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The Analysis And Costume Design Of Jennifer Haley's The Nether

Emily Taylor

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THE ANALYSIS AND COSTUME DESIGN OF JENNIFER HALEY’S THE NETHER

By

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This thesis submitted by Emily Taylor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

[Signatures and names of committee members]

This thesis is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

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Emily Taylor

April 26, 2017
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ABSTRACT

In designing the costumes for a play there are many pieces that have to come together, both personal and collaborative. An analysis of the text and the characters help broaden the ideas that a designer must use. As the costume designer for a production of Jennifer Haley's The Nether it was important to bring in the analysis as well as everything that the rest of the design team brings in. The final product came out in a fully realized production of the play in February 2017 at UND.
CHAPTER 1
TEXT ANALYSIS

The theatre will never find itself again—i.e., constitute a means of true illusion—except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior. -Antonin Artaud

Technology allows us the freedom to express ourselves. We post images, words, videos of our world. This is merely a replication of a person and their life. It is a forced attempt at a facsimile. The full story is hard to capture through snapping pictures, sharing images, trying to replicate human interaction over a touch screen. We spend our lives with our heads down inches from the screen, liking pictures of nature instead of raising our head to the natural world surrounding us. We have moved our world from reality to the online worlds of the websites that are downloaded onto our phones and tablets.

Why do we put so much effort into the world we create online via technology? We can make ourselves prettier, sound smarter, and appear taller all through simple effects and filters. We are creating and falsifying documentation of reality. In her play Jennifer Haley warns us of the consequences of living too much in these technological fantasies. She shows the extent virtual anonymity can have on a person’s judgment. The Nether is an allegory of what life could become if we continue down our road of dependence and reliance on tech and virtual worlds. She uses one of society’s greatest taboos to push the audiences understanding of how far a person can go when given the “freedom” enabled by technology. Through the use of these taboos along with the
Jennifer Haley speaks greatly to the state of today’s society. Her use of technology as a primary component in her plays only aids in the relevance of her plays. It is her use of taboo subjects, though, that connects it to a deeper part of the human existence. The grittiness of the subject matter harkens back to a form of theatre that goes back decades. This is a form that requires the use of the darkest parts of the human mind being portrayed on stage. Antonin Artaud wanted theatre to reflect the worst of man alongside the best parts created the Theatre of Cruelty.

Artaud was a Parisian actor and theatre theorist in the early twentieth century. His major contribution to theatre was his concept called the Theater of Cruelty, which came as a response to the cinema, and theatre that was being produced in his time. Artaud believed that, “Everything that acts is cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theater must be rebuilt” (435). He believed that the theatre needed to reflect not only the good, and the natural, but the depravity of society as well, “His taste for crime, his erotic obsession, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism” (Artaud 439).

Artaud spoke to the darkest parts of human nature. The world that he lived in was plagued by two great wars, wars that showed the darkest parts of man. He thought that performance had become a mere diversion that made the population forget the need for a more serious art form (Artaud 435). According to him, the world that exists is not black and white, and the dark grimy gray area is where culture and society gain their true
definition. One subject that seems to live in this gray area is the one of the main topics in *The Nether*. Pedophilia. It is in this subject matter that I find difficulties with the text.

When I was about twelve, my grandfather passed away. My father’s parents had separated when he was young, and his father was always a distant figure in his life and mine. If I rarely saw my grandparents on my father’s side, I rarely saw his brothers. My father was the middle child out of five boys. His younger brother’s were around more often then not, his eldest brother I remember only vaguely, but his second eldest was a mystery. I had seen this man once at my grandmother’s funeral, and I feel like there may have been a moment in my childhood where my father stopped downtown and bailed him out of jail.

He was a mystery man. At my grandfather’s funeral he became less so, and following that, I began to put the pieces together. At my grandfather’s funeral he brought his new fiancée, a large chain-smoking woman. In the months that followed, our family would find out that she had cancer and that she was pregnant. Not only was she pregnant, but she also did not know she was pregnant until extremely late in the pregnancy.

It was then that certain things caught my eye. My father was under stress; he was seeking guidance from people around him about this pregnancy. In the end my father took action, he reported the situation to somebody. My father was uneasy about his brother having a child for some reason one that wasn’t told to me. The child was born and nothing happened. Everything my father had tried was all for nothing. Only a few simple rules were set, and my uncle was not allowed to be left alone with his daughter.

My family moved away and the whole situation became a distant thought. My uncle was once again no longer part of our lives. The child, my cousin, who I never met,
my aunt and uncle simply disappeared from our world. But, then we moved back North
and somehow that uncle ended up living in the same city. The rules were still intact for
the child and her male guardian. The main problem with this however was that the
primary care giver, the mother, had cancer. She was taking copious amounts of
medications and was sometimes hospitalized for procedure that left her incapacitated for
hours. Even though the child was not technically alone, she was left alone with her father.

After moving back, the child started to mix in with our lives. Her mother would
give us pictures that hung on our fridge, and my father would buy her Christmas and
birthday presents. The little girl, now a walking and talking toddler, would even come
over while her mother went to the doctor. This small child was an anomaly to me. I had
spent my summers with family on my mother’s side and would babysit my younger
cousins. I was used to children her age. There was something different about her though.

I was surprised when a five-year-old girl would come to me because she wet her
pants. I am fully aware of accidents, but it would occur far too often for it to be a simple
accident. The most peculiar moment was when the little girl asked my mother and me,
“Has my daddy ever touched you?”

These six words rang in my ears as I read, and reread Jennifer Haley’s *The Nether*. A play that portrays a virtual world where the act of pedophilia is not only
discussed, but that type of relationship appears before the audience in several different
pairings. I was never told anything about my uncle, but a person has to be unwilling to
put all of these circumstances together and not come to the same conclusion. These things
all added up to one thing. My uncle, my grandmother’s son, my father’s brother, a man
with whom I share DNA with was a convicted child molester, a pedophile.
I tell you this personal detail about my life to explain the bias that I have innately for some of the topics in this play. My bias that leans mostly towards the taboo that Haley uses to make her point. It is important to explain it because I feel it helps explain my perspective of this play. Haley doesn’t try to hide from this unfortunate part of the human existence, because she understands that it is part of it. Her use of this most awful occurrence in her play is nothing if not part of the theatre of cruelty. If it is how Artaud wanted it to be then the topic of sex and murdering a child fits right in with the savagery and chimera’s that make up our dreams.

*The Nether* opens on an interrogation room where a detective, Morris, is questioning a man, Sims, about his double life (Haley 5). Sims it appears is living in two worlds, one where he is a married with no children in a brownstone, and the other is a world where he is called Papa and has an old Victorian home full of children (11). A second world and persona that he created called the Hideaway.

The Hideaway is an adult site that allows consenting adults to experience their fantasies without consequences (16). The Hideaway caters towards those tendencies that deal with children. From the beginning, Sims opens up and creates a dialogue with Morris about his inclinations. He explains how he created the Hideaway as a safe environment for himself, and others like him, to act out their fantasies. He believes in the justness of it because the children that are in the Hideaway are all avatars controlled by adults (Haley 7-8).

As the play progresses, the scenes switch between the interrogation room and Papa’s Hideaway in the Nether. Certain characters are confined to one setting or the other, while Papa/Sims appears in both. Five actors appear in this play. One actor plays
the roles of Papa and Sims, because they are technically the same man. Other than Sims, Detective Morris and Cedric Doyle are the characters that appear in the “real world” of the interrogation room, while; Papa, Iris and Woodnut are featured in the “virtual world” of the Nether. The one character that appears in both worlds is the man who also connects the rest of the characters.

As we work our way through the play, connections begin to be made between the world of the Hideaway and the real world. When we meet Cedric Doyle an initial connection is made between himself and Iris, but as the play goes on the relationship and connection deepens and it is revealed that Doyle, the sixty-five year old science teacher is, the nine year old, Iris (Haley 56). This leaves the last connection between Woodnut and Morris. It is Sims who reveals the relationship of these two characters after Morris let slip how Sims and Papa look alike in both worlds (42). Morris is Woodnut, and because of him she knows all the private information about the Hideaway and that things that occur there. As an undercover agent Mr. Woodnut notes the intricacy of the Hideaway. It is the most realistic of any place in the Nether. Sims has managed to create a world that is not only visually realistic, but is on the cutting edge of sensation, “sensations they can no longer experience in the real world”(28).

Morris is angry at the Nether and Sims world in particular. Through out the play it seems like her goal is to shut down Sims’ site. As she finishes the interrogation, it comes out that Doyle, who wished to cross over and remain entirely in the online world, has killed himself because he had betrayed Papa as Iris. Sims, after hearing the news about Iris/Doyle, gives up the information that Morris has been fighting him for. His sentence is in-world banishment.
This play has many similarities to the topics in Haley’s other plays. Her previous works also deal with the nature of humans and their relationship to technology. 

*Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom* is a horror play about a neighborhood of families that find their children addicted to an online game that uses GPS to map out the player’s own neighborhood as they fight a horde of the undead. In the end they learn that the game may be drawing a little bit more from real life than they initially thought (Haley).

This play, like *The Nether*, deals with the power and freedom that technological anonymity gives to people. The characters in both plays are killing and defiling things online without thinking of the real world complications. *The Nether* uses a near future setting to give a feeling of foreboding. Originally written around 2012, the play is set “soon” (Haley 2). Her purpose in this is to expose how quickly our world might be headed to this de-natured, barren, online void of a world that is the partial setting of this play.

Haley uses the two settings of the play to expose just how much society has to lose if it continues down the path it is on. The Nether, or more specifically the Hideaway, is viewed and explained as a utopia. It is a world that has all the characteristics of an idealized world, as opposed to the real world, which seems to have lost a lot of the natural world that we take for granted today. The contrasting worlds set up the major conflict of the play: reality versus imagination. It is a debate that Morris has with Doyle and Sims. What makes up reality? How far does imagination make up our reality? In James Thomas’ book on text analysis he asserts that, “the truth can be found only in the inner life of the human spirit, not in the realistic appearances of everyday life. The unspoken assumption is that the real world is a failure and that imagination is therefore
truer and better than life”(Thomas 311). According to Thomas, the assertions that Doyle and Sims make about the Hideaway are more real than reality because they make it so, but than what happens to reality?

The major conflict is represented in the two characters of Morris and Sims, and to some extent their counterparts in the Nether. This conflict of reality versus imagination raises the question: what happens if you live entirely in your imagination? The contrast between the two worlds represented is an important characteristic. Through the dialogue in the interrogation room we can visualize both what the real world is like in this soon to be future state, as well as the hyper-realized world created by Sims in the Nether.

Morris exposes the bareness of the real world when she describes Sims home there. In scene three, Morris says, “Your realm is not only popular, but lucrative. It has afforded you two hundred square feet of real grass, surrounding your brownstone. A garden of snap peas and swiss chard. Your wife’s clothes are made of cotton”(Haley 14). In bring up wealth, Morris shows how nature is product now. The fact that it is Sims’ wealth that allows him to have these natural comforts alludes to what the world has become. A world that is sparse and bare of natural resources. These comments by Morris, combined with the discussion Papa and Iris have in the Hideaway about trees show that the real world has become a wasteland. Grass, trees, cotton, and “wine made from grapes” all these things that we take for granted are seemingly gone or almost extinct (15).

Haley has created a desolate idea of a place without having the audience experience anything outside the interrogation room. She has created a world that lends itself to the byproducts of man more so than the things that the earth creates (39-40). The
Hideaway is a natural utopia. Morris describes it in a report: “The first thing I experience is the trees. The flickering light and soft sound as they sway in the sun and wind is almost overwhelming. They surround a beautifully rendered 1880’s Gothic revival…”(11). It harkens back to a simpler time when the mechanics of machinery were not handheld or the products of the byproducts man. The products were built from the earth. As Woodnut states, “It’s incredible what we have done using the materials of the earth. Not only have we built roads and cities, but we have created tools for our imagination” (32). On the other side of Woodnut is Morris, a woman of the near future whose technological experience deals with ideas that were once science fiction, but yet it is the industrial mechanics that amaze her. Why does Sims choose the Victorian, gothic, era to create the image of his utopia?

Everything that the “real world” lacks Sims makes up for in abundance in his realm. He wishes to create an environment in which there are no consequences; a world that is pure imagination. These two images side by side it is hard to imagine why anyone would pick the dark harsh reality that is reality over the beautiful masterpiece of imagination.

Haley’s use of pedophilia forces the audience to see the lengths to which the human imagination can go. Morris says it best, “Images create reality. Everything around us—our houses, our bridges, our wars, our peace treaties, began as figments in someone’s mind before becoming a physical or social fact”(Haley 29). Everything in our world was once just a figment of someone’s imagination, until someone took action and made his or her dreams a reality. Sims dreams and desires are taboo in the real world, so he created a reality that allowed him to truly be himself (Haley 17). Haley structure of the play helps
ease the audience into the idea of pedophilia. She consistently reiterates in the first scenes, before we ever meet the child, that though it has the appearance of a child, “They are not children” (11)).

The issue of pedophilia or child abuse is a relatively new issue that has been raised in society. According to Katherine Beckett public attention emerged in the 1960’s (59). It is one of those issues that have very few if no outliers that are in support of it. I think that is why Haley uses it in her play. As humans we can reason away murder, or violence, sexuality, cannibalism, almost anything. I would even go so far as saying that it isn’t the murder of the child that is most shocking, but the sexualization of that being that is most unforgettable.

Pedophilia in the reality versus imagination, makes the audience question what is real? And how far can it go? As Sims says, “As the Nether becomes our contextual framework for being, don’t you think it’s a bit out of date to say it isn’t real?” (Haley 15). Sims seems to fight for both sides, he states that Morris cannot police his imagination, but he also believes that that world is just as real as reality.

**Sims:** It’s nothing but images. And there is no consequence.

**Morris:** Images—Ideas—create reality. Everything around us—our houses, our bridges, our wars, our peace treaties—began as figments in someone’s mind before becoming physical or social fact.

**Sims:** Are you accusing me of creating pedophiles? If anything, I’m giving them a place to blow off steam.
**Morris:** You foster a culture of legitimization, telling them their desires are not only acceptable, but commendable. Do you know what your guests are doing in-world?

**Sims:** Show me a study that proves a correlation between virtual behavior and actual offense (29).

In this dialogue the question is raised of how real is imagination. Sims wants to believe that his world is mere images and therefore is free of any consequence or repercussion, but in a previous scene he makes the argument that because the Nether is so engrained in their society that it is archaic to state that it is not real (15). He contradicts himself because if imagination was real than it has to suffer the consequences of the morality that was created alongside reality, and consequences are not what Sims wants. But if Sims states that it is not real then everything he has worked for in the Hideaway, the world he created to escape lacks meaning. The Hideaway has to be real to Sims because that is how he defines himself, where he is allowed to be himself.

Haley makes us question how far our minds can go, using the character of Morris as our moral compass, the character we can relate to. Morris from the beginning of the play is obviously against what Sims has done in the Hideaway. As the play proceeds, her repulsion becomes more understandable as more is revealed about her actions in the Hideaway. She had committed acts that in her mind were improbable, if not impossible. She had done things that had probably never crossed her mind to commit prior to these moments, yet when given the opportunity she fell victim to the freedom of that world. The issue of imagination versus reality is a question of our humanity. Morris has to live with herself, after everything that she had done. Woodnut does not. He does not exist,
because he is merely a part of Morris. In Morris’ final statement to Sims she says, “The world is still the place we have to learn to be” (Haley 59). The Hideaway might be a place to escape, but it is still not reality, and the actions that are committed there do not remain there.

The issue of pedophilia and the other acts that are everyday occurrences in the Hideaway makes us question our reality and moral judgment. If the Nether, and the online worlds that it contains, is truly becoming the “contextual framework for being” then the rules of reality and being should coincide with them (Haley 29). That is what Morris is arguing for, but it goes beyond just the question of imagination versus reality and into the very core of what it means to be a human. If humans began to act out their darkest and most private fantasies what kind of world will that leave us in? Morris’ closing line about learning to live in the world we have is a warning and a reflection on what it means to be human.

The reality is that, in the world that man has created over centuries, there are consequences, and the question of what is right and what is wrong. Laws, morals, religion, these are all man made structures created to insure the survival of the human race. Sims created the Hideaway to get away from all the guidelines that society places on him, but even in the Hideaway, he has a prescribed set of guidelines for both his guests and his children. Sims believes that it is imagination and people should be free there, but people are not truly free there. He polices emotion and relationship. The world that Sims has created, though beautiful, lacks humanity and any meaning that coincides with morality. The dark and cruel moment of listening to Morris read the brutal destruction of Iris reflects the lack of humanity in that world. Morris says,
And in those moments, standing in the carnage of her small body, the hot smell of everything we have inside rising around me, I stare at the blood on my hands and think my god, look at the brightness of it, look at the bright beauty, how does this exist in nature, how does it exist in any way, in any code I can understand? I look down to find her body gone. What have I done, have I done something, have I done nothing, is this all nothing, is everything nothing? A giggle at the door, and she reappears, coming toward me with her arms open—and I lift the axe and do it again. And I do it again. And I do it again. And I do it again. I want her to stop coming so I known I’ve done something. But she keeps coming, and now it’s not just my hands covered in blood, it’s my face, it’s my body, I can taste it in my mouth, it’s so exquisite I am crying, I have never felt so much with every nerve, felt so much, felt so much… feeling. Until I’m spent. And she comes to me again, eyes wide. But if there has been no consequence, there has been no meaning—no meaning between her and myself, between myself and myself, and if there has been meaning, then I am a monster.

This explanation is why Sims world lacks the basic understanding of human existence. Meaning is the purpose of our lives. It is what sets humans apart from other animals. We are able to give meaning to objects and action so that they are more than just an object or action. Morris questions her existence because of her actions of dismembering a child, but then having the child reappear before her. It is not the action that gives it meaning, but the reaction. Sims world of freedom and imagination lacks the one thing that gives humans the drive to continue. Meaning.

The action that is represented in that quote is terrifying for many reasons. First it is the image of the destruction of something that is a representation of purity and innocence. But not only that it is also the destruction of a person’s being. In her monologue the audience is seeing the destruction of a human being. Morris has to relive one of the darkest moments of her life. Her recitation of the events is an act of cruelty on
the character herself. It is not the true definition of Theatre of Cruelty where the crime is fully portrayed on the stage, but it goes further than that. It is psychological and just as painful to watch. Artaud states, “In a word, we believe that there are living forces in what is called poetry and that the image of a crime presented in the requisite theatrical conditions is something infinitely more terrible for the spirit than the same crime when actually committed” (Artaud 436). Listening to Morris explain what it is like to continuously dismember the image of a girl, after just seeing that girl forces the audience to live that moment with her and also live through the internal struggle of Morris having to live and understand her own actions. It is the response and reaction that makes it real and not just imaginary.

Jennifer Haley has created a contemporary form of Artaud’s theatre of cruelty. She combines reality with the dark desires of imagination. This is because it is through the worst that we are able to see through to our true humanity. Pedophilia and murder force the audience to question how far they are willing to go inside the anonymity of technology. Haley pushes the moral boundaries of what humans are willing to do when put into certain circumstances. It is important to take what she has shown and reflect on the circumstances similar to our reality. *The Nether* is a warning to us about what we do in our natural world and in our virtual worlds. We must learn to live in the world that exists.
CHAPTER II
CHARACTER ANALYSIS AND DESIGN

In creating the design for a character in a play, it is important to analyze the text and the characters to create fully developed designs. In my previous chapter, it was determined that Jennifer Haley’s intent in *The Nether* was to force the audience to question their dependence on technology and imaginative worlds. She uses the ideas behind Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty to show how far a human being will go when given the freedom to live out their darkest desires. Haley uses the topic of pedophilia and other brutal acts to show the consequences of living a consequence free life.

*The Nether* raises the question: what is reality? And how much does imagination influence and makeup reality? The characters in Haley’s near future drama reflect the conflict within that debate of reality versus imagination. There are a total of six characters in the play: Morris, Sims, Doyle, Papa, Iris, and Woodnut. Three appear in the real world and other three are in the virtual world of the Hideaway. Each of the real world characters has an avatar in the virtual world. Haley initially reveals the connection between the two characters by writing Sims and Papa as the same actor. As the story progresses it is revealed that Morris’ avatar is Woodnut and Doyle’s is Iris.

This connection between the characters creates an interesting dilemma when analyzing the characters. If Woodnut is Morris, should he be analyzed as a separate character or as an extension of Morris? In a performance, it is difficult to not view these characters separately, but in a textual analysis of the characters, it is difficult to not keep
them together. The relationships of all the characters are dependent on the interactions between both their real world and virtual actions.

If this play was taken out of order, and the story was told chronologically, all the scenes that appeared in the Nether would happen first, except for one, then the scenes with Doyle followed by the Nether exception, then it would finish with the Sims and Morris’ scenes, this chronology excludes the epilogue. By placing the scenes in chronological order, it makes the scenes that occur in the Nether an extension, a history, of the characters in the real world. By doing this, it makes it evident that these characters cannot be viewed separately from their counterparts. They are one.

The most obvious example of this is Sims and his virtual character Papa. In Haley’s character notes she places these two characters in one line: “Sims/Papa—a successful businessman.” The first, and only, time it is mentioned that Sims and Papa are the same person is by Morris during one of their final scenes. “You even look like yourself in the Hideaway”(42). Morris is exposing Sims to the audience. Though it has been evident to them from the beginning because we are watching the events unfold out of context and chronological order.

The important thing is not that he looks like himself in both worlds; it is the reasoning behind why he chose that appearance. Morris blames his ego. “Your concern is an act. Like Papa’s kindness is an act. There is not love in your realm. There is only your ego”(Haley 42). His ego is what drives his character; he is driven by his own needs. Sims wants control in order to be himself. Sims did not enjoy his reality so he created a world in which there were no consequences and he was able to do what he wanted to do. Sims rationalizes his choices and his predilection towards children through this online persona.
In an argument with Detective Morris about policing the Nether, which to Sims is simply images and imagination, he makes a comment about why he created the Hideaway.

Look, Detective, I am sick. I am sick and have always been sick and there is no cure. No amount of cognitive behavioral therapy or relapse determent or even chemical castration will sway me from my urges toward children. I am sick and no matter how much I loved him or her I would make my own child sick and I see this I see this—not all of us see this—but I have been cursed with both composition and insight. I have taken responsibility for my sickness. I am protecting my neighbor’s children and my brother’s children and the children I won’t allow myself to have, and the only way I can do this is because I’ve created a place where I can be my fucking self (17).

Sims could not control himself or his urges. He is afraid of what he might do if he is not able to act upon these desires. “My neighbor’s children, and my brother’s children, and the children I won’t all myself to have,” he feels that he is taking responsibility for his actions. In creating the Hideaway, Sims has made the world safer. Or so he thinks.

The Hideaway is a highly regulated system that controls all guests and employees; from the moment a person wishes to enter the world. Morris in her initial description of Sims’ world talks about the hoops a person has to jump through if they wish to enter. The looks and actions of the guests are controlled. “My realm is designated Adult. There are adults behind the children and adults behind the guests. My background checks are thorough in the extreme to make sure we don’t involve users who are underage”(Haley 16). Sims defends himself from Morris attacks through his explanation that everything he does is according to rules and regulation.
Sims needs to control this realm because he fears returning to the real world and the actions he might commit if he does return. He no longer has all the control if he loses Papa. He will no longer be the father of his own world. He is afraid of losing control because he knows what he is capable of. He gives Morris a description of a real life girl. She is the reason that the Hideaway and Iris ever existed. “One night I got her alone in her own room. We were laughing—and I reached over and grabbed her—and she looked at me—so startled— and—I…found it in myself to let her go. I went home, to my computer, and that’s where I stayed. You don’t know what you do, Detective, putting me into the world” (59). Sims hid from himself in his Papa persona.

The state of the real world is left up to the imagination of the audience. It has basically disappeared into these online worlds that people create. Sims is successful in the real world only because of the fact that the real world seemingly doesn’t exist outside of the Nether. Sims was unhappy in the real world so he created a world to live in, but he found out that there are consequences for living so fully in one’s own imagination. He was left to realize that a consequence free life does not exist.

Morris is the one that forces him into that conclusion because she had to learn that lesson herself. “The world is still the place we have to learn to be” (Haley 59). She uses the collective noun we to describe the situation. Morris does not separate herself from Sims. When she entered the Hideaway as Woodnut, she fought to remain separate from that world, but as she spent more and more time there she fell victim to the pull of the Hideaway. As Woodnut, Morris was able to say and do things that she had probably never even dreamt of. She did things that lie in the darkest corners of the human mind. Morris wants redemption in order to understand her actions. She does not fully
understand what repercussions there are because she sodomized, murdered, and fell in love with a virtual child.

In the final report Morris reads to Doyle, she reveals what she had done in the Hideaway. She talks about the continuous attack with an ax on the small child, the blood that soaked her, and the feelings, or really the lack thereof. “But if there has been no consequence, there has been no meaning…and if there has been meaning, then I am a monster” (50). How is a person supposed to recover from that? The actions that Morris took were ingrained into all of us as needless and horrific. Yet, when given the opportunity Morris took it. The question that she raises in that statement is the same question that Sims talks about. Imagination or reality?

The Nether is slowly becoming the place where everyone is spending the bulk of his or her life; it is becoming “the contextual framework of being” (15). Morris in her interrogation of Sims is trying to make him see the repercussions of his actions, so she can see hers. As she argues with him about the reality of his domain, she is trying to convince him that though he says there is no consequence there will always be consequence because she wants to be convinced of that fact.

Morris fights so hard against Sims because if the bad does not exist and it is merely images, then all the good she felt there is also nothing. The love and relationship she created with Iris has no meaning because it is just images. Morris has been searching for that bond ever since before her father passed away. She found it in the relationship she built up between Woodnut and Iris. “You are my…first love” (52). Morris reveals to Doyle before finally convincing him to turn on Papa. Morris received attention. She found the love that she had always lacked. She did not want to lose that.
Morris was able to reach what Iris called pure relationship. Doyle believed the purpose of the Hideaway was to break down the physical barriers and connect through pure spirit (35). Doyle was a man who had lost his place in society. He is outmoded technology. He found something that he had lost in the Hideaway. Doyle wants connection in order to have a purpose. He found his purpose again as Iris. The problem was Doyle attributed more spirituality to Sims creation than Sims actually wanted. Doyle’s ideas behind the action in the Hideaway are explanations to trick himself into understanding what Sims wanted in that realm.

I tried to focus on status and position in society when designing the characters of The Nether. Morris is a product of society. The world that Haley has created is technologically dependent and void of nature and life. Morris is part of that world. She cannot remember being part of a world that was full of nature and greenery. “I had a memory of being held up to a window. I looked out and saw the sun coming through a thin line of trees. I’d always assumed I was too young to remember trees”(Haley 55). The world that she experienced in the Hideaway was foreign to her.

I wanted to wipe out any personality in Morris’ pieces. Her outfit needed to be utilitarian. It was a uniform. It is an outfit for Morris to be able to put on everyday without having to waste any time deciding on what to wear. Her appearance did not matter in the real world because she spent her time in the Nether. I still wanted her to be well groomed though. Her choices and appearance are simple but effective. The blue of her suit is supposed to allude to her position as some sort of law enforcement. I also wanted her suit to have the structure and line of this technologically based society. The world that I imagined The Nether to be a part of had very streamlined, straight, industrial
quality to it. The buildings did not have the soft curves that are represented in the Hideaway through the Victorian era.

The costume for Morris reflects the utilitarian sparseness of society. I chose to design a suit that did not have the softness and curve that is seen in women’s suits of today. I did not want to accentuate the female form, nor did I want to mask it. The suit has a more masculine cut because of the lack of curved seams meant to hug the female form, but on this character, it represents a gender-neutral uniform. It goes along with my attempt to showcase very little of her personality in the costume as well. On first glance I want Morris to blend in with her surroundings, which speaks to the characters place in the world that she lives in. The world has become devoid of its personality and nature. It is harsh and waiting to be defined. Morris is a product of her world and her clothing needed to represent that as well.
If Morris is a product of the society at the present moment, then Cedric Doyle is a product of the past. He is a representation of what life used to be like before the Nether really took hold. He is the oldest character on stage at sixty-five-year old. It can be assumed that he comes from a time that still had some semblance of nature. He says several times, “I miss the trees” (Haley 61). That statement shows that he had some kind of memory of trees in order to miss them. Doyle was not only able to remember the trees, but he was also probably at an age that allowed him to actually experience it unlike the younger characters in the real world.

In one of Doyle’s scenes with Morris, he talks about his life before the Nether had become such a finite institution. He was at the top in his field, an award-winning teacher, but all that changed quickly with the introduction of the new technology (Haley 22). Society had tossed this man aside for a newer model. Doyle’s appearance is shaped by this relationship to the present and his new place in society. He was superfluous, and in response remained rooted in the past.

Doyle’s design is based on that stereotypical image of an older male teacher. Whereas Morris’ costume did not enhance any personality, Doyle’s costume was an embodiment of himself. His pieces show off what type of man he was once. There is a softness and comfortableness in his appearance. When Doyle and Morris appear on stage together I wanted the differences between the two to be apparent. Morris was structured and stiff. Her suit was perfectly pressed and looked like it was almost just off the rack. Doyle’s clothing should appear well worn. He had these pieces for years.

The coloring choices are also different from the other characters. The others in the interrogation room are dark and showcased that industrial age. Doyle’s coloring is based
on more natural colors. Browns and soft yellows, these colors showcased him as an alien in the space of the interrogation room, whereas Morris is a part of it. The colors are also softer and less harsh. His clothing is soft and the structure and color have a well-worn feel to them. They are not new pieces, but an outfit that he has worn for many years. I want there to be a disheveled look to Doyle. He has checked out of his world and life and spends most of his time in the Hideaway. His shirt is wrinkled; his pants have not been washed. He is no longer taking care of his appearance in the real world. Doyle is also no longer keeping up with his hygiene and personal care. Morris comments on how Doyle has no interest in anything offline, his family, his job, his life, and I connected that with his personal appearance as well (Haley 23). He spends the majority of his time in the Hideaway,
hours upon hours hooked up to his terminal.

The characters of Morris and Doyle are opposites. Through age, gender, and appearance, and the obvious difference between these two characters is what helps define their relationship. In my development of their costumes, I wanted those differences to be evident. The third character is where things get a bit trickier. The character of Sims is the only character that has to transition between the two worlds. He is the only one that looks like himself in both worlds (Haley 42). The difficulty in the transition is that these two worlds are so different, but he has to be at entirely home in both places. Morris is a product of the present, Doyle of the past, and Sims has to be a mixture of the two.

Sims is obviously a man of this time. Not only does he write code that creates online worlds, but also his code is so well constructed that those that enter the Hideaway speak of how it is more real than reality (Haley 29). He created the world though, to escape that society that he was born into. The character of Sims fits into the world better than Morris, his dark clothing, and the line of his costume allows him to fit in and blend well with his surrounding. He stands out as a dark figure in both worlds. Sims characters hold dark secrets and desires and his presence has to add that darkness to the situation.

Sims’ design had to be able to blend well into both settings. The characters had to be able to switch between the two worlds at a moments notice, and there was not enough time between scenes to allow for a full costume change. This made it necessary that his basic look had to have the victorian essence, while still maintaining a modern attitude. It is lucky for me that the style of men’s clothing has not changed too much since the Victorian era. The cut and shape of pants could reasonably be universal for men. The solution I came up with was to add a dark frock coat that he would put on and button up
whenever he entered the Hideaway and became Papa. This ensured that his more contemporary vest and tie would be covered up, but the gray slacks he wore were not out of place in either world.

The coloration of Sims is more similar to Morris than Doyle. I chose dark colors for him because he, like Morris, was a part of the new, harsh, technological world. Unlike Morris, Sims clothing showed off his personality. The styling, though more modern, still held the look of a man of the industrial age. His clothing was fitted, and well cared for and showed he was a man of substance and he cared about his appearance. Sims is a man who, like Doyle, spends the bulk of his time in the Nether, “an average of fourteen hours a day” (Haley 15). The difference between the two characters is that Sims chooses to maintain a life outside, in the real world. Unlike Doyle, he maintains and cares for his actual appearance. He is clean-shaven, and his hair

Figure 3. Costume Design, Sims/Papa. The Nether.
is clean and styled. He looks and acts the same in both worlds, so he has to maintain his appearance in both worlds.

The dark colors which allowed him to blend into the real world, made him stick out in the Hideaway. The styling was not anachronistic or misplaced, but in this light and flowery world, Papa was a dark spot. He contrasted the other two softer avatars that lived in that world. The addition of the dark, black frock coat made his heaviness even more apparent in the Hideaway. The darkness of his character also set him up as opposition. He was going against Morris and her avatar Woodnut, and he needed to stand out against them. Papa’s darkness is in stark contrast to the coloring of the other two characters in that world, but he also controls and decides how the other’s look in the Hideaway, especially the children.

Iris is the perfect image of a little girl, and she is always looks the same. “So all of the children, no matter who is behind them, look the same” (Haley 35). The man behind Iris, Doyle, determined how she would act, but he did not define how she looked. Her appearance was not affected by Doyle, but it was by Papa. She was a real little girl, and Sims had placed her to remain forever young in the Hideaway (58).

Sims created and maintained this world to be set in the Victorian Era, and forbade any discussion or action that related to anything beyond that time. There was no real definition of what time the Hideaway was exactly just mentions the victorian era. There is a moment at the beginning that references the home in the Hideaway as an 1880’s gothic revival(Haley 11). Using that as a jumping off point, I looked at old photographs of young girls to help create the style for Iris. She was supposed to be the image of a perfect young girl from that general time period.
The cut and shape of her dress are not only appropriate for that time period for a girl of her age, but it also helps hide the shape of the actor who plays Iris. The Playwright notes at the beginning of the play that it would be appropriate and recommended to cast an age appropriate young girl in the part of Iris instead of trying to make an older actor appear pre-pubescent. In this production that option was not chosen, so not only did I need to design an outfit for a young girl, but I needed to design the costume to mask the actor’s grown up form. The cut and shape for young girls during the Victorian era was perfect for that. The line and drape of the dress usually started above the chest and held no shape and created a straight line that went out into a triangular silhouette. The dress had to be removed on stage at one point and Iris appeared in her undergarments. It was easy to mask the female form in the dress, but removing that added layer would create difficulties. I had to design undergarments that

Figure 4. Costume Design. Iris. *The Nether*
did the same as a bulky dress. The drape and form of undergarments during the Victorian time period aided in the masking of the form in relatively the same way the dress did.

The dress and undergarments had a similar masking quality and they also were the same coloration. I wanted Iris to appear as though her costume was a perfect, complete outfit as if she were a doll. I chose the coloring of the pieces to exude a very pure, innocent, girlish form. Her dress and undergarments were white and the accents, and embellishments a soft pink. In designing this character I looked at images of young girls at this time, but underlying in my mind was the idea of a porcelain doll. The Hideaway is continuously described as a world that was on the cutting edge of imagery and sensation, and Sims crowning achievement of Iris should be no less. The idea of a doll to me also described the smoothness that I wanted Iris to have. She was pristine and perfect, no curl out of place. The

Figure 5. Costume Design, Iris undergarments, *The Nether.*
The white of dress was like snow. This coloration also helped when she was opposite of Papa in his dark, and structured coat.

The design for Iris had to be based more so on what I thought Sims would create versus what Doyle would create. This is the same for the character of Woodnut. Just like Iris, the looks for this character were not defined by Morris, the person behind the avatar, but by Sims in his code and in his guidelines for entry into the Hideaway. Because of this, there is not really a connection in appearance between these two characters and their counterparts. This almost made it easier in my designing process for these characters, because I did not have to try and force a connection between them.

In my early designs for Woodnut, I had him as a blue collar worker. A man of the earth, who was gruff and masculine. He was almost too masculine because I felt like

Figure 6. Costume Design. Woodnut. The Nether.
Morris was trying to overcompensate for the fact that behind her male avatar was a female. The concept changed because of Sims’ guidelines for looks and actions. There was “a set of prescribed looks, and … a draconian manners tutorial,” that guided Morris creation of Woodnut (Haley 11). Sims would not want a disheveled, lower class individual entering his establishment. Woodnut was designed to be the epitome of man for the time, almost to a point of discomfort for the character.

I designed a three-piece suit with an ascot and top hat. A very structured and common outfit for a man of this time period. Woodnut’s design, very much like Morris, is a product of the world he is in. Woodnut’s appearance is completely based and dependent on the Hideaway; it is there that he fits wholly. Woodnut needs to both relate and be distinguished from Papa, the other male who appears in the Hideaway. They share the same silhouette that is appropriate for males of that time. However, Woodnut is a much softer character because of his coloration. Like Doyle, I chose earthy tones for Woodnut. This palette gives his character a softness and subtly in the patterning that Papa lacks in his attire. It is also a less imposing color to Papa’s blackness. Through browns, reds, and oranges I wanted to create almost a classically romantic attire for Woodnut.

The costumes for a character should enrich and not take away anything from the performance. Most importantly they give the first impression of the character before the actor speaks a word. Jennifer Haley has created a play that uses the depth of her characters to expose the harsh reality of living so fully in a world that is not real.
CHAPTER III

RELECTION

My introduction to The Nether happened almost half a year before any design meetings were scheduled. I have sat and returned time and time again to the script trying to force myself to get over my bias and come to some kind of understanding. The process started a month or two before production would even start, in design meetings. The first meeting was held with me sitting in a salon chair miles away from the room where everyone else was. It was not exactly the way I wanted it to begin. I was unable to fully commit myself to the discussion with dye in my hair and my hands stuck in mitts because they offered free paraffin wax treatments. I was uneasy. I had “designed” shows before, but nothing at this level. My experience prior to this moment had been in undergraduate theatre where the department was so small that a young girl with no experience but a desire to sew was enough to get her the job and position of costume designer.

It had helped that prior to this moment that I was able to work as an assistant costumer designer for a production of Hamlet at UND and also take a class with Jessica Ray to help me develop my design and rendering skills. All the things that I had learned previously in undergrad barely accounted for anything compared to the year of experience I was able to receive from her. After the initial shock of the first meeting had passed, it was time to take what our director had said about what he envisioned for the world of The Nether and try to evoke that in my costume design.
My initial research was a collage of images. I started with architecture and images of modern fashion to pictures taken during the late 1800’s of men and young girls. I wanted to compare and contrast the look of ultra modern, high-tech buildings to those iconic behemoths that were a part of the Victorian era and see how they related to the clothing. The lines and feelings they evoked are what helped create my initial silhouettes. Seeing the images that the fellow designers also prepared allowed for me to see what they were offering and how they differed from my own initial thoughts on the play. This is also where the formation of the theater was discussed. It was alley in the small lab theatre at UND. This smaller space made it important for me as a designer to make sure that my characters were fully realized down to the smallest detail. The audience being so close to the actors makes it important that nothing was out of place.

After the initial discussions and images were shared, it was time to create rough sketches of the costumes. In my initial designs, there were several things that I differed on with the director. I had Doyle more covered. I initially saw him as a very structured scruffy professor, complete with an elbow-patched blazer. After some discussion, we both came to the conclusion that the blazer was not right for Doyle and in my further renderings it was removed. The major disagreement came in the form of the character Woodnut. I saw him as a blue collared, older male. He was unkempt and looked out of place in the perfect world that Sims had created. The director saw almost the exact opposite of my view. He saw Woodnut as a young man who was dressed so fully in the attire of that time period that it was almost a discomfort for that man.

The other characters were simpler in the discussion with the director. I was going in the right direction and the major questions over arching all of the sketches were
coloring. The main issue I had in coming up with the color palette for my characters was to insure that they did not disappear into the set. I was unsure of using the color black in such a dark space as well as what accent colors to use on Iris. I needed the actors to stick out and not blend in with their surroundings. It was important at that moment to know exactly what the scenic designer was thinking of using for the two worlds.

The scenic design for the show was set up with the two worlds on either side of the alley configuration with a small area in the middle that connected the two. Since the stage was set up in alley, two out of the four sides were the audience. The only flats that were used were on opposite ends of the stage. The real world was going to be in gray tones, the lighting would be realistic, and there was very little set dressing. The world of the Hideaway had warmer pink tones, it had softer lighting, and the stage was full to the brim with set dressings and furniture.

The next step was to do final drafts of the costume designs. These are full color renderings that try to express all the details and styles that the designer wants to portray to the director, but also to those in charge of creating and building the costumes. This is where I find my greatest weakness as a designer. I am still developing my ability to create texture and depth in my color renderings. I use watercolor, it is the media that I am most comfortable with when rendering. Something I learned from taking my design of Antigone to KCACTF region five, is that my full color renderings lack the detail that I have in my pencil sketches. I have not developed the technique to get those fine line details into my work yet.

My designs for the production, seen in chapter two, were accepted and our design meetings came to an end and so did the fall semester. There was roughly a month break
before we would meet again and discuss actual production of the show. Before the break,
I started to search through the collections and stock at the school to see what I would
need to make, buy, or pull. The best find I came by is the suit that Woodnut wore. It was
a matching two-piece suit that had the cut and shape that was appropriate for the time
period of the Hideaway, and it was in the color palette that I wanted for the character. I
declared that Iris would be a full build, and the rest of the characters would be mostly
purchase and pull, with a few exceptions. Iris, though, was my project.

Since, in our production, an age appropriate actor would not play Iris, I wanted to
create pieces that were made exactly for the actor to be able to mask her adult body type.
The best way to ensure this was to drape and build a dress specifically to the actor’s
measurements. I draped and built three original pieces for the character: an undershirt,
bloomers, and a dress. I wanted there to be enough volume to ensure the masking of the
actor’s body, but still have the pieces create a specific shape that was easily recognizable
as something from the Victorian age.

The problem with draping on a body form, even if the measurements seem to
match up to the actors, is that a body form will always have unrealistic proportions. I did
not take that into account and there were many difficulties that arose because of it. When
dress rehearsal started the dress was too tight across the back and the actor went through
the rehearsal with a big hole in the back of her dress where I had to open it up so she
could move.

It was essential that she it not be too tight because the actress had to be able to
remove the dress on stage with ease. After some brainstorming, I inserted a panel and
masked the addition with buttons to make it seem like a choice rather than a mistake. The
final piece was suitable, and it matched the initial renderings, but I wish I had created a different design. The shape and look for the final garment was more like a nightgown than a dress. Which could work for the circumstances of the play, but since the choice was not purposeful, it just showed how much my designs lacked a true understanding of the characters.

Along with Iris’ pieces, Papa’s frock coat and Woodnut’s vest were the only other two pieces that were built. This was another trial for me. I had to not only delegate work, but also give up major projects to my fellow costume shop workers. My issue does not stem from a lack of belief that the others can do it, but it is more so that it is out of my control. It was a test of my ability to handle not taking care of one hundred percent of the production. It taught me how to configure and run a shop. I needed to decide what was the best way to use my workers time. It also showed me that I needed to be more organized. That it isn’t just about giving up control, but actually maintaining it even though I am not the making the piece myself.

A piece that I wish I had done myself, only so that I could have gotten the experience, was Papa’s coat. I wish I had that experience because tailoring is something that I have yet to have the opportunity to undertake. It was designated to Jessica Ray, and not only did she build the jacket and was able to line it correctly, but she had to do it with two jackets because the initial one that was built was too small for the actor. She had created two suits in the time that I would have maybe been able to build one. Papa’s frock coat was an important piece to me, because it was the thing that distinguished Sims and Papa as being in two different worlds.
The rest of the characters, Doyle and Morris, were made of pieces that I purchased. But, just because they were not built does not make them any less difficult. The style and cut of suit that I wanted to Morris was very specific and woman suits being sold today are not what I had in mind. I scoured website after website, and nothing was coming up. The cut and color of the suit was extremely important to me and it had to be the just right. Doyle had similar difficulties. The bulky, patterned, sweater vest that I pictured in my mind for this character was disappearing from the realm of possibility. The piece that I wound up buying was a beautiful mustard color and matched the palette I wanted for Doyle, but it lacked the chunkiness that I initially wanted.

The hole in the dress was the major faux pas for me when dress rehearsals began. An unknown difficulty was collars and buttons on the actors’ jackets. Every night of dress rehearsals there was at one time at least one actor who had their collar popped awkwardly or their jacket buttoned incorrectly. I had to have practice for both Woodnut and Sims to figure out how to put on their jackets and make sure that collar was correct and the buttons were going into their correct spot.

Other than the jackets most of the pieces were simple enough to work with. Morris’s suit fit the way I wanted it to. She was simple and professional. Once the hole was covered Iris’ looked young and childlike. The suit that I managed to find on my first day exploring managed to fit the actor who played Woodnut well and with the addiction of the vest underneath his look was complete. I quit trying to perfect it though, and I winced every time I saw him because his sleeves were to short. Sims was able to move between the two worlds, as the frock coat added that extra something that made him fit
into the Hideaway. Just like with my renderings, I was fine with everything just being okay. It worked and they looked good enough, and so that was enough.

It is strange to thing then with all these more intricate pieces that Doyle is the character that I had the most pride in. I built Iris’ costume entirely, but I will always look at it and see where I could have done better. Doyle, though it was not the sweater vest I had originally wanted, not only fully embodied the image I created in my renderings, but it also embodied the character.

No matter how much his costume pieces related Doyle was another character that had a consistent problem. I had to mask Iris’ age with soft make up, bouncy curls, and pieces that hid her adult body. I had to make her appear younger. Doyle, I had to age. As previously discussed, this production was in a very close environment. In these types of shows, it is very difficult to suggest age on a character because old age make up is extremely hard to do and is even harder when the audience is only feet away. I tried to mask Doyle’s youth with facial hair and by coloring his hair white. Which was a task that proved more difficult that just combing in white coloring into his hair. No matter how much was combed into his hair every single night, it was not fully readable from the audience.

I am slowly learning to let go of control and allow other’s to share in the work load instead of trying to do it all myself. But most importantly it has taught me what I need to work on if I were to continue in this field. I need to paint and render and sketch as much as possible so that those little details are not missed in my final drafts. I need to ask for help, and believe that the opinions I have about the show are worth hearing.
The play and design are sadly almost two entirely different entities to me. I allowed my biases and emotions to overwhelm my initial design, and they lacked the depth of a designer who fully understood the play. By the time I began to understand the play, I thought it was too late to reassess. I did not fully understand my placement in the hierarchy of a play production. Reflecting on my designs, they lack the depth and detail that makes a play whole. I was able to put forth and give the bare minimum for the directors and my fellow designers. Completed, it all worked. The designs I created fit into the world, and nobody looked out of place on the stage, but that should not have been enough for me.
All photographs taken by Brad Reissig

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