue begins.)

Hedda: Welcome back Judge! That's what you get for sneaking in the back way. So sorry. Did I hit you by chance?

Come along. What in heaven's name am I to do with myself all day long? I haven't any visitors and Tessman rushed off with his aunts directly after lunch. He didn't expect you so early Judge. We must sit here and wait until Tessman comes - he may not be back for some time.

Well? It seems ages since our last little talk doesn't it? Every day on our trip I wished I was home again - you know Tessman my dear Judge. His idea of bliss is grubbing about in a lot of dirty bookshops and making endless copies of antiquated manuscripts. But as for me, I can't tell you how bored I've been!

Surely you can understand! How would you like to spend a whole month without meeting a soul you could really talk to? But the most unendurable thing of all was to be everlastingly with one and the same person. Tessman is a specialist, my dear Judge, and specialists do not make amusing traveling companions - not for long at any rate. Then why did I marry him?

Tessman? I had danced myself tired and I wasn't getting any younger.
to dismiss — But I won't talk about that. I won't
to convince - build even think about it. One must admit
him up anything especially funny about him, do
look for response you? After all, he's a distinguished
loss- gets caught scholar. Who knows? He may still go far.
to defend I really didn't see why I shouldn't accept
his offer. That was more than some of
him feel guilty my other admirers were prepared to do,
concerned. God knows a third person
would have been welcome on our
journey. Oh! those infernal tete-a-tetes.
My wedding trip is not over still by a
long shot. No, we've only stopped at a
station on the line. And I never get out
and stretch myself a bit because there's
always someone there waiting to stare at
my legs. I don't like that sort of thing.

(desperation sinks in)
realize he's eyeing me - to embarrass him,
control/dominate win

to warn I'd rather keep my seat and continue the
tete-a-tete. But if the third person, gay
and entertaining in a variety of ways,
were to jump in and join the couple,
that would certainly be a great relief!

(Lights fade c and come up DSR on hotel room. Enter Minnie with
spoon, bowl, napkin and doily. She begins eating. Realizes the
audience is there and begins speaking.)

Remember the
journey Minnie's
taking the audience through
to convince —

Minnie: Oh dear, are you here already?
(Checks watch) I didn't expect you so
soon. You're early. I thought you'd be
here at 3:45 p.m. Please excuse me for
eating but I'm on a strict schedule. I'd
offer you some -- but I don't think I
have enough to go around. I'm sure
you'd like it though, milk and onions!

I should introduce myself. I'm Mrs.
Fiske. My friends call me Minnie. I'm
glad you found my hotel room. It's not
home but it's where my trunk and bags
are right now, so it suits me. (XDR) The
fire escape is off here to my right, so in
case of a fire, you'll know right where to
go. I always request a first floor room
and keep a wash-basin full in the
bathroom for emergencies. /

to proclaim — The theatre has always been my
home. I was born in it. It holds no glamour, fear nor any great emotion for me, I just love it naturally. There is also no glamour in why I choose to produce Ibsen’s work. I play Ibsen’s women because they are the best roles. I can't play a love scene or Shakespeare, or the melodramas of today. But Ibsen writes about human characters. There are no stage heroes or tricks, just threads of life woven together. I wasn't always positive about Ibsen. Have any of you read the article I wrote for *Theatre* a few year's ago? I was influenced by the critic William Winter. You know he's very conservative! I wrote that Ibsen had all but “banished beauty, nobility and poetry from the stage with his merciless surgery of the human soul.” We are all allowed one mistake.

I just performed a monologue from *Hedda Gabler* for you. The play begins 36 hours before Hedda takes her own life. To play Hedda, I must know everything that has gone before. I go back into her childhood reconstructing the years up to the first page of the play. I look for hints supplied by the playwright and fill the rest with my imagination. I must know all that Hedda was. When I do, the role plays itself. Take for example Hedda's vulnerabilities, to understand them, I must go back to a time when she was very vulnerable and see how she felt. Say the first time Mr. Lovberg comes to call. It might have looked something like this.

*(X to C set and improvised scene from rehearsal. When completed, begin addressing the audience again.)*

I call these little “Improvisations”, “Preludes.” I was so excited the first time I discovered this method that I quickly shared it all with my niece Emily. I couldn't understand why she
didn't share my excitement. She was really upset when she found out I had been rehearsing a scene that didn't even appear in the play. But her real anger came from being locked outside in the cold while I had rehearsed it.

Emily is my favorite traveling companion. She appears in many of my plays. She's quite a fine actress in her own right. Traveling would be quite lonely without her since I spend almost eight months of the year on the road. Besides, she still needs mothering. Her mother died four years ago and she's been with me ever since. (Discovers letter on table.) Oh, this must have arrived. (Reads letter aloud.)

As you know the lease expires this April. I think it's time to give up the Manhattan Theatre. We'll keep the company intact and continue to rent houses. I've scheduled your charity benefit for your farwell performance. A matinee on April 28th. Let me know if it's suitable. I'm thinking we should build a splendid new Manhattan Theatre farther uptown and will begin looking into it. Hope all is well with you.

Harry

Put letter away ——— I was quite anxious to hear from Harry. Emily and I have just completed an exhausting tour of 18,000 miles. We travelled by train through some of the most awful conditions I've ever experienced; electrical storms, fog, ice, roaches in the dressing rooms, bats in the electrics. The tour began on the east coast and worked its way to the Pacific, then down to Mexico and up through Canada. We couldn't use regular theatres because of the theatrical syndicate's monopoly so we played in churches, abandoned theatres,
warehouses, one-room schoolhouses and roller skating rinks. In many cases there were no dressing rooms, so we dressed in people's homes and laid the props out on the grass and just picked up the ones we needed before we entered the scene.

We were performing the play, The New York Idea, a wonderful satire on easy divorce. Harry and I commissioned Langdon Mitchell to write a play for me last year and he created Cynthia Karslake, a bright, witty, somewhat flighty woman caught up in the society games of New York City. She still loves her husband Jack, whom she divorced several months earlier, but she won't admit it!

(During last speech add needed props. Lights fade DR and come up C with Cynthia's entrance into the scene.)

See him and lie—loss/to defend  

Cynthia: Oh, I didn't know you were here. I came to see you. Of course I told you yesterday I was coming here. Jack—

I mean, Mr. Karslake - no, I mean Jack! I came here because, well you see, it's my wedding day and I was rude to you last evening. I'd like to apologize and make peace with you before I go. I'm only here just a moment. I'm to be married at 3 and just look at the clock! Besides, I told Phillip I was going to Louise's shop, and I did - on the way here, but you see, if I stay too long, he'll telephone Louise and find I'm not there, and he might guess I was here. So you see I'm risking a scandal.

whisper—little win

to convince

And now Jack, see here, I lay my hand on the table, I'm here on the square and what I want to say is, why Jack, even if we did make a mess of our married life, let's put by anger and pride. It's all over now and can't be helped. So let's be human, let's be reasonable, and let's be kind to each other! I wish you every happiness!
Won't you give me your hand? I give you one more chance! Yes, I'm determined to be generous. I forgive everything you ever did to me. I'm ready to be friends. I wish you every happiness and every horse in the world! I can't do more than that!

You refuse? Our marriage was a wager, you wagered you could live with me. You lost, and paid with a divorce and now it's time to part friends.

There's no possible harmony between divorced people. I withdraw my hand and all good feeling. No wonder I couldn't stand you. Eh? However that's pleasantly passed. But at least, my dear Karslake, let us have some sort of beauty of behavior. It's an insufferable thing to a woman of any "delicacy of feeling" to find her husband to find the man she once lived with in the house of making love to to find you here! No woman should have to meet her former husband! Oh, I should have never come! What business have you to be about to be at large to be at all. I divorced you. I buried you out of my life. If any human soul was ever dead, you are! No, I am not in love with you Mr. Karslake! I am here because I had an irresistible longing to see you make an ass of yourself just once more and my dear fellow to make an experiment of myself. I've been with you 30 minutes and its alright. I'm immune, you're not catching anymore! I said to myself, if I fly into a temper when I see him, well that shows I'm not yet so entirely convalescent that I can afford to have Jack Karslake be my best man and give me away when I'm married this afternoon. Don't you think I mean it? I'll lay my wedding gown on that horse out there that you won't be there! If you're there, you get the gown, and it not, I get the horse! Now then, we'll see which of us two is the real
sporting goods! Shake!

(Lights down C and up DSR.)

Minnie: This play charmed audiences everywhere we went. I felt it provided a strong message in a humorous way. Marriages are just not taken seriously enough today. I know first hand, through my relationship with LeGrand White. We were both very young and idealistic. I was not the kind of wife he had expected, an actress constantly on tour. He wasn’t there for me either. Both of us became disillusioned. LeGrand died in a mental institution a few years ago. It wasn’t until his death that I stopped feeling guilty, in a way, for his unhappiness. I am uncomfortable talking about marriage. I suppose it’s because I’m more of a bad example than an authority on the topic. (Sees paper pinned to skirt and reads it.) I’m afraid of losing things or thoughts so I pin them to my skirt. Like this one. Finish writing Harry. Oh, Harry is my second husband. It’s nice when you get a second chance.

(X to desk and read letter aloud.)

First, I want to speak to you of this beautiful little here. I met the owner and manager last night. They are going to operate the theatre independently, avoiding any shows produced by the theatrical syndicate, and they are building their hopes that you will speak of the theatre to Mr. Schubert and Mr. Belasco and influence them to send their attractions here when possible.

And now there is another thing I wish to speak of. We must remember that the years are passing. Boy. After twelve years of hard work and considerable success we find ourselves with nothing though we have earned enough to be
placed beyond all stress and worry.

This fortune has gone... everything
went in the effort to keep the
Manhattan Theatre open.
Together we have built up a little
following for me.
It must be carefully nourished. We must
put money
away as soon as we are able. The little
popularity I have may wane. I have a
horror of an old age of financial
distress and all the humiliation it brings.
Let us
determine to avoid it.

new thought - after

reflection write it
down, then say it

Oh, I'm going to be late. (Gather up
speech and begin to leave. Speaking as
an afterthought while putting on hat and
shawl.) Theatre isn't my only love. I'm
very concerned about animal welfare.
I'm a great follower of St. Francis of
Assisi.

(Out on DSR light and up on DSL light.)

How far are we sure that we have a
moral right to destroy animal life, since
all living things belong to a universal
kinship? I consider this. We have a
horror of pain for ourselves - our
children - our friends - and yet we
demand of the dumb creatures of the
world a magnificent courage and
fortitude that transcends all human
understanding.

Take ermine! The procuring of
ermine, the symbol of royalty and
kingship, dignity, majesty, the ideal of
high things. The means are the lowest,
the most dastardly and nastiest. A
Metal rod is smeared with grease and fastened where the timid little creature will lick its ice cold surface. Their tongues are frozen to it and thus they starve, sometimes for days, until they tear their tongues out or fall down dead.

Is it too fanciful a dream that many of us hope for the coming of a time when women of kind hearts will refuse to wear furs and algerettes? Furs are quite unnecessary. Many of us have not worn them for years. I have not missed them or needed them in the coldest countries.

These helpless creatures are utterly dependent upon our sense of honor and chivalry. (Even those that must be destroyed) we must deal with in mercy and with having respect to our own humanity. The children of today will not—be lesser citizens of tomorrow when they are taught that the greatest coward is he who treats with cruelty, any helpless living thing.

Go out my brother, to the wilderness—out to the virgin loveliness of untouched nature, where sodden man has not yet littered the wild with his “improvements;” loiter among winding streams and watch the shadows sleeping in the quivering pools, and the water birds splashing up and sailing away out of sight; see the beautiful blue sky with its silvery fleets sailing silently out of the west—and then, then! If you honestly feel like killing something, feel as if you must become the author of an ill-smelling carcass of some kind, go home, my brother, as straight as you can, and hang yourself by the neck until you are dead!

(Lights down DSL and up C stage.)

I’m also working on Rosmersholm, Ibsen’s darkest play. I’ve been studying the role of Rebecca West for 5 years. We have 3
weeks left. I've been working on Rebecca's confession scene. It seems to come out of nowhere. I can't find the motivation for it unless the audience can hear Rebecca think. This is the way I work.

(Proceed through the monologue as worked out in rehearsal giving special emphasis to the character's past, movement and voice concerns and then add psychological intent.)

I want him to regain his innocence - even if it costs me his affections. Remember: illegitimacy, affair in papers, view of lie with Beata - gives of every line work for simplicity of the moment explanation begins.

Rebecca: There! Now it's out of sight; let it be out of mind too. There'll be no more of that sort of thing Rosmer. Come and sit down. I'm going to tell you everything. I'm going to give to you back what makes your life worth living. Your confidence of innocence. When I first came here from Finmark, I felt as if a new, wonderful world was opening up before me and I wanted to be part of this new world; I wanted to belong to it - to share in all these new ideas. One day Professor Kroll was telling me of the great influence Ulrick Brendel had over you, when you were still a boy; I suddenly thought it might be possible for me to carry on his work. I wanted us to join hands and work for this new freedom. We were to be in the front ranks and march on side by side; forward, always forward. But I soon found out there was a gloomy, insurmountable barrier standing in your way. I knew there would be no freedom for you unless you could break loose - get out into the clear bright sunshine. I saw you pinning away here, defeated - stultified by your disastrous marriage. I didn't dare speak like this before. I didn't want to frighten you. I could see where your salvation lay - your only salvation. And so I set to work.

retract forwardness

the confession — Now you must know the truth. It wasn't you Rosmer. You are entirely innocent. It was I who worked on your
wife Beata and deliberately lured her into madness that led her to the millrace. She was given to understand that you were gradually working yourself free from all your former beliefs and prejudices. Shortly after that I begged and implored her to let me go away from Rosmersholm. I didn’t want to. I wanted to stay here. But I led her to believe it would be best for me to go for all of our sakes—before it was too late. I hinted that if I were to remain here, something—anything might happen!

She was obsessed by the fact that she was childless—and never could have children; because of this she felt she had no right here. She was convinced it was her duty to efface herself—her duty to you I mean.

— I had to choose between your life and hers. You seem to think I acted with shrewd deliberation, that I was cold and calm about it all; but I was a very different person then. I wanted Beata out of the way—somehow; but at the same time it never occurred to me that the thing would really happen! A voice inside me kept crying out "stop", "no further!" but I couldn’t resist the impulse to go on. I thought: a little further—just a little further; a tiny step more—and then another; I just couldn’t stop! And suddenly—there it was! That’s the way these things happen you see.

Minnie: Well as you can see that still needs work. Why is it that some scenes always need more work? I’m still too mechanical. I think sometimes overanalyze a part, but its better that doing nothing at all. I don’t believe in a moment of greatness on stage unless you know what you did and can do it again and again and again. That’s what rehearsal are for! (Musical tag ending}
encourage them to admit to my new friends begins.) Do come see Rosmersholm next week at the Lyceum in New York.] But don't come opening night. I'm never my best on opening. And come backstage afterwards and tell me what you think. (Blackout)
Rehearsal Schedule

**November**
Sat. 5 - 1p.m. - 3p.m.  Walk and Block
Sun. 6 - 1p.m. - 3p.m.  Walk and Block
Mon. 7 - 1p.m. - 3p.m.  Walk and Block (Joy watches)
Tues. 8 - 1p.m. - 3p.m.  Walk and Block
Weds. 9 - 1p.m. - 3p.m.  Walk and Block
Fri. 11 - 3p.m. - 5p.m.  Experiment

Sat. 12 - type research paper again
Sun. 13 - 1p.m. - 3p.m.  Experiment
Mon. 14 - 3p.m. - 5p.m.  Work Segments (Marc watches)
Tues. 15 - 3p.m. - 5p.m.  Work Segments
Weds. 16 - 7p.m. - 9p.m.  Work Segments
Thurs. 17 - 1p.m. - 3p.m.  Work Segments
Fri. 18 - 3p.m. - 5p.m.  Work Segments

Sat. 19 - 10a.m. - 12 noon Work Segments
Sun. 20 - 8p.m. - 10p.m.  Work Segments
Mon. 21 - **Savage in Limbo** Dress
Tues. 22 - **Savage in Limbo**
Weds. 23 - 10a.m. Run Thru (Ionia watches)
2p.m. - 4p.m. (Marc watches)

Thurs. 24 - Thanksgiving
Fri. 25 - Thanksgiving
Sat. 26 - Thanksgiving
Sun. 27 - 8p.m. - 10p.m. Run Thru
Mon. 28 - 3p.m. - 5p.m. Run Thru in Stadium II (Marc watches)
Tues. 29 - 3p.m. - 5p.m. Run Thru in Stadium II
Wed. 30 - 10a.m. - 12 noon Oral Interp. with Ionia
7p.m. - 9p.m. Run Thru in Stadium II

**December**
Thurs. 1 - 5p.m. - 7p.m. Run Thru in Stadium II (Joy and Joe watch)
Fri. 2 - 3p.m. - 4p.m. Cue to Cue
Sat. 3 - 9a.m. - 11a.m. Tech and Dress
Sun. 4 - 9a.m. - 11a.m. Final Dress
Mon. 5 - 7p.m. PERFORMANCE
Tues. 6 - 7p.m. PERFORMANCE
Creative Project Log of Events

July 27, 1988

I turned in my prospectus to Marc at his home tonight and we talked about what to look for in order to write my script and my research paper. The following are notes and ideas I wrote down from the meeting. It will be interesting to see if the final product has these elements in it.

In order to research Minnie Maddern Fiske's life look for her views on Psychological Naturalism, her own technique. Look for what critics had to say in order to create a little conflict and struggle within her to improve. Get an idea of her style - what styles came before (like Delsarte) and how did her style grow out of this. Try to find some interesting biographical anecdotes that make her a real person. Look for her vulnerable points and her faults. Watch for her political views - were they conservative or liberal? Also see if she mentions her costuming in anything. Was she corseted or liberally uncorseted?

As for the process of putting the script together, Marc had these helpful directions. Try to make the script more of a journey or quest rather than a biography. Let us follow her search to find a better way of doing something. Don't let her know the end in the beginning and don't get bogged down in triviality. Look for the universals in her life... i.e. flaws, frustrations and truths that would apply to all of us.

One suggestion I'm going to follow is the possibility that she was more of a singer than her list of productions show. Possibly, at that time, singers weren't taken as serious actresses and that is why she turned to Ibsen's works. I know her husband produced Kismet, maybe I can work that in somehow. She could sing a silly melodramatic song, then after she finds her acting system, she could sing Kismet, a show she was never able to perform.

I'm very excited to get to the Library of Congress to find some of these things in her papers. The materials I've found so far at OSU are adequate but not stunning! The hope is to get the research paper and the first draft of the script completed by the start of school on September 22nd!

August 16, 1988

I just completed a day and a half of research at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. I don't mind admitting how surprised I was that everything worked out so well. I didn't make any special arrangements to see Minnie Maddern Fiske's materials in the Manuscript Division, I just travelled there hoping I could get in to see some of them. I felt I didn't have enough interesting and
unique data from secondary sources to write the show and really hoped I'd come across some pieces relating to her acting process.

The Manuscript Division was a well organized, eye opening place. First I registered my research with the front desk and then searched through a Minnie Maddern Fiske folder that listed the boxes of materials in the back room. There were 22 boxes of memorabilia from Minnie and Harrison Gray Fiske and I perused every one of them.

The most helpful source was an autobiography begun by Mrs. Fiske but never completed which displayed her writing style and gave me a great deal of insight into her opinions and mood. Unfortunately, it was written as a diary in her own script style and was very difficult to decipher. Another helpful source was a biography begun by Harrison about his wife. It was typed and included several anecdotal stories not recorded anywhere else. I also came across several of her typed speeches delivered all over the country on animal rights and many letters she had written to plea for her cause. I hope to use them someplace in the script.

There were also about ten scrapbooks tracing her career through newspaper clippings. They gave me a flavor for the critical commentary of the time but I couldn't find many negative criticisms to use as obstacles to overcome in my show. The critics seemed to be more interested in commenting about her appearance in their town rather than to cite any flaws her performance may have contained.

I was disappointed with the actual play scripts. There were about ten of them there that were used by Mrs. Fiske during rehearsals but they were hardly marked up at all. The only comments I found were related to blocking or technical effects, not a trace of acting or motivational comments.

Probably the most disheartening materials were the individual newspaper clippings not in scrapbooks. There were three boxes of these and as I tried to gingerly open them up, they quickly crumbled at my touch. Some of them were already illegible and my intrusion into the box helped many of the others towards further degeneration.

I was also quite surprised by the rules of the Manuscript Division. First, I couldn't bring in anything but I.D. proving who I was. Pencils, paper and notecards were provided at no charge for my use. I could duplicate anything that wasn't bound - which meant even the crumbling articles but not the clippings from the organized scrapbooks.

All in all, it was a very worthwhile journey and it really gave me the motivation to write the first draft of the script. There was something quite inspiring about touching her actual
materials. I felt a much stronger attachment to her life and her causes after being with her - through her writings and her work.

The only research I'm still missing is the viewing of two silent movies, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Vanity Fair* in which Mrs. Fiske played the leading roles in both. Unfortunately, the motion picture division at the Library of Congress didn't have them and couldn't help me locate either one across the country. If I can find them I could observe her walk, physical presence, gestures and the heightened sense of emotion that I feel certain she must have had. I'll keep looking for them back in Columbus.

**September 22, 1988**

I turned in the first draft of my script today and the first draft of my research paper. The paper was a lot easier to write than the first draft of the script. I had a very clear idea of the progression in the paper and it was a nice prelude to the script. When it came time to write the script, I found myself wanting to use a lot of the same material from the paper that was interesting but not very theatrical. In fact, I'm sure that the script is too wordy but at least it gives me something to go from. I read through it at an even pace and it timed out at fifty-five minutes. I'm kind of in a holding pattern now waiting for Marc to read both things and give me suggestions. It actually is kind of nice to get away from it for awhile. It has taken my total attention for the last month.

**September 28, 1988**

Marc and I met today to discuss revisions to my research paper. He suggested that I needed to include more information about the acting styles prior to Minnie Maddern Fiske to better understand how different her style was to other actors of her time period. He also wanted more specifics about Mrs. Fiske's acting contemporaries. He also had passed on my script to Rex and Joy and explained their reactions to it. Rex felt it needed cutting but wasn't specific with what should be cut. Joy had written comments about wanting more specific dates in the show. Since it will be a period piece she also raised concerns about the manners of the time, hand props and costuming. She wrote that she would like to get together with me and work on the script and I will definitely take her up on her help. Marc suggested that I work directly with her, since she seems interested in the project. This will also relieve him from the total responsibility of helping to shape the script.

Marc's main comments on my script related to the lack of
immediate discovery. Minnie is just telling a planned story and she doesn't learn anything in the process, she learned it before the audience got there. He also has concerns about why she talks to the audience at all. Her motivations for sharing her story seem pretty weak right now. I agree with him but I don't know how to change it. Marc suggested two improvisations that would help to show her process in a more interesting fashion than just telling about it. The first one, Minnie actually did herself, an improv in which Hedda meets Lovberg at her home. The second idea Marc had would be to take a monologue and have Minnie go through it using her system, or actually what I have gathered together to resemble her system. I think the third monologue, the Rebecca West one, would be best for this process in that I don't have a clear vision for it now and this process could only help me to understand it better. Frankly, the idea of improvisation scares me to death!!!

I can see improvising in rehearsal but I want it set when I perform it!!!

October 20, 1988

I turned in the second draft of the paper to Marc on the 17th and am relieved that that is out of the way for awhile. I can't imagine trying to spend any more time on it right now, I'm so itchy to get the script completed to start rehearsing it. I spent two and a half hours at Joy Reilly's house today working on my script and I feel very relieved and hopeful that this might actually come off! We talked about my concept and general thoughts about what I was trying to accomplish. We then proceeded to go line by line through the script cutting and changing sentences to achieve a more everyday speech pattern for the show. I had used a lot of Mrs. Fiske's own words in the first draft and they were just too stuffy to sound real to an audience of today. The following are a bunch of ideas that came out of this meeting that I want to save and don't have any other place to put them.

A lot of things need to be more clear. I need to give more information about Mrs. Fiske to the audience before they see any acting. In the program, write up why she's important and some background information about her. I also need to explain her unique rendition of "In the Gloaming." Also she feels I need a small paragraph about her acting technique. As for a visual element, she suggested that I either show more than one side of Mrs. Fiske or use posters as playbills to represent each show I am performing a monologue from. I really like the idea of a poster of her portrait and need to talk to Cindy Stillings about lighting it.

Joy really thinks I should consider singing live. I'm not so
sure because I’ve set the show in 1907 and “In the Gloaming” was performed when she was much younger and performing melodramas. To open the show, I really like her idea of starting with my back to the audience and then aiming the gun directly at them. It is a neat effect and will take them by surprise.

Generally, Mrs. Fiske has to be more of a real person that people can relate to. For example, I should poke fun at myself when reading the Ibsen article and try an aside with the punch line. I need to use more of my own language and talk to the audience as if they were my friends. We talked a little bit about the improvisations and she suggested I use a broom handle for Lovberg! I love it! Try to poke fun of her first marriage. Possibly pin a watch to her blouse and use time as a running gag. Joy would like to see more tour conditions added to the script. They were outrageous and will be interesting to an audience.

Basically, Joy and I decided that she was the first Method actress without realizing it. I never quite thought about her like that but it’s true. Her final comment is something I really have to take to heart and work on. Just put Debby into Mrs. Fiske, because if I’m not honest about Mrs. Fiske, it won’t work. The other three monologues can help me develop different characters but Mrs. Fiske is at the center of all of this and must have some qualities that Debby has. The rest of our ideas from this discussion will be reflected in the second draft of the script which I want to complete while all of this is fresh in my mind.

October 25, 1988

AHHHHHH! We pulled props and tagged furniture today for our shows and I haven’t even begun to rehearse. I keep hoping the memorization will come very easily for me since I have spent so much time on the script preparation. I think I can get it typed up in a couple of days and show it to Joy and Marc.

October 31, 1988

It’s done and I’m not changing it unless I need to do it in rehearsals!! I gave Joy, Marc and Joe Albright (the stage manager) a copy of the third draft of the script today and I feel very pleased with it. Now I have to get it up on its feet and blocked. The basic movements I’ve already established for myself by placing the show in two different areas. (The living room/study area of a hotel and at the podium of a convention hall for animal welfare enthusiasts.

November 7, 1988
Joy saw Hedda today. I feel Hedda's coming along quicker than the other two and I thought it was about time somebody came in to see something. Joy thinks I need to explore more manly physical characteristics for her. Her ideas were very helpful and I understand what she's missing. It's not so much the physicality as the forward, man-like tactics to get what she wants. It will make her much more interesting to watch as a character.

November 14, 1988

Everything is now blocked and running except for the improvisations. I've steered away from them because I don't know how to approach them. Marc saw Hedda, Cynthia and helped talk me through the improvisations. My choices for Hedda aren't reading still so I've got to make them bigger. Cynthia is a great chance for a total change in rhythm and pitch and I see more clearly where I want to take her. Also the gloves and the horse whip are beginning to help me punctuate my ideas. The best part of the Lovberg improv was when Marc sat in for Lovberg and we took it step by step through Hedda's responses to Lovberg's advances. It just might work. I've got to get off book for the Rebecca West improv before I can get any help with it. My character analysis is completed so I can perform the monologue three times focusing on Mrs. Fiske's method.

November 17, 1988

I don't have any sense that anything is working! I feel like I'm working by rote and nothing new is happening! Part of my problem is that my mind is so scattered between this show and Savage in Limbo. If I can just complete one so that I can turn my full attention to the other I will feel more secure about this whole thing!

November 23, 1988

Z saw the entire show today. She was the first person, besides Jim who has seen the piece in its entirety. Most of her comments concerned making bigger choices. My choices are correct but just not big enough to make a difference or to remain interesting. She suggested I go further with my annoyance at the audience being early. I'm lacking passion and enthusiasm for the theatre when playing Mrs. Fiske. Generally, I need to talk and walk at the same time so that it doesn't look so rehearsed. About Hedda, we discussed that she was really a coward and a slave to convention. She lived vicariously through Lovberg. He would tell her naughty
things to excite her and she would goad good gossip out of him. Z didn’t like the improv. at all. She suggested I try to respond to my feelings towards Lovberg instead of working so hard to maintain a dialogue with him.

She caught me indicating with the characters. She felt I needed to become the characters more completely as I entered the scenes and maybe establish a ritual Mrs. Fiske goes through before she begins every character. She wants me to become more altered with each new character.

She also had problems with the way I moved. She thought I needed less gesturing and more leading with the wrist as opposed to the arm. The important parts of the Lovberg improv. were lost. Mrs. Fiske needs to learn something from the scene that she can use. Decide what discoveries need to be made and make the switch from turning him on to getting turned on by him bigger. After the realization, the switch to something steel and cold has to be strong and immediate.

As for the Hedda monologue, she thought I needed to cut the flirting with the judge, lounge more on the couch with my whole back and make her tactics more deliberate and pre-meditated. These comments were similar to Joy’s two weeks ago. I really wonder if I’m able to do anything successfully by myself !!!!!! Z also gave me the note I heard a lot in acting class this term and that was to think it, don’t show it on my face. (Easier said than done) She also brought up the general point that all three characters need to still be more distinct. Mrs. Fiske is battling against melodramatic bigness, have her win and lose at that.

The Cynthia monologue is headed on the right track. She suggested that I quicken the pace even more. Also she said it would be more interesting if John gets to me more. Think con-Job!

I know I want Z to help me again but I think I need to narrow down all my help because I’m hearing the same things from everybody. I need to come up with answers for these problems and then let professors see it again. I seem to understand Marc’s view of the improv. the best, Joy’s tactical direction of the 3 monologues and Z’s knowledge of period style and the urgency of the moments I’ve rehearsed to death. (like the letters) If I can limit the faculty help to these areas I think it will be more beneficial to me and less frustrating. I agreed with everything Z said but know my time is quickly passing.

Marc talked with me this afternoon about the improv. and I feel much better. Z had me so depressed and scared into thinking that none of my work up until this point was useful. I was feeling very guilty about leaving it all for a few days to travel to Rochester, N.Y. with Jim for Thanksgiving. I think I’m back on track now with where the improv. are going and I can relax a
little. I just have to remember that this is not the completion of my work at O.S.U. but rather where I happen to be at this moment at this place in time!

November 28, 1988
I had my second run thru in the theatre today. Marc came and helped me with the first few moments on stage as Minnie. It has been a spot that has always bothered both of us but I think he helped me find a change of tactics that suited it much better. A lot of it he claims is tied up with the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. Sometimes I felt it, sometimes I didn't, but I could feel it when it clicked. Every day I get a few more of those little pieces to click and that lifts my spirits tremendously!

December 1, 1988
I got some great notes from Joy today. They were very specific and will help clarify some of my weaker intentions. Generally, my level of enthusiasm and intensity has to jump up or this will be accused of being a lecture/demonstration. Some of Joy’s ideas I really liked dealt with props. The gun cleaning can be pointed up so much stronger, need a photo album, pictures of wedding trip, books of Ibsen’s plays, coffee table props, possible bell before my lecture, several speeches on animal welfare, etc. Mrs. Fiske still needs more of my enthusiasm. I need to remember back to this summer and my enthusiasm at the Library of Congress. I've been so bogged down with Mrs. Fiske for 4 months now that I have lost alot of the reasons why I thought she was so interesting. I understand what Joy wants pointed up in some of Hedda's lines but I can't get the motivation myself to make it work - like the line "...waiting to stare at my legs." Hedda catches Brack looking at her legs and she likes it but she also lets him know in that split second that he's a dirty old man and she won't play anymore. Right now it's just luck as to whether I get the timing right on it or not.

December 4, 1988
Final Dress was today. It was nice in that Shelley, Eric, Jim and Marc were there as an audience. Lots of things worked well. The opening Minnie worked as did Cynthia Karslake and my Delsarte animal welfare speech that Z helped me with last week. Marc gave me some more specifics with the opening gun fire that I'll try out tomorrow before the show. Joy worked with me downstairs for a little while on Rebecca West and we threw out a
lot of the planned stuff and returned back to what she is really saying and what's at stake. I think it's clearer. Tomorrow night I'm doing what I vowed at the beginning of this process I wouldn't do. A REAL LIVE IMPROVISATION !!! I know generally the shape of what I want to discover in the monologue but who knows how I will get there. I guess when you really think about it, that is what theatre is all about! If you plan more than the shape of the piece you are only reciting what you've planned and showing the audience what you know. If you trust your shape and your homework maybe you can create believable moments on stage, never exactly the same twice.
Post-Performance Critique

Minnie Maddern Fiske: A Portrait was performed on December 5 and 6 at 7:00 p.m. in the Stadium II Theatre. I truly enjoyed my time with this project. I had a clear idea conceptually of a one-woman show with additional characters and slowly all of the pieces fell into place. Referring to my intentions in the project concept statement, I felt I was able to develop a well documented and entertaining portrayal of Minnie Maddern Fiske. The three characters showed range and variety in rhythm and style. They also gave me the opportunity to play roles in which I might not immediately be cast. The audience was very responsive to the project and I can only hope that I have heightened their awareness of Minnie Maddern Fiske's role in developing realistic acting as we know it today.

There was a lot of discussion at the talk-back about revisions to the script, such as throwing out the Delsarte speech, or adding a non-successful piece that would spur Minnie on to finding her own acting system. Most of these comments were very helpful and I would like to revise the script with those ideas in mind. The improvisational part of the script was probably the most problematical in rehearsal for me but the most honest and rewarding part of the performance. If I learned anything from the improvisations, it was the true meaning of discovering stage moments. I knew the shape of each piece and what needed to happen in them but the way it happened was subject to the stage moment and I enjoyed that spontaneity.

During the five week rehearsal process, the script allowed me to work on pieces separately and then later add transitional beats. There were times in the process when I felt that nothing new was being generated from me and had to step back and re-evaluate what still needed to be completed. Luckily, when I ran out of ideas, I had several helpful faculty who were always willing to observe me and stimulate a new flow of ideas, and for that I was very grateful. Throughout the process, I constantly felt as if I was behind "where I should be" for I was working towards a definitive performance, a culmination of my three years of training. I soon realized that that was not an achievable goal and settled into creating a few believable moments on stage. I think I succeeded at different points in each performance. In terms of analysis, I used Minnie Maddern Fiske's process for the most part and I really enjoyed discovering the characters in the way she would have. I found it much more difficult to beat out Minnie's speeches, probably because they were not true pieces of dramatic literature.

As for technique, I was pleasantly surprised with the amount
of resources I had available to aid me with this project. I was most pleased with my attention to detail from the truthfulness of the script, to the selection of correctly dated props and set pieces, to the specific character choices. i.e. vocal, physical, rhythmic, attitudinal, etc. Never before has specification worked for me as well as it did with this project. This project really informed me about my technique and gave me the opportunity to experiment with some acting choices that I didn't feel totally comfortable with until the end of the rehearsal period.

My background research was strong, as was my rehearsal process, and hopefully my enthusiasm for my subject matter was infectious. I appreciated the opportunity to create a one-person project such as this one and would recommend others take advantage of the chance to create their own piece of theatre. It was a rewarding experience and will remain one of the high points of my Ohio State graduate experience!
"Think of me as you did once long ago."

Minnie Maddern Fiske: A Portrait

December 5, 1988
December 6, 1988
7:00pm
Stadium II Theatre

MFA Showcase - Debby Shellard

in partial fulfillment of Master of Fine Arts Degree
“Think of me as you did once, long ago.”

MINNIE MADDERN FISKE: A PORTRAIT

A ONE WOMAN SHOW BY DEBBY SHELLARD

DECEMBER 5th and 6th, 1988 at 7:00 p.m.

Stadium II Theatre
Minnie Maddern Fiske
1865-1932

Minnie Maddern Fiske played a significant role in the development of a Realistic acting style in America. During the years 1898-1905 while Constantin Stanislavsky was experimenting in Russia, she was already pursuing her own psychological motivation. She experimented with these ideas in her portrayals of the heroines in Henrik Ibsen's plays. She successfully produced and starred in five Ibsen plays including the second performance in English on the New York stage of A Doll's House, Hedda Gabler, Rosmersholm, Pillars of Society, and Ghosts.

Mrs. Fiske, born on December 19, 1865 in New Orleans of theatrical parents, grew up on the stage and was an acclaimed child star performing in over fifty productions by 1885. She married Harrison Gray Fiske, editor of the Dramatic Mirror, and together they acquired the Manhattan Theatre in 1904 and established their own New York repertory company. With a small number of friends they succeeded in defying the monopoly of the theatrical syndicate and introduced audiences around the country to new Realistic playwrights such as Langdon Mitchell, Edward Sheldon, and Henrik Ibsen.

Mrs. Fiske developed her own style of acting known as the Modern School of Psychological Naturalism. The essence of her technique is divided into three steps. First, she analyzed the given circumstances of the character including her relationship to every other character in the play, with special attention placed on the background of the character. Next, she would form a characterization through vocal technique and body movement. Finally, she would add psychological details to the character's actions.

It was my intent to pursue a project from conception through writing, rehearsal and production. I wanted to develop a well-documented and entertaining script that capitalized on the uniqueness of Mrs. Fiske, the actress, and to explore a variety of characters also played by Mrs. Fiske. My primary sources included a study of her personal papers at the Library of Congress which supplied me with her letters, scripts and reviews. Archie Binn's biography, Mrs. Fiske and the American Theatre provided me with personal reflections of her life and work.
Fiske

The action takes place in a Chicago hotel room in November of 1907 and later at a meeting of the Chicago Animal Welfare League.

The music "In the Gloaming," is a turn-of-the-century ballad made popular by Mrs. Fiske in the melodrama Caprice, in 1884. Before this production, it was the practice that all dramatic action stopped while a song was performed at the front of the stage. Mrs. Fiske created a precedent by breaking this rule and singing this song quietly upstage by a roaring fireplace to her dying grandfather.

Production Staff

Stage Manager - Joe Albright
Lighting Designer - Cindy Stillings
Light Board Operator - Steve Koehler
Sound - Joe Albright
Stage Crew - Charles Murray
Sketch - Jim Shellard
Accompanist - Professor Robert Nims

Special thanks go to:

* Staff at the Library of Congress; Manuscripts Division, Barry Cleveland, Mark Shanda, Cindy Stillings, Dennis Parker, Gwen Nagle and the costume shop, Ionia Zelenka, and Bob Nims

* My faculty committee - Rex McGraw, Marc Powers, and Joy Reilly

* Debi, Ede, Rob and Tom - for 2 1/3 years of trial and error, screams and sweat, push and pull, and forcing me to reveal just a little bit more of who I am.

* The whole Dickey clan - Doug, Dave, Derek, Mom and Dad (my best fans)

* Nana - who instilled the dream...

* And most of all Jim - who shares my dream and my reality!