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CRIMES OF THE HEART Reviewed by Gail M. Burns, August, 2007 VI went to see an all African-American production of The Cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin. I finally got it when [I watched Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin. I finally got it when [I watched Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin. I finally got it when [I watched Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin. I finally got it when [I watched Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin. I finally got it when [I watched Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin. I finally got it when [I watched Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin. I finally got it when [I watched Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin buy] the cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin buy] the Cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin buy] the Cherry Orchard with Gloria Foster and James Earl Jones as Lopakhin buy and James Ea
and I started having this sort of epileptic fit in the audience. I was crying and screaming; I was really euphoric because I understood how things could be simultaneously tragic and comic and so alive and so real. After that I understood how things could be simultaneously tragic and comic and so real. After that I understood how things could be simultaneously tragic and comic and so real. After that I understood how things could be simultaneously tragic and comic and so real.
wanted to open with this quotation from the playwright which the WTF has featured in the program for Crimes of the Heart because I think that it provides an important insight into her intent and the structure of the play. I wish that someone had whispered the name & Chekhov in my ear before I went to see and review Terence McNally so Love!
Valour! Compassion! earlier this season, and so I wanted to be sure to whisper it in your ear here and now, especially since this guote provides such a clear link between his work and this one. Now if Chekhov conjures up hours of dour Russian angst in your mind, rest assured that, while Beth Henley splay is clearly Chekhovian in style, she is not
Russian. She has taken Chekhov s lively mix of tragedy and comedy and reinvented it in her own distinctly southern, female voice. This is why Crimes of the Heart won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1981, the first play ever to do so prior to its New York production. It is a very good play. And this is a very good production. Kathleen Turner, in her
Williamstown directorial debut, has assembled an outstanding cast and provided them with a structure and space in which to present extraordinarily honest performances. The play centers on a day in the life of the Magrath sisters of Hazelhurst, Mississippi in the fall of 1974. It is Lenny (Jennifer Dundas) 30th birthday and her cousin Chick Boyle
(Kali Roche) is giving her a hard time. Lenny, the oldest of the Magrath girls, is unmarried and lives with and cares for her elderly grandfather, who is in the hospital all during the action of the play. Her youngest sister Babe (Lily Rabe) has just been arrested and accused of shooting her husband in the stomach, a crime to which Babe freely admits.
The middle sister Meg (Sarah Paulson), who everyone thinks has been on the road with a successful singing career, returns to help Lennie and Babe cope with the crisis. Babe is also aided by a young lawyer, Barnette Lloyd (Chandler Williams) with an ax to grind against her husband. Meg spends an evening with Doc Porter (Patch Darragh), an old
flame who she convinced to ride out Hurricane Camille with her five years earlier, a decision that led to his becoming permanently disabled and abandoning his ambitions to become a doctor. This is not the first crisis that the sisters have had to face together. Their father abandoned the family and their mother hung herself (and the cat) in the
basement. The entire close-knit community considers the Magraths are odd, but in a wonderfully human and endearing manner. Like Chekhov Henley has the ability to create characters you feel you know already, doppelgangers of friends or relatives you deal with all the time. As I said before, this is a
very fine cast, and I am not the only one who thinks so. All three of these actresses have been awarded and nominated for major awards in the film and theatre industries, even 25-year-old Rabe, whose gentle and loopy Babe is a real stand-out here. Yes, she is the daughter of playwright David Rabe, and her mother is actress Jill Clayburgh, so she
comes of good stock, but that alone does not account for the presence and talent she displays. From her joyous entrance to the final tableaux Rabe has command of the stage. Rabe and Paulson have worked together before, in the 2005 off-Broadway production of Laura Wade s Colder Than Here. They play well together and they look like sisters.
Paulson is cast as the $\text{$\text{$\text{$\cong}$}} transhy $\text{$\cong}$ sister, the one who found their mother hanged. Her Meg is all nervous energy and unapologetic misbehavior. I liked Dundas as Lenny, the spinster before her time, but while Paulson and Rabe can pass for sisters, Dundas looks nothing like them. Visually the picture is off, although emotionally the three women connect
beautifully. This is always a challenge in casting a show. What happens if the performer who looks the part, or do you take a chance on the right actor who looks wrong? Here Turner has opted for the latter, and it was probably the best choice. Rocha is delightful as
cousin Chick, that self-centered nosy snake-in-the-grass who represents all that is false and intrusive about small town life. Williams makes a nice job of the smitten Barnette while Darragh is merely passable as Doc, but Henley small town life. Williams makes a nice job of the smitten Barnette while Darragh is merely passable as Doc, but Henley small town life.
of a middle-class home in Hazelhurst, Mississippi. The appliances were all much older than the 1974 setting of the play, I suppose because this is grandfather house against the
scrim, symbolizing both the white-glove southern gentility in which the Magraths were raised, and which was rapidly disintegrating by the 1970 s, and the see-through quality of life in any small town. Christal Weatherly s costumes remind us just how hideous women s clothes were back in the day, and how pervasive polyester was. The only
character I thought was poorly clothed was Paulson so family life southern style, but Crimes of the Heart is a show that has been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, but Crimes of the Heart is a show that has been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, but Crimes of the Heart is a show that has been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, and those should have been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, and those should have been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, and those should have been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, and those should have been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, and those should have been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, and those should have been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, and those should have been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, and those should have been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, and those should have been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, and those should have been around for quite some time are lots of laughs in this play of family life southern style, and those should have been around style some time are lots of laughs in this play of laughs in this play
regional theatres 🏶 and there is the 1986 film version as well, starring Diane Keaton, Jessica Lange and Sissy Spacek. What a treat it would have been to see what Turner and her actresses could have done with a newer or less well known work. Crimes of the Heart runs through August 19 on the Nikos Stage at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. The
show runs two hours and fifteen minutes with one intermission and is suitable for ages 14 and up. For tickets and information call the box office at 413-597-3400. copyright Gail M. Burns, 2007 Back to Gail Sez home. 1 Ann Morrison Will Lead National Tour of KIMBERLY AKIMBO Existing user? Just click login. Center Playhouse in Freehold presents
their newest production of Beth Henley's classic play, Crimes of the Heart was a co-winner of the Great American Play Contest at The Actors Theatre of Louisville, and its first performance was held in February 1979. The play expanded its
presence with many other productions across the country, including a run at Broadway's John Golden Theatre in November 1981. Crimes of the Heart is set in Hazlehurst, Mississippi in the mid-20th century, and centers around the three Magrath sisters: Lenny, Meg, and Babe. The siblings reunite to take care of their sick grandfather, who is in the
hospital. During their time together, the sisters bond over their experiences with love and heartbreak. Babe is struggling with the aftermath of attempting to murder her abusive husband, causing Lenny and Meg to reflect on their own past romances. The Magrath sisters haven't been in a successful relationship so far, but eventually realize that the
deepest love is found within each other. The actresses who play the Magrath sisters are extremely talented and have a connection that resembles real-life sisters onstage. Linda Paone stars as the responsible, older sister Lenny Magrath. Donna Nicholle is the spicy, fun middle sister Meg Magrath. Rebecca Grossman takes on the role of the
mischievous, youngest sister Babe Magrath Botrelle. Each sister is unique in her own way, and the women combine their different personalities to complement one another. They put on a performance with many layers, which allows the audience to see the highs and lows of their sisterhood in the play. There were three other cast members in this
production who added drama to the play's storyline. Candace Predham portrays Chick Boyle, the Magrath sisters' sassy first cousin. Ryan Irving plays Meg's rugged ex-boyfriend, Doc Porter. Christopher Berry completes the cast as Babe's intelligent and straightforward lawyer, Barnette Lloyd. These supporting characters did their part to enhance the
play's chaotic storyline and interact with the sisters in a significant way. The cast as a whole navigates Beth Henley's rollercoaster of a play like true professionals. Director Anthony Marinelli created the set design for Crimes of the Heart. All three acts of the play take place in the kitchen of the Magrath sisters' house in Hazlehurst, Mississippi.
Marinelli recreated an ornate kitchen structure with working appliances like a refrigerator and stove (donated by Stephen Kazakoff from Howell High School). Amy Scott of Copiah County Courier) for the actors to use as props in the play. She also helped with
vocal coaching to make sure the cast was able to speak in an accurate southern dialect. The lighting and sound design (also by Anthony Marinelli) brought audiences into the tense drama of the Macgrath family household. Center Playhouse's production of Crimes of the Heart keeps everyone on their toes with each unexpected scene. It is a play that
has the crowd laughing hysterically, but also feeling emotional at the same time. This show is heartwarming and teaches a lesson about how love between family members is the most important thing. Audiences who see the play will leave having a greater appreciation for their siblings and relatives. Tickets for Crimes of the Heart can be purchased by
calling 732-462-9093 or visiting Center Playhouse's website at The show will be performed through May 22. Center Playhouse is located at 35 South Street in Freehold, NJ. For more information, please check out the theatre's Facebook page at Credit: Mark LamhutReader ReviewsTo post a comment, you must register and login. Serious and absurdly
dark play is enjoyable and frustrating in equal measure. @ Morningside Campus Studio Theatre, Edinburgh Napier University's production of Beth Henley's Pulitzer-prize winning production of Beth Henley's Pulitze
the brilliant Ellen Aitken (as Lenny) and by the voluntuous and very watchable Sarah Ford (as Meg) are reunited with Babe, the younger sister, who is facing trial for shooting her husband. Confronting their pasts and attempting to redefine their futures, the three central characters endure a tempestuous journey, fraught with attorney visits and
adultery. The stage accurately portrays the home of the Magrath sisters in Mississippi, but a rather superfluous array of unused paraphernalia leaves little to the imagination. The traverse layout seemed slightly unnecessary, and only acted as a supplementary to the difficulty some of the less refined actors were having. A consistent indigenous
Southern American accent is difficult to pull off, but apart from the odd word, the cast seemed mostly in control of the intonation and diction problems that can arise from tackling any accent. Unfortunately, Henley's text - which should be carried along unforced - seemed to struggle at times, due to the inconsistency in the ability of the cast. Having
said that, almost everyone managed to get to grips with the comical nuances in the script, delivering them with heartfelt sincerity. Ending with a touching fluster around Lenny's birthday cake, Crimes of the Heart is a funny, serious and absurdly dark play, successfully produced and delivered by a cast with varying ability. 1 Review: Dahlia Lesh's
STRINGS ATTACHED at the Ottawa Fringe Festival 2 Review: 37 POSTCARDS at Ottawa Little Theatre's production of Beth Henley's Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning Crimes of the Heart is a bit of a mixed bag. Published forty-
five years ago, the play has a gripping plotline with themes and lessons that are still relevant, but getting to them is a slow process. The story takes place in the mid-seventies in the small southern town of Hazelhurst, Mississippi, and introduces us to Lenny Magrath (Sarah Aaron), who is sitting alone in her kitchen celebrating her 30th birthday. As
she wishes on a candle, sans cake, we feel a twinge of pity for her. This is further cemented when we meet her cousin, Chick (Judy McCormick), a brash, bossy type, who seems to look down on everyone, including her relatives. We find out that not only did the Magrath sisters' father abandon the family when they were kids, but their mother
committed suicide, taking the family cat along with her. Chick reminds Lenny of how embarrassing it all was for her. Lenny's sister Meg (Katie Torresan) has just returned to Hazelhurst from Hollywood where she moved years ago in search of her big musical break. Meg has come home because of a family crisis: the youngest Magrath sibling, fondly
known as Babe (Olivia Lee Brown), shot her husband, Zachery, in the stomach apparently because she "didn't like the look of him". We are told that Zachery is a wealthy lawyer and powerful U.S. senator, and it seems that Babe's fate is doomed. Chick, once again, bemoans how embarrassing this will be.Olivia Lee Brown in Crimes of the Heart.Photoo
grandfather who is now bedridden in hospital; Meg, who abruptly left home and her own relationship with Doc Porter (Allan MacLeod) to forge her own path forward; and Babe, who married Zachery only to please her grandfather, but ended up becoming the most isolated of all. The first act was slow getting started; it picked up steam right before
 intermission, only to return to a trickle throughout the second half. The strongest performances came from Brown, who was exceptionally well cast, and Edgar Wakefield as Barnette Lloyd, Babe's young lawyer with a score to settle. The southern accents seemed a little too forced, and they were often uneven and distracting. Babe's fidgety motions
were exaggerated to demonstrate her anxiety, but ended up feeling overdone, and could have ultimately been toned down without losing the overall effect. As is true with most Ottawa Little Theatre productions, the set design (Geoff Gruson) was wonderfully constructed and accurate for the era. Likewise, the costumes (Ross Dumontet) were massively
retro, complete with bell bottoms and kitschy outfits for the younger characters. The use of dimmed stage lighting (designed by David Magladry) to show memories was effective but could have been even more pronounced for greater impact. Olivia Lee Brown, Katie Torresan, and Sarah Aaronin Crimes of the Heart. Photo by Maria Vartanova. Billed as
a tragicomedy, the play utilizes humour as a coping strategy, most notably when Lenny and Babe deliver some bad news to Meg in a fit of laughter, bordering on hysteria. Some of its themes are still all too relevant today, where we continually see high profile individuals get away with behaviours that would not otherwise be tolerated. The play focuses
on the importance of family bonds, while recognizing that sometimes it is necessary to (literally) sweep hateful family members aside. It also teaches some valuable lessons along the way by showing us that people can cope with trauma and loss in very different ways, and most importantly that, although the difficulties we face in life may shape us,
they do not need to define us. Crimes of the Heart is in performances at Ottawa Little Theatre through September 2nd. Click here for more information or to purchase tickets. Note that this show contains adult content, including imagery of self-harm. Headline photo credit: Maria Vartanova. Click Here to Buy Tickets Reader Reviews To post a comment
you must register and login. Taxationincome tax assessment levied upon individual or corporate incomes. Pathologyautism, developmental disability resulting from a neurological disorder that affects the normal functioning of the brain. Buddhism pure Land Buddhism or Amidism, devotional sect of Mahayana Buddhism in China and Japan, centering
on worship of the Buddha Amitabha. U.S. HistoryBoston Tea Party 1773. Explorers, Travelers, and Conquerors: BiographiesHernán Cortés or Hernando Cortez, 1485-1547, Spanish conquistador, conqueror of Mexico. French and Benelux Physical GeographyPyrenees, Span. Pirineos, Fr. environmentalism surrogate mother education martial arts
Barcelona 1 Ann Morrison Will Lead National Tour of KIMBERLY AKIMBO 2 GOLDEN GIRLS: THE LAUGHS CONTINUE New U.S. Tour Begins In October 2025 Existing user? Just click login.CRIMES OF THE HEART, the 1981 Pulitzer Prize winner for drama and a Tony nominee for best play, is currently playing at Desert Rose Playhouse. The
production is well-directed and well-acted, and the play itself is absorbing, with both shallow and deep moments. Desert Rose and its mission, the theatre has two separate areas of focus: Productions about LGBTQ+ people, and productions oriented towards
 mainstream audiences, but written by members of the LGBTQ+ community. This play falls into the second category - the playwright is bisexual, but the play itself, about straight women, is a Southern Gothic dramedy that will appeal to all genders and orientations. Middle sister Meg (Zoe Sanchez). The story concerns three sisters, 30-year-old Lenny
(Laura Martinez-Urrea), twenty-seven-year-old Meg (Zoe Sanchez), and twenty-four-year-old Babe (Emily Rose Unnasch). Their father disappeared from the family when they were young and their mother hanged herself and her beloved cat. Their grandfather took them in his home in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, but is currently in the
 hospital and unlikely to recover from multiple strokes. The sisters get together at their grandfather's home after Babe, the only married sister, has spent a night in jail for shooting and wounding her abusive husband after be caught her with a lover. The other three cast members consist of Nick Wass as Barnette Lloyd, Babe's sleazy and not
necessarily competent attorney; Alexa Ottoson as Chick, the sisters' cousin, who looks down on all three of them; and Jason Reale as Doc, a former boyfriend of one of the sisters, and friend of them all. Attorney Barnette Lloyd (Nick Wass) spills privilegedinformation about Babe's case to Meg. Based on the combination television and VCR that appears
on the set (a product of the mid-1980's), director Robbie Wayne has apparently chosen the middle of the Reagan era to set the play. However, the exact mid-20th century decade (sixties, seventies, or eighties) does not really matter; the play clearly takes place well before adult women having sex with male high school students became criminal and
before women felt free to make their own life decisions. Those who saw last year's MISS FIRECRACKER CONTEST, which is a far more cheerful and less deep story, will recognize Beth Henley's methods of parodying Southern female communication and her bizarre sense of humor, even though CRIMES OF THE HEART is not a true comedy. Cousing Southern female communication and her bizarre sense of humor, even though CRIMES OF THE HEART is not a true comedy. Cousing Southern female communication and her bizarre sense of humor, even though CRIMES OF THE HEART is not a true comedy.
Chick (Alexa Ottoson) annoys Lenny. Nevertheless, director Robbie Wayne and the actors manage to wring humor from several grim situations. CRIMES OF THE HEART ends on a cheerful note for some of the characters, who demonstrate growth that even they do not expect. However, not all the characters' story arcs are resolved, which some
audience members may find unsatisfying. None of the six young cast members has significant acting experience with Desert Rose, but their performances is that some of the actors spoke too softly (although that could have been a problem
with the sound system) and, more importantly, several spoke too quickly - this Yankee reviewer had troubles keeping up with the fast clip of the Southern-accented speech. I missed a lot of lines as a result. Attorney Lloyd Barnette, his client, Babe, and the picture display. The set is another character in many of Desert Rose's plays, including this
production's brilliant design by Matthew McLean, which consists of the kitchen, living room, and staircase in Granddaddy's house. Mr. McLean uses drab colors, dated cabinetry, a haphazard display of photographs and art, and especially, a worn-out set of dinette chairs and 1950's or earlier appliances, to portray the residents as lacking any sense of
style or design, although Mr. McLean, himself, possesses each of those senses in abundance. The result is that this prominent family's home is thoroughly depressing. Is this a result of the occupants' emotional problems or does looking at the drab prison day after day help create the characters' depressed moods? This is a point for audience members
to ponder. One intriguing bit of scenery is a triangular flag box with a United States flag inside - the kind that people often use for the flag again creates the opportunity for audience members to speculate about why it is there. This proud display
of the Stars and Stripes, rather than either the Confederate battle flag or the Stars and Bars, implies that the family members do not buy into the south's mid-20th century racial attitudes - something that does, in fact, relate to an important aspect of the play - although there is a laugh line about someone's "half-Yankee" children. The result of the
combination of fine performances and technical design (lighting, sound, and visual) is that CRIMES OF THE HEART is well worth seeing. It will keep audiences engaged for some time afterwards, thinking about the aspects that are not resolved by the final curtain. I highly recommend attending this production crew consists of the production crew consists of the production.
of Nick Wass (sound and lighting design), Bill Kates (costume design), James Cesena (graphic design), Violet Feath (lighting operator), Koby Queenan (sound operator), Zoe Sanchez, Nick Wass, and Koby Queenan). Lenny,
Chick, and family friend Doc (Jason Reale). CRIMES OF THE HEART will run for five more performances: Wednesday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Friday through Saturday, July 1-2, 2022 at 8 p.m.; Frid
three) are $177. The Desert Rose Playhouse is located at 611 S. Palm Canyon Drive, in Palm Springs, in the same shopping center as the Palm Springs Revivals. Photos courtesy of Desert Rose Playhouse. Click Here to Buy TicketsReader ReviewsTo post a comment, you must register and login. "The entrance of middle sister Meg (Isla Iago) gave it a
much needed lift, not only because her character had the best lines "BENEDICT FLETT Set in the mid-twentieth century in a generic Mississippi town, Crimes of the Heart tells the story of three sisters reunited and forced to confront uncomfortable truths: their grandfather's illness, the eldest sister Lenny's thirtieth birthday, the death of their
childhood horse, and the fact that the youngest, Babe, has just shot (but avoided killing) her husband. Billed as a black comedy, Crimes of the Heart was lighter than I was expecting (as the friend who accompanied me said, "if it were chocolate, it would be Lindt 60%"). It treads the fine line of flitting between the serious (suicide, infertility and
mental breakdowns among them), the touching (the relationship between the sisters is a really nice display of familial love) and the hilarious. The humour is gently biting, and the script is genuinely sparkling with wit. "If it were chocolate, it would be Lindt 60%" In general, the production looked very good. The set (a kitchen) was simple, yet crowded
enough to give the impression that it was used frequently. I especially liked the pile of rubbish on the table that grew as the play went on, a messy touch that felt quite homely. The acting, however, was a little touch
and go. The Southern Belle accents (which are really tricky to do) more often than not sounded quite strange: nearly right though not right enough to carry the illusion. This became quite distracting, especially nearing the end when even the stronger actors started to lose the accent a little. In the case of Ellie Cole (playing the snooty cousin Chick),
this was a particular shame: while her facial expressions and mannerisms were deadpan and tonally perfect, she clearly struggled with the accent, which ended up drawing attention away from her lines. In general, the acting seemed to have been directed in a rather loud and giddy way, and the actors seemed encouraged to jump and shout their way
across the stage when often something more understated would have been better. I must admit that I was uncertain about the play until the entrance of middle sister Meg (Isla Iago), whose presence gave it a much needed lift, not only because her character had the best lines, but also because Iago herself embodied the character extremely naturally
and competently. Josh McClure as Barnette (Babe's lawyer) also put in a very enjoyable performance, and indeed, one of the Heart passes competently and confidently" I did had reservations about the play to begin with, but due to the
strength of the script and performances that grew on me as it went on, these were mostly ironed out. By the end, I wanted to spend more time with these characters and find out more about their lives. Many questions are posed, but few answered by this play. That, ultimately, is the best test of whether a play works — and Crimes of the Heart passes
competently and confidently Varsity is the independent newspaper for the University of Cambridge, established in its current form in 1947. In order to maintain our editorial independence, our print newspaper and news website receives no funding from the University of Cambridge or its constituent Colleges. We are therefore almost entirely reliant
on advertising for funding and we expect to have a tough few months and years ahead. In spite of this situation, we are going to look at inventive ways to look at inventive w
Many thanks, we hope you can help! I remember being in high school and watching Desperate Housewives with my parents. During one episode, one of the characters had just been fighting with her family, and when they walked out the door, they better plaster a smile on their face and pretend to be a happy and healthy family. That sentiment always
stuck in my head, and it's a line that I still use in my therapy today. There's such a focus on appearances in families have some form of dysfunction, whether we realize it or not. After generations of trauma rolling down the hill, dynamics between members spiral out of
control, and we become a system that functions because of the dysfunction. This lies at the heart of Avon Players Theatre's Crimes of the Heart follows three sisters who are barely holding it together. With themes of morality, mental illness, and strength in
the face of adversity, this stage play is heavy and served with a healthy dose of humor. Perhaps considered an acquired taste when it comes to dramedies, Crimes of life and the gray parts within people. But at its core, this stage play
contains heart and drives home the importance of family, be it the one we're born with or the one we make along the way. Crimes of the Heart peels back the layers of what constitutes family and the great lengths we go to ward off loneliness with those bonds we make. [Warning: spoilers from Crimes of the Heart are below!] A lost family finds its way
home in Crimes of the Heart Lenny (Lisa "D" Denomme) is doing her best to keep her family together, which is no easy task. As the show opens, she's celebrating her birthday all by herself in her grandfather's kitchen, waiting for the return of her two younger sisters. All three sisters were raised by their Old Granddaddy after their mother killed
herself along with the family cat. However, it was Lenny who stayed around. With a strong sense of duty to her kin, Lenny is tired and alone in her struggle to keep the family house running as it should, without her sisters. Babe (Maia Fetter), Lenny (Lisa "D" Denomme), and Meg (Tara Makar). Crimes of the Heart (Avon Players Theatre). There's to
be a reunion between the three sisters, although perhaps not the happiest of sorts. Everyone is reuniting at the old family home as a direct result of a shooting at the hands of Babe (Maia Fetter), the youngest of the bunch. With charges of homicide hanging over Babe, having shot her husband, there's a sense of panic that is descending on those in the
 house. That is, for everyone except Babe, who is almost at peace with her choice or having a complete psychotic break from reality with her childlike disposition throughout the family and the reality of the situation. She's gone off and lived a fabulous
life, putting the small town of Hazlehurst, Mississippi, behind her. Like all people who escape small towns, family and blood call her back to the middle of nowhere, where she's drawn back into the fold, helped by a failed singing career. It's not all bad, as Doc (Jeffrey Monterosso), a guy from Meg's past that she still has a soft spot for, reminds her of
the upside of life in Hazlehurst and the importance of being through. Can these three learn to lean on each other again, or are they destined to remain a broken family? Wading through dark moments to find the light in this Avon Players
production Having watched my fair share of comedies, I'm a big proponent of dark humor. I was once told that members of the LGBTQ community appreciate dark humor more than other groups because we've toed that line so much in our journey to keep us alive. While that's obviously an exaggeration, it doesn't discount the fact that I can laugh
through some pretty dark topics and situations pretty much all the time without exception. To fully appreciate this production, we must separate the source material from what we received on stage. Looking at the basis of Crimes of the Heart, there is a lot that can be appreciated and some that felt too dark to laugh at. As a psychologist, I loved the
exploration of dysfunction within a family system, as that is one of my specialties. Seeing how the system works, regardless of how well it functions, was exhilarating, to say the least. That portion of the source material was rich, with plenty of moments and dialogue to tease apart and examine. I'm sure it was just as exciting for the actors on stage to
perform as it was for the audience to watch. That being said, there were some components of the script that felt too far out of the realm of dark humor to be comfortable. Specifically, certain aspects of Babe's crime, and I'm not referring to her attempting to murder her husband—instead, this idea of her sleeping with an underage boy, Willie Jay. I
understand that Crimes of the Heart was written in a different time about a different time, but even so, the normalizing of such an experience and even pushing people to laugh at it felt wrong. This is nothing against the work that the actors and Avon Players put into the production, but more so a critique of the source material they worked with. In
fact, what made Crimes of the Heart so enjoyable, despite that hard-to-overlook issue with the script, was the acting of our three main leads. The chemistry between Denomme, Fetter, and Makar was oozing off the stage in every scene. You could feel the sisterhood that these three developed over the course of Crimes of the Heart, providing the show
with the emotional backbone it needed. Of the three, there was something about Tara Makar's performance of Meg that drew me in and kept me engaged. She played the middle child perfectly, capturing both a careless energy and desire to be free, along with the need to protect her sisters in the only ways she knows how. We've all had family
members like that, and Makar understood the assignment perfectly and put it into the Meg we saw on stage. Everyone involved is dedicated to the craft of tellings to the craft of tellings that hard work and love of theater create something magical on their 2024-2025 season, Avon Players continues to prove that hard work and love of theater create something magical on their stage. Everyone involved is dedicated to the craft of tellings that hard work and love of theater create something magical on their stage.
stories, be it musicals or plays. This theater excels at what they do and stops at nothing to provide a wonderful escape for its audiences. Crimes of the Heart is just another fine example of Avon's commitment to that and the lengths they'll go to provide an excellent theater experience to anyone who comes to their shows. Make sure to catch Avon
Players Theatre's next show, Farce of Habit, which runs from January 10 through the 25, so get your tickets now before they are gone! Have you seen Crimes of the Heart before? Let us know on social media @mycosmiccircus or @boxseatbabes! Avon Players 2024-2025 Season is Not One to Miss! 1 Ann Morrison Will Lead National Tour of
KIMBERLY AKIMBO 2 REVIEW: FAT HAM at the Austin Playhouse Existing user? Just click login. The Wimberley Playhouse presents CRIMES OF THE HEART by Beth Henley as the opening of their 2025-2026 season, and it is a captivating experience that deeply resonates with audiences. Through the emotional journeys of its characters, the play
explores themes of transformation, self-discovery, and the sometimes painful, yet beautiful, realities of life. Henley's writing brings vulnerability and authenticity to the stage, allowing the characters' struggles and growth to connect with each viewer on a personal level. The production captures the heart of the play, creating a poignant and
memorable experience for all who attend.CRIMES OF THE HEART premiered Off-Broadway at the Ensemble Studio Theatre in 1980 and quickly gained attention for its witty and Babe—as they reunite in their small hometown of
Hazlehurst, Mississippi, following a series of personal and family crises. Each sister is dealing with her own troubled past and complicated present, from Lenny's bitterness over unfulfilled dreams to Meg's failed career and volatile love life, and Babe's legal troubles after shooting her abusive husband. The play delves into themes of family loyalty
forgiveness, and the struggle for self-acceptance, blending humor and tragedy as the sisters come to terms with their individual "crimes" and attempt to rebuild their lives. Through Henley's sharp dialogue and quirky characters, the play explores the healing power of love and the importance of facing one's past. Director Tysha Calhoun's sensitive and
professional directing shines through her outstanding cast and their exceptional work on stage. The flow of movement, the intensity of the arguments, and the uncomfortable reconciliations that eventually transform into moments of laughter and family connection all reflect her impressive directing skills. Calhoun expertly navigates the delicate
balance between humor and heartache, guiding the actors to deliver performances that are both deeply emotional and authentically comedic. The seamless transitions between tense moments of lightness underscore her ability to draw out the complexities of the script while keeping the audience fully engaged. The pacing is perfect, and
each scene feels grounded in the raw reality of the characters' struggles, yet still holds onto the play's sense of humor and hope. It's clear that Calhoun's direction has brought out the best in her cast, resulting in a production that resonates long after the final curtain falls. Sarah Coyle's portrayal of Lenny in CRIMES OF THE HEART brings a profound
earthiness and depth to the character, embodying the complex reality of an older sister who has shouldered family burdens while suppressing her own desires. Coyle masterfully captures Lenny's underlying depression and frustration, particularly in the opening scene where Lenny's underlying depression and frustration, particularly in the opening scene where Lenny's underlying depression and frustration, particularly in the opening scene where Lenny's underlying depression and frustration, particularly in the opening scene where Lenny's underlying depression and frustration, particularly in the opening scene where Lenny's underlying depression and frustration, particularly in the opening scene where Lenny's underlying depression and frustration, particularly in the opening scene where Lenny's underlying depression and frustration, particularly in the opening scene where Lenny's underlying depression and frustration, particularly in the opening scene where Lenny's underlying depression and frustration and frust
a jar on the counter—and singing Happy Birthday to herself, only to be interrupted. This moment of quiet, heartbreaking isolation immediately sets the tone for Lenny's character, who has sacrificed her dreams for life to care for her aging granddaddy. Coyle's gravitas in portraying this worn, almost defeated woman on the brink of turning 30 is
nothing short of astonishing. Throughout the performance, she seamlessly becomes Lenny, drawing the audience into her character's struggles and vulnerabilities with remarkable authenticity. As Lenny begins to turn toward hope, Coyle's performance truly shines, beautifully capturing her character's transformation. Coyle's nuanced portrayal of
Lenny's shift from weariness to newfound hope lifts the hearts of the audience, offering a powerful reminder of the possibility for change and resilience, even after years of hardship. Through her subtle yet deeply moving performance, Coyle conveys the gradual emergence of Lenny's strength and the spark of renewal within her, allowing the audience
to feel the emotional weight of her journey. It is a testament to Coyle's skill that she can evoke such empathy and inspiration as Lenny embraces the possibility of a better future. Emily-Ann Patterson's portrayal of Meg in Crimes of the Heart beautifully offsets Sarah Coyle's kerny with her character's vigor and deep desire to embrace life. Patterson
captures Meg's zest for living while subtly revealing the shadows of her past, particularly her mother's suicide, which she tragically discovered. Through Patterson's performance, the audience feels Meg's vibrant energy, yet also senses the undercurrent of fatigue, loss, and unspoken desperation that defines her. Kelly Menz as Babe is an equally
skilled and polished counterpart to both Coyle and Patterson. Menz brings to life the awkward, abused younger sister with a delicate balance, portraying Babe's emotional complexity with striking authenticity. She deftly captures the tension between Babe's awareness of the consequences of her actions—shooting her husband—and her almost
indifferent, distracted reaction to the situation, shifting her focus onto other concerns. Together, these three performers create a dynamic and compelling portrayal of Barnette in CRIMES OF THE HEART is possibly one of the best depictions of a
quirky, sober character I've seen. Young perfectly captures the essence of a reserved, professional man, initially leading the audience to believe his character might be dry or uninteresting. However, this impression quickly fades as Young's impeccable timing and subtle wit bring unexpected, hilarious outbursts that emerge at the end of sentences,
only to be immediately followed by a return to his typically composed demeanor. Throughout the play, Young commands the role with moments of comic brilliance, providing a unique depth and charm to his character. The cast is completed by Elle Klein Garrison as Chick, the
Magrath sisters' cousin, whose loud clothes and even louder personality provide a perfect contrast to the more subdued characters. Chick's condescending and sneering attitude brings a sharp, judgmental edge that reflects the narrow-minded culture of the small town the sisters live in, adding tension to the dynamics of the play. Samuel Ellisor, as
Doc, the past love interest of Meg, brings a rural authenticity to the production, grounding the play in its Southern setting. Ellisor's portrayal of Doc not only adds to the play's rustic atmosphere but also helps deepen the complexity of the scenes, subtly revealing the emotional layers between the characters, especially Meg and Doc. Together,
Garrison and Ellisor round out the ensemble, each bringing unique qualities that enrich the overall performance. As I've learned to expect at Wimberley Playhouse, the production elements for CRIMES OF THE HEART are outstanding. The set and lighting, designed by Scenic artist Carol Dolezal and six set builders, is a contract the ensemble, each bringing unique qualities that enrich the ensemble, each bringing unique qualities that enrich the overall performance. As I've learned to expect at Wimberley Playhouse, the production elements for CRIMES OF THE HEART are outstanding.
constructed in two layers, perhaps inspired by the tri-level houses popular in the 1970s, and feels almost surreal in its accuracy. The cabinets, with their flat white paint and red inserts, match the checkered tile floors of the era (and the cake at the end!), while the appliances look like they were sourced directly from that time. Melinda Ellisor's
properties design is immaculate, featuring rooster canisters that could have belonged to their grandmommy, floral paintings on the wall, dish drainers, iron pitchers, and a quilted tablecloth, all contributing to the sense of a lived-in, familiar home. The crocheted afghan and needlepoint sampler on the wall further evoke the warmth and comfort of
family life. Every item, from the smallest detail to the larger pieces, feels integral to the play and its characters. The actors interact seamlessly with these props, so much so that it truly feels as though the home is theirs—down to the small, relatable detail of a slightly raised edge on a braided oval rug, which is tripped over and stomped on in
frustration--something so many of us do in our own homes every day. The set and properties not only enhance the atmosphere but also serve to deepen the connection to the family dynamics at the heart of the play. The set and properties, enhancing the overall
atmosphere of the play. The preshow and intermission music, featuring iconic black blues artists such as Big Mama Thornton, Memphis Slim, Victoria Spivey, Reverend Gary Davis, and others, sets a deeply Southern tone while reflecting the emotional undercurrents of the various characters' heartache. This music not only establishes the time and
place but also subtly mirrors the themes of struggle and resilience that run through the play. The sound effects throughout the production are thoughtfully balanced, never overshadowing the action or dialogue. From the ringing of the phones—placed exactly where they should be on stage—to the carefully timed moments of ambient sound, the design
works seamlessly to underscore the mood of each scene, enhancing the emotional impact without drawing undue attention to itself. Prowell's sound design in Crimes of the Heart is exceptionally well-executed, adding another
layer of depth to the characters and their stories. One detail that particularly stood out was Lenny's dress, which requires constant tugging and has a hitch in the back—a subtle yet impactful touch that many larger women will instantly recognize from their own experiences with clothing. It's a costuming detail I've never seen on stage before, and it
adds a level of realism and relatability that is greatly appreciated. The bold, eye-catching outfits for Chick perfectly match her judgmental, flashy personality, while Meg's boho style effortlessly reflects her free-spirited nature. Barnette's small-town lawyer attire, Doc's almost-farmer look, and Babe's attempt to dress professionally, yet with a quirky
edge, all add to the richness of the characters. Every costume feels meticulously chosen to reflect not only the individual traits but also the larger context of the characters' lives, and the level of thought and attention to detail is truly impressive. Great job!Ultimately, CRIMES OF THE HEART, so well executed by The Wimberley Players, reminds me
that we are all on a journey of transformation, often heading in directions we least expect. It beautifully captures the complexity of relationships, particularly the exceptionally difficult and messy nature of familial bonds. Henley's writing explores how we carry our pasts, struggle with our present, and, despite the heartache and chaos, continue to
search for hope and healing. The play serves as a poignant reminder that even through the most challenging moments, there is always the possibility for growth and change, no matter how unlikely it may seem. I highly recommend this play, and encourage my colleagues in the larger theater community to drive out to Wimberley, enjoy the town, and
see this exceptional production. You won't be disappointed. It is important to note that there are some cautions for youth and/or children, including frequent mention of sex. CRIMES OF THE HEARTPlay by Beth HenleyTheater
Company: The Wimberley PlayersVenue: Wimberley Players
(84)76% found this document useful (84 votes)82K viewsScript of the Heart script For Later 76%76% found this document useful, undefined 1 Ann Morrison Will Lead National Tour of KIMBERLY AKIMBO 2 News Flash: Surprise Debut in
Title Role of MSMT's ANASTASIA 4 A FORTY SECOND STREET STORY: The Extraordinary Career of Kevin Stites Existing user? Just click login. Pull out your bell bottoms and spray your hair so it stands up high! The Classic Rock Orchestra will be performing on Saturday, January 21, 2023 at 7:30 p.m. at Husson University's Gracie Theatre. This
eleven-piece orchestra will be performing legendary and nostalgia and rock 'n' roll classics," said Jeri Misler, managing artistic
director of the Gracie Theatre. "The band is tastefully balanced with extraordinary singers, a big band sound, and some of the finest orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestrations found anywhere." Famous composer Robert Moody said, "The Classic Rock Orchestration Robert Moody said, "The Clas
now coming into its own as a hallmark of nostalgia for multiple generations of pop enthusiasts. Attending the concert is a great way to sing all your favorite songs at the top of your lungs. "The show is conceived by the creative team of orchestrator Chris Eastburn and singer/multi-instrumentalist Joe Boucher who brought "Piano Men - The Music of
Elton and Billy" to the stage. "Piano Men" has been playing to sold out audiences with symphony orchestrations and the bass
guitar, with Gary Backstrom on guitar and Steve Hodgkin on drums. The band receives additional orchestration from musicians with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Ticket prices range from $32.00-$42.00, depending on seat selection. They can be purchased online at gracietheatre.com or by calling the box office at 207-941-7888. Groups of eight or
more are entitled to a 10% discount. For patrons who would like to put together a customized package of multiple shows, The Gracie's "You Pick 4" season tickets include premium seats for at least four shows of the purchaser's choice at a special discounted price. The premium seats located in the orchestra section are available for a limited time.
Patrons can purchase tickets for the "You Pick 4" plan now through February 23. Single tickets range from $20.00 - $47.50 over the course of the season, depending on the performer. Multiple show purchases using the "You Pick 4" discount will reduce the overall cost by 20%. The Gracie Theatre,
in a collaboration between artists, students, and university constituents, is an intimate and inviting performing arts facility that provides hands-on experiential learning and technical support services for the Husson University community through a combination of diverse cultural programming and community engagement. Learn more about the Gracie
Theatre and upcoming shows at GracieTheatre.com. For more than 120 years, Husson University has shown its adaptability and strength in delivering educational programs that prepare future leaders to handle the challenges of tomorrow through innovative undergraduate and graduate degrees. With a commitment to delivering affordable classroom,
online and experiential learning opportunities, Husson University has come to represent a superior value in higher education. The hallmarks of a Husson education; pharmacy studies; science and humanities; as well as communication.
According to an analysis of tuition and fees by U.S. News & World Report, Husson University is one of the most affordable private colleges in New England. For more information about educational opportunities that can lead to personal and professional success, visit Husson.edu.Click Here to Buy TicketsCommentsTo post a comment, you must
register and login. BETH HENLEY 1979AUTHOR BIOGRAPHYPLOT SUMMARYCHARACTERSTHEMESSTYLEHISTORICAL CONTEXTCRITICAL OVERVIEWCRITICISMFURTHER READINGBeth Henley completed Crimes of the Heart, her tragic comedy about three sisters surviving crisis after crisis in a small Mississippi town, in 1978. She submitted
it to several regional theatres for consideration without success. Unknown to her, however, a friend had entered it in the well-known Great American Play Contest of the Actors' Theatre of Louisville. The play was chosen as co-winner for 1977-78 and performed in February, 1979, at the company's annual festival of New American Plays. The
production was extremely well-received, and the play was picked up by numerous regional theatres for their 1979-81 seasons. At the end of 1980, Crimes of the Heart was produced off-Broadway in November
1981, Crimes of the Heart had received the prestigious Pulitzer Prize. Henley was the first woman to win the Pulitzer for Drama in twenty-three years, and her play was the first ever to win before opening on Broadway. Crimes of the Heart went on to garner the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best New American Play, a Gugenheim Award,
and a Tony nomination. The tremendously successful Broadway production ran for 535 performances, spawning regional productions in London, Chicago, Washington, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Dallas, and Houston. The success of the play—and especially the prestige of the Pulitzer award—assured Henley's place among the elite of the American theatre
for years to come. As Henley herself put it, with typically wry humor, "winning the Pulitzer Prize means I'll never have to work in a dog-food factory again" (Haller 44). Often compared to the work of other "Southern Gothic" writers like Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, Henley's play is widely appreciated for its compassionate look at good
country people whose lives have gone wrong. Henley explores the pain of life by piling up tragedies on her characters in a manner some critics have found excessive, but she does so with a dark and penetrating sense of humor which audiences—as the play's success has demonstrated—found to be a fresh perspective in the American theatre. AUTHOR
BIOGRAPHYBeth Henley was born May 8, 1952, in Jackson, Mississippi, the daughter of an attorney and a community theatre actress. Her southern heritage has played a large role in the setting and themes of her writing, as well as the critical response she has received—she is often categorized as a writer of the "Southern Gothic" tradition. As an
undergraduate at Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas, Texas, Henley studied acting and this training has remained important to her since her transition to play writing. Directors and fellow playwrights have observed that Henley "approaches a play from the point of view of theater, not literature" and that "as an actress, she then knows
how to make her works stageworthy" (Haller). She wrote her first play, a one-act titled Am I Blue, to fulfill a play writing class assignment. When it was produced at SMU her senior year, she modestly used the pseudonym Amy Peach. The play has an adolescent perspective—two insecure and lonely teenagers meet in a squalid section of New Orleans—
but audiences and critics (who reviewed the play when it was revived in 1981) found in it many of the themes, and much of the promise, of Henley's later work. Henley undertook graduate study at the University of Illinois, where she taught acting and voice technique. By this time, however, she was growing more interested in writing, primarily out of
a frustration at the lack of good contemporary roles for southern women. Henley completed Crimes of the Heart in 1978 and submitted it for production consideration, without success, to several regional theatres. The play was eventually produced in the Actors' Theatre of Louisville's 1979 Festival of New Plays. The successful production in this
prestigious festival led to several regional productions, an off-Broadway production at the Manhattan Theatre Club, and a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, unprecedented for a play which had not yet opened on Broadway. When it did, in November, 1981, the play was a smash success, playing for 535 performances and spawning many other successful
regional productions. When Crimes of the Heart was made into a film in 1986 it received mixed reviews, but Henley did receive an Academy Award nomination for her screenplay adaptation. With the prestige of the Pulitzer Prize and all the acclaim afforded Crimes of the Heart—her first full-length play—Henley was catapulted to success in the
contemporary American theatre. The attention paid to her also, however, put extreme pressure on her to succeed at that level. As Henley said of the Pulitzer: "Later on they make you pay for it" (Betsko and Koenig 215). Many critics have been hard on Henley's later plays, finding none of them equal to the creativity of Crimes of the Heart. Her second
full-length play, The Miss Firecracker Contest was, however, predominantly well-received. Similarly a dark comedy about a small Mississippi town, the play was completed in 1984. It played off-Broadway for a total of 244 performances,
moving to larger quarters in the process. The Miss Firecracker Contest was adapted into a film in 1988, starring Holly Hunter. In October, 1982, The Wake of Jamey Foster, Henley's third full-length play, closed on Broadway after only twelve performances. Henley felt that this commercial flop (not uncommon under the severe financial pressures of
Broadway production) was "part of the cost of winning" the Pulitzer Prize (Betsko and Koenig 215). Her next play, The Debutante Ball, was better received, and throughout the last decade Henley has remained a productive and successful writer for Broadway, the regional theatres, and film. Her major projects include the plays The Lucky Spot,
Abundance, and Control Freaks. She also wrote the screenplay for Nobody's Fool (as well as screen adaptations of her own plays) and collaborated with Budge Threlkeld on the Public Broadcasting System's Survival Guides and with David Byrne and Stephen Tobolowsky on the screenplay for Byrne's 1986 film True Stories. PLOT SUMMARYThe entire
action of the play takes place in the kitchen of the MaGrath sisters' house in Hazlehurst, MississippiAct IThe action opens on Lenny McGrath trying to stick a birthday candle into a cookie. Her cousin, Chick, arrives, upset about news in the paper (the content of which is not yet revealed to the audience). She wonders how she's "gonna continue
holding my head up high in this community." She and Lenny discuss going to pick up Lenny's sister Babe. Chick expresses displeasure with other facets of the MaGraths family, as she gives Lenny a birthday present—a box of candy. Doc Porter, an old boyfriend of the other McGrath sister, Meg, arrives, and Chick leaves to pick up Babe. Lenny is
upset at Doc's news that Billy Boy, an old childhood horse of Lenny's, was struck by lightning and killed. Doc leaves to pick up his son at the dentist. Lenny receives a phone call with news about "Zackery" (who we learn later is Babe's husband), who is hospitalized with serious injuries. Meg arrives, and as she and Lenny talk, it is revealed that Babe
has shot her husband and is being held in jail. There is an awkwardness between the two sisters as they discuss their grandfather; Lenny has been caring for him (sleeping on a cot in the kitchen to be near his room), and he has recently been hospitalized after a stroke. Lenny learns that Meg's singing career, the reason she had moved to California, is
not going well—as is evidenced by her return to Hazelhurst. Chick returns to the house, accompanying Babe. Chick shows obvious displeasure for Meg, and for Babe, who "doesn't understand how serious the situation is." Lenny and Chick run out after a phone call from a neighbor having an emergency. Meg and Babe, left alone together, discuss why
it was that their mother committed suicide, hanging herself along with the family cat. Babe also begins revealing to her sister more about shooting her husband. The sisters also discuss Lenny, whose self-consciousness over her shrunken ovary, they feel, has prevented her from pursuing relationships with men, in particular a Charlie from Memphis
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who Lenny dated briefly. Noticing the box of candy, Meg and Babe realize they've forgotten Lenny's birthday. They plan to order her a cake, as Babe's lawyerBarnette arrives at the house. Babe realize they've forgotten Lenny's birthday. They plan to order her a cake, as Babe's lawyerBarnette arrives at the house. Babe realize they've forgotten Lenny's birthday. They plan to order her a cake, as Babe's lawyerBarnette arrives at the house. Babe realize they've forgotten Lenny's birthday. They plan to order her a cake, as Babe's lawyerBarnette arrives at the house. Babe realize they've forgotten Lenny's birthday. They plan to order her a cake, as Babe's lawyerBarnette arrives at the house. Babe realize they've forgotten Lenny's birthday. They plan to order her a cake, as Babe's lawyerBarnette arrives at the house. Babe realize they've forgotten Lenny's birthday. They plan to order her a cake, as Babe's lawyerBarnette arrives at the house. Babe realize they've forgotten Lenny's birthday. They plan to order her a cake, as Babe's lawyerBarnette arrives at the house. Babe realize they become reacquainted by the babe realize they be a cake and babe realize they become reacquainted by the babe realize they become reacquainted by the babe realize they be a cake and babe realize they become reacquainted by the babe realize they be a cake and babe realize they become reacquainted by the babe realize they be a cake and babe realize they be a cake and 
partly because he has a personal vendetta against Zackery, Babe's husband. Barnette also reveals that medical information. Babe admits she's protecting someone: Willie Jay, a fifteen year-old African
American boy with whom Babe had been having an affair. The shooting, Babe says, was a result of her anger after Zackery threatened Willie Jay and pushed him down the porch steps. As the act ends, Babe agrees to cooperate with Barnette for the benefit of her case, and the two sisters plan a belated birthday celebration for Lenny. Act IIE vening of
the same day. Barnette is interviewing Babe about the case. Babe says after the shooting her mouth was "just as dry as a bone" so she went to the kitchen and made a pitcher of lemonade. She is afraid that this detail is "gonna look kinda bad." Zackery calls, threatening that he has evidence damaging to Babe. Barnette leaves to meet him at the
hospital, after answering Babe's question about the nature of his personal vendetta against Zack: "the major thing he did was to ruin my father's life." Lenny enters, fuming; Meg, apparently, lied "shamelessly" to their grandfather about her career in show business. Old jealousies resurface; Lenny asks Babe about Meg: "why should Old Grandman and the career in show business." The major thing he did was to ruin my father's life. "Lenny enters, fuming; Meg, apparently, lied "shamelessly" to their grandfather about her career in show business. Old jealousies resurface; Lenny asks Babe about Meg: "why should Old Grandman and the career in show business." The major thing he did was to ruin my father's life." Lenny enters, fuming; Meg, apparently, lied "shamelessly" to their grandfather about her career in show business.
let her sew twelve golden jingle bells on her petticoats and us only three?" Babe and Lenny discuss the hurricane which wiped out Biloxi, when Doc's leg was severely injured after his roof caved in. Many people have the perception, apparently, that Meg, refusing to evacuate, "baited Doc into staying there with her." Meg enters, with a bottle of
bourbon from which she has already been drinking. An apology for her lying to grandpa is quickly forthcoming, but she says "I just wasn't going to sit there and look at him all miserable and sick and sad!" The three sisters look through an old photo album. Enjoying one another's company at last, they decide to play cards, when Doc phones and is
invited over by Meg. Lenny begins criticizing Meg, who counters by asking Lenny about Charlie; Lenny gets angry at Babe for having revealed this secret to Meg. Meg continues to push the point, and Lenny runs upstairs, sobbing. Babe for having revealed this secret to Meg. Meg continues to push the point, and Lenny runs upstairs, sobbing. Babe follows, to comfort her. At this less than opportune moment, Doc arrives. He and Meg drink together, and talk about
the hurricane and hard times. Meg reveals to Doc that she "went insane" in L.A. and ended up in the psychiatric ward of the country hospital. The two decide to go off together and continue to drink; there is an obvious attraction, but Doc is careful to say they're "just gonna look at the moon" and not get in over their heads. There is a knock at the
back door, and Babe comes downstairs to admit Barnette. He has bad news for Babe: Zackery's sister, suspicious of Babe with Willie Jay. Babe is devastated, and as a final blow to close the act, Lenny comes downstairs to report that the hospital has called with news that their
grandfather has suffered another stroke. Act IIIThe following morning. Babe enters and lies down on Lenny's cot. Lenny enters, also weary. Chick's voice is heard almost immediately; her questions reveal that grandpa is in a coma and will likely not live. Chick and Lenny divide between them a list of people they must "notify about Old Granddaddy's
predicament." Chick goes off with obvious displeasure with the sisters. Lenny and Babe ruminate about when Meg might be coming home. Meg actually returns a moment later, exuberant. Exhausted by their traumatic night, Lenny and Babe break down in hysterical laughter telling Meg the news about their grandfather. As the three sisters talk, Meg
and Babe convince Lenny to call her man Charlie and restart their relationship. With her confidence up, Lenny goes upstairs to make the call. Babe shows Meg the envelope of incriminating photographs. Barnette arrives; he states that he's been able to dig up enough scandal about Zackery to force him to settle the case out of court. In order to keep
the photos of Babe and Willie Jay secret, however, he will not be able to expose Zackery openly, which had been his original hope and intention. Willie Jay, meanwhile, will be sent North to live in safety. Barnette leaves; so does Meg, to pick up Lenny's late birthday cake. Lenny comes downstairs, frustrated at having been too self-conscious to call
Charlie. Chick arrives a moment later, calling Meg a "low-class tramp" for going off with Doc. Lenny confronts Chick and tells her to leave; she does, but continues to curses the family as Lenny chases her out the door. Zackery calls, informing Babe he's going to have her committed to a mental institution. She defies him to do so and hangs up the
phone, but she is clearly disturbed by the threat. Lenny re-enters, elated at her triumph over Chick, and decides to make another try at calling Charlie. Babe takes rope from a drawer and goes upstairs. Lenny makes the call; it goes well, and she makes a date with him for that evening. Wanting to tell someone, she runs out back to find Babe. There is a
thud from upstairs; Babe comes down with a broken piece of rope around her neck. She makes another attempt to commit suicide, on-stage, by sticking her head in the oven. Meg finds her there and pulls her out. Babe, feeling enlightened, says she knows why their mother killed the cat along with herself; not because she hated it but because she
loved it and "was afraid of dying all alone." Meg comforts Babe by convincing her Zackery won't be able to make good on his threat. Lenny returns and is surprised by her sisters smiling and laughing together for a moment, in "a
magical, golden, sparkling glimmer."CHARACTERSBabeBabe is the youngest MaGrath sister. At the start of the play, she has shot her husband, Zackery, a powerful and wealthy lawyer. At first, the only explanation she gives for the act is the defiant statement: "I didn't like his looks! I just didn't like his stinking looks!" Eventually, she reveals that the
shooting was the result of her anger at Zackery's cruel treatment both of her and of Willie Jay, a fifteen year-old African American boy with whom Babe had been carrying on an affair. Babe makes two attempts to kill herself late in the play. After being rescued by Meg, Babe appears enlightened and at peace with her mother's suicide. Babe says she
understands why their mother hanged the family cat along with herself; not because she loved it and "was afraid of dying all alone." BeckySee BabeRebecca BotrelleSee BabeRebe
of her. When news is published of Babe's shooting of Zackery, Chick's primary concern is how she's "gonna continue holding my head up high in this community." Chick is especially hard on Meg, whom she finds undisciplined
and calls a "low-class tramp," and on Babe, who "doesn't understand how serious the situation is" after shooting Zackery. Chick seems to feel closest to Lenny, and is genuinely surprised to be ushered out of the house for her comments about Lenny's sisters. Barnette LloydBarnette is Babe's lawyer. An ambitious, talented attorney, Barnette views
Babe's case as a chance to exact his personal revenge on Zackery. "The major thing he did," Barnette says, "was to ruin my father's life." Barnette also seems to have a strong attraction to Babe, whom he remembers distinctly from a chance meeting at a Christmas bazaar. Barnette is prevented from taking on Zackery in open court by the desire to
protect Babe's affair with Willie Jay from public exposure. He is willing to make this sacrifice for Babe, and the play ends with some hope that his efforts will be rewarded. Lenny MaGrathLenny, at the age of thirty, is the oldest MaGrath sister. Her sisters have forgotten her birthday, only compounding her sense of rejection. Lenny is frustrated after
 years of carrying heavy burdens of responsibility; most recently, she has been caring for Old Granddaddy, sleeping on a cot in the kitchen to be near him. Lenny loves her sisters but is also been surrounded by men all her life, while
 Lenny has feared rejection from the opposite sex and become withdrawn as a result. She fears continuously pushed beyond the point of frustration, Lenny nevertheless has a close bond of loyalty with her sisters. Chick
is constantly criticizing the family (culminating in her calling Meg a "low-class tramp"); when Lenny is finally pushed to the point that she turns on her cousin, chasing her out of the house with a broom, this is an important turning point in the play. It demonstrates the ultimate strength of family bonds—and their social value—in Henley's play. Meg
MaGrathMeg is the middle sister at twenty-seven years of age. As an eleven year-old child, Meg discovered the body of their mother (and that of the family cat) following her suicide. This traumatic experience provoked Meg to test her strength by confronting morbidity wherever she could find it, including MEDIA ADAPTATIONSCrimes of the Heart
was adapted as a film in 1986, directed by Bruce Beresford and starring Diane Keaton, Jessica Lange, Sissy Spacek, and Sam Shepard. The film adds as fully-realized characters several people who are only discussed in the play: Old Granddaddy, Zackery and Willie Jay. The film received decidedly mixed reviews but also garnered three Academy
Award nominations, for Henley's screenplay and for the acting of Spacek and Tess Harper, who played the catty Chick. In a rare example of reverse adaptation from drama to fiction, Claudia Reilly published in 1986 a novel, Crimes of the Heart, based on Henley's play poring over medical photographs of disease-ridden victims and staring at March of the Award nominations, for Henley's play poring over medical photographs of disease-ridden victims and staring at March of the Award nominations, for Henley's play poring over medical photographs of disease-ridden victims and staring at March of the Award nominations, for Henley's play poring over medical photographs of disease-ridden victims and staring at March of the Award nominations, for Henley's play poring over medical photographs of disease-ridden victims and staring at March of the Award nominations, for Henley's play proving over medical photographs of disease-ridden victims and staring at March of the Award nominations, for Henley's play proving over medical photographs of the Award nominations at the Award nomination of the Award nominations at the Award nomination of the Award nominatio
Dimes posters of crippled children. At the beginning of the play Meg returns to Mississippi from Los Angeles, where her singing career has stalled and where, she later tells Doc, she had a nervous breakdown and ended up in the psychiatric ward of the county hospital. The other MaGrath sisters share a perception that Meg has always received
preferential treatment in life. When Lenny ponders "why should Old Grandmama let her sew twelve golden jingle bells on her petticoats and us only three?" this is not a minor issue for her and Babe. The two sisters feel on some level that this special treatment has led Meg to act irresponsibly—as when she abandoned Doc, for whatever reason, after
 he was severely injured in the hurricane. Lenny is angry with Meg for lying to Old Granddaddy in the hospital about her career, but Meg states "I just wasn't going to sit there and look at him all miserable and sick and sad!" Both sisters, however-
especially Lenny—are also protective of Meg, especially from the attacks of their cousin Chick.Rebecca MaGrathSee BabeDoc PorterDoc is Meg's old boyfriend. He is still known affectionately as "Doc" although his plans for a medical career stalled and eventually died after he was severely injured in Hurricane Camille—his love for Meg (and her
promise to marry him) prompted him to stay behind with her while the rest of the town evacuated the storm's path. Many people now have the perception (as Meg and Lenny discuss) that Meg "baited Doc into staying there with her." Doc, who now has his own wife and children, nevertheless remains close to the MaGrath family. Although Meg
abandoned him when she left for California, Doc remains fond of her, and Meg is extremely happy to have his friendship upon her return from California. THEMESAbsurdity and is extremely happy to have his friendship upon her return from California. The message is extremely happy to have his friendship upon her return from California. The message is extremely happy to have his friendship upon her return from California. The message is extremely happy to have his friendship upon her return from California. The message is extremely happy to have his friendship upon her return from California. The message is extremely happy to have his friendship upon her return from California.
meaningful action. With the constant frustration of their dreams and hopes, Henley's characters could easily find their lives completely meaningless and absurd (and indeed, each of the MaGrath sisters have found a kind of unity in the face of adversity.
While Lenny's vision, "something about the three of us smiling and laughing together," in no way can resolve the manyTOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDYResearch the destructive effects of Hurricane "Camille," which in 1969 traveled 1,800 kilometers along a broad arc from Louisiana to Virginia. Why do you think Henley chose to set Crimes of the Heart
in the shadow, as it were, of this Hurricane? What does Camille represent for each of the major characters and thematically to happen to her? Draw from your understanding of Barnette's case against Zackery and Zackery's case against Babe. From
your own perspective, how do you think Babe will change as a result of this event and what do you feel her future should rightly be?Contrast Lenny's and Meg's life strategies: how do they each view responsibility, career, family, romance? How spontaneous—or not—is each one? What are the strongest bonds between the sisters, and what are their
sources of conflict? Research the prestige of the Pulitzer Prizes and the history of the Pulitzer for Drama—you might begin with Thomas P. Adler's book Mirror on the Stage: The Pulitzer Prizes and the history of the Pulitzer for Drama—you might begin with Thomas P. Adler's book Mirror on the Stage: The Pulitzer Prizes and the history of the Pulitzer for Drama. When Henley won the Pulitzer for Drama in 1981, who was the last woman who had won the prize, twenty-three years
earlier? Why did winning the Pulitzer draw so much attention to Henley, as it did to Marsha Norman two years later, when she won with her play 'Night, Mother?conflicts that have unfolded in the course of the play, it does endow their lives with a collective sense of hope, where before each had felt acutely the absurdity, and often the hopelessness, of the play it does endow their lives with a collective sense of hope, where before each had felt acutely the absurdity, and often the hopelessness, of the play it does endow their lives with a collective sense of hope, where before each had felt acutely the absurdity, and often the hopelessness, of the play it does endow their lives with a collective sense of hope, where before each had felt acutely the absurdity, and often the hopelessness, of the play it does endow their lives with a collective sense of hope, where before each had felt acutely the absurdity and often the hopelessness.
life.DeathReminders of death are everywhere in Crimes of the Heart: the sisters are haunted by the memory of their mother's suicide; Babe has shot and seriously wounded her husband; Lenny learns that her beloved childhood horse has been struck by lightning and killed; Old Granddaddy has a second stroke and is apparently near death; Babe
attempts suicide twice near the end of the play. Perhaps even stronger than these reminders of physical death, however, are the images of emotional or spiritual death in the play. Lenny, for example, has rejected Charlie, her only suitor in recent years, because she feels worthless and fears rejection herself. Meg, meanwhile, has experienced a
psychotic episode in Los Angeles and has prevented herself from loving anyone in order to avoid feeling vulnerable. Significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play, individual "rebirths" which preface the significant transitions occur near the end of the play the
course of spending a night out with Doc, is surprised to learn that she "could care about someone," and sings "all night long" out of joy; and finally, Babe has a moment of enlightenment in which she understands that their mother hanged the family cat along with herself because "she was afraid of dying all alone." This revelation allows her to put to
rest finally the painful memory of the mother's suicide, and paves the way for the moment of sisterly love at the conclusion of the play. Good and EvilHenley challenges the audience's sense of good and evil by making them like characters who have committed crimes of passion. "I thought I'd like to write about somebody who shoots somebody else just
for being mean," Henley said in Saturday Review. "Then I got intrigued with the idea of the audience's not finding sympathy for her." While Babe's case constitutes the primary exploration of good and evil in the play, the conflict between Meg and her sisters is another example of Henley presenting a number of
perspectives on a character's actions in order to complicate her audience's notions of good and bad behavior. Lenny and Babe find many of Meg's actions (abandoning Doc after his accident, lying to Granddaddy about her career in Hollywood) to be dishonest and selfish, but the sisters eventually learn to understand Meg's motivations and to forgive
her. Through this process, Henley suggests the sheer complexity of human psychology and behavior—that often, actions cannot be easily labeled "good" or "evil" in a strict sense. Limitations and Opportunities virtually all the characters, to some extent, have throughout their lives been limited in their choices, experiencing a severe lack of opportunity
Lenny, in particular, resents having had to take upon herself so much responsibility for the family (especially for Old Granddaddy). Much of Babe's difficulty in her marriage to Zackery, meanwhile, seems to have grown out the fact that she did not choose him but was pressured by her grandfather into marrying the successful lawyer. Meg, however, at
least to Lenny and Babe, appears to have had endless opportunity. Lenny wonders at one point: "Why, do you remember how Meg always got to wear three apiece? Why?!" Lenny is clearly fixating on a minor issue from childhood, but one she feels is representative of the
preferential treatment Meg received. The bells are, she says to Meg later, a "specific example of how you always got what you wanted!" Meg, however, has learned a hard lesson in Hollywood about opportunity and success. Old Granddaddy has always told her: "With your talent, all you need is exposure. Then you can make your own breaks!"
Contrary to this somewhat simplistic optimism, however, Meg's difficulty sustaining a singing career suggests that opportunity is actually quite rare, and not necessarily directly connected to talent or one's will to succeed. Public vs. Private LifeWhen Babe reveals to Meg her affair with Willie Jay, she admits that she's "so worried about his getting
public exposure." This is a necessary concern for public opinion, as Willie Jay might physically be in danger as a result of such exposure. Chick, meanwhile, has what Henley characterizes as an unhealthy concern for public perception—she cares much more about what the rest of the town thinks of her than she does about any of her cousins.
Immediately upon her entrance at the beginning of the play, Chick focuses not so much upon Babe's shooting of Zackery, but rather on how the event will affect her, personally:"How I'm gonna continue holding my head up high in this community, I do not know." Similarly, in criticizing Meg for abandoning Doc, Chick thinks primarily of her own
public stature: "Well, his mother was going to keep me out of the Ladies' Social League because of it." Near the end of the play, Lenny becomes infuriated over Chick calling Meg "a low-class tramp," and chases her cousin out of the private,
 family unity the three sisters are able to achieve by the end of the play is far more important than the public perception of the Heart are its insights into violence and cruelty. While Babe has ostensibly committed the most violent act in the play
by shooting Zackery in the stomach, the audience is persuaded to side with her in the face of the violence wrought by Zackery upon both Babe (domestic violence stemming, as Babe says, from him "hating me, 'cause I couldn't laugh at his jokes"), and, in a jealous rage, on Willie Jay. There occur other, less prominent acts of cruelty in the course of the
play, as well as numerous ones the audience learns about through exposition (such as Meg's abandonment of Doc following his injury). In the end, Henley encourages the audience to take a less absolute view of what constitutes cruelty, to understand some of the underlying reasons behind the actions of her characters, and to join in the sense of
 forgiveness and acceptance which dominates the conclusion of Crimes of the Heart.STYLESet in the small southern town of Hazlehurst, Mississippi, Crimes of the Heart centers on three sisters who converge at the house of their grandfather after the youngest, Babe, has shot her husband following years of abuse. The other sisters have their own
difficulties—Meg's Hollywood singing career is a bust, and Lenny (the eldest) is frustrated and lonely after years of bearing familial responsibility (most recently, she has been sleeping on a cot in the kitchen in order to care for the sisters' ailing grandfather). Over the course of two days, the sisters endure a number of conflicts, both between
themselves and with other characters. In the end, however, they manage to come together in a moment of unity and joy despite their difficulties. Beth Henley is most often praised, especially regarding Crimes of the Heart, for the creative blending of different theatrical styles and moods which gives her plays a unique perspective on small-town life in
the South. Her multi-faceted approach to dramatic writing is underscored by the rather eclectic group of playwrights Henley once listed for an interviewer as being her major influences: Anton Chekhov, William Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Samuel Beckett, David Mamet, Henrik Ibsen, Lillian Hellman, and Carson McCullers. In
particular, Henley's treatment of the tragic and grotesque with humor startled audiences and critics (who were either pleasantly surprised, or unpleasantly shocked). While this macabre humor is often associated with the Southern Gothic movement in literature, Henley's dramatic technique is difficult to qualify as being strongly of one theatrical bening the strongly of the tragic and grotesque with humor startled audiences and critics (who were either pleasantly shocked). While this macabre humor is often associated with the Southern Gothic movement in literature, Henley's dramatic technique is difficult to qualify as being strongly of one theatrical bening the strongly of the s
or another. For example, Crimes of the Heart has many of the characteristics of a naturalistic work of the "well-made play" tradition: a small cast, a single set, a three-act structure, an initial conflict which is complicated in the second act and resolved in the third. As Scott Haller observed in Saturday Review, however, Henley's purpose is not the
resurrection of this tradition but the "ransacking" of it. "In effect," he wrote, "she has mated the conventions of the naturalistic play with the unconvention but the "ransacking" of it. "In effect," he wrote, "she has mated the convention of tragedies in
Henley's dramatic world thus appears too absurd to be real, yet too tangibly real to be absurd, and therein lies the playwright's originality. Many critics have joined Haller in finding in Henley's work elements of the Absurd, which presented a vision of a disordered universe in which characters are isolated from one another and are
incapable of meaningful action. There is, however, much more specificity to the plot and lives of the characters in Crimes of the Heart than there is, for example, in a play by absurdists like Beckett or Eugene Ionesco. Nevertheless, Henley shares with these playwrights, and others of the Absurd, a need to express the dark humor inherent in the
struggle to create meaning out of life. Henley's macabre sense of humor has resulted in frequent comparisons to Southern Gothic writers such as Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty. Providing a theatrical rationale for much of what appears to be impossibly eccentric behavior on the part of Henley's characters; in the New York Times, Walter Kerr
wrote: "We do understand the ground-rules of matter-of-fact Southern grotesquerie, and we know that they're by no means altogether artificial. People do such things and, having done them, react in surprising ways." Although Henley once stated that when she began writing plays she was not familiar with O'Connor, and that she "didn't consciously"
say that she "was going to be like Southern Gothic or grotesque," she has since read widely among the work of O'Connor and others, and agrees the connections are there. Of her eccentric brand of humor Henley, quoted in Mississippi Writers Talking, suspected that "I quess maybe that's just inbred in the South. You hear people tell stories, and
somehow they are always more vivid and violent than the stories people tell out in Los Angeles."While Crimes of the Heart does have a tightly-structured plot, with a central and several tangential conflicts, Henley's real emphasis, as Nancy Hargrove suggested in the Southern Quarterly, is "on character rather than on action." Jon Jory, the director of
the original Louisville production, observes that what so impressed him initially about Henley's play was her "immensely sensitive and complex view of relationships. . . . And the comedy didn't come from one character but from between the character
Crimes of the Heart goes hand-in-hand with her primary focus upon characterization, and her significant break with the tradition of the "well-made play." While the plot moves to a noticeable resolution, with the sisters experiencing a moment of unity they have not thus far experienced in the play, Henley leaves all of the major conflicts primarily
unresolved. Stanley Kauffmann wrote in the Saturday Review assessment of the Broadway production that "Crimes moves to no real resolution, but this is part of its power. It presents a condition that, in minuscule, implies much about the state of the world, as well as the state of Mississippi, and about human chaos; it says, "Resolution is not my
business. Ludicrously horrifying honesty is."Because of the distinctive balance that Henley strikes—between comedy and tragedy, character and plot, conflict and resolution—the playwright whose technique Henley's most resembles may be Chekhov (although her sense of humor is decidedly more macabre and expressed in more explicit ways).
Henley has said of Chekhov's influence upon her that she appreciates how "he doesn't judge people as much as just shows them in the comic and tragic parts of people. Everything's done with such ease, but it hits so deep," as she stated in Mississippi Writers Talking. About a production of Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard which particularly moved her
Henley commented in The Playwright's Art: Conversations with Contemporary American Dramatists that "It was just absolutely a revelation about how alive life can be and how complicated and beautiful and horrible; to deny either of those is such a loss." HISTORICAL CONTEXTCrimes of the Heart, according to Henley's stage directions, takes place
"[i]n the fall, five years after Hurricane Camille." This would set the play in 1974, in the midst of significant upheavals in American society. Henley's characters, however, seem largely unmoved by the events of the outside world, caught up as they are in the pain and disappointment of their personal lives. Vietnam The war continued in 1974, setting off
had protested against the war remained largely disillusioned about the foreign interests of the U.S. government, and society as a whole remained traumatized by U.S. casualties and the devastation wrought by the war, which had been widely broadcast by the media; the Vietnam War was often referred to as the "living room war" due to the
unprecedented level of television coverage. Watergate Perhaps the most significant event in American society in 1974 was the unprecedented resignation of President Richard Nixon, over accusations of his granting approval for the June 17, 1972, burglary of Democratic National Committee offices at the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C. By the
end of 1973, a Harris poll suggested that people believed, by a margin of 73 to 21 percent, that the president's credibility had been damaged beyond repair. Like public opinion over Vietnam, Watergate was an important symbol both of stark divisions in American society and a growing disillusionment with the integrity of our leaders. Less than two
years after being re-elected in a forty-nine-state landslide and after declaring repeatedly that he would never resign under pressure, Nixon was faced with certain impeachment by Congress. Giving in to the inevitable, he resigned his office in disgrace on August 9.World Crises: Food, Energy, Inflation1974 was an especially trying year for the
developing world, as massive famine swept through Asia, South America, and especially Africa, on the heels of drought and several major natural disasters. As they watched this tragedy unfold, citizens of industrialized nations of the West were experiencing social instability of another kind. In the fall of 1973, Arab members of the Organization of
Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) leveled an embargo on exports to the Netherlands and the U.S. The United States, with its unparalleled dependency on fuel (in 1974, the nation had six percent of the world's energy), experienced a severe economic crisis. U.S. economic output for the U.S. The United States, with its unparalleled dependency on fuel (in 1974, the nation had six percent of the world's energy), experienced as severe economic output for the U.S. The United States, with its unparalleled dependency on fuel (in 1974, the nation had six percent of the world's energy).
first quarter of 1974 dropped $10-20 billion, and 500,000 American workers lost their jobs. The U.S. government blamed the Arabs for the crisis, but American public opinion also held U.S. companies responsible for manipulating prices and supplies to corporate advantage. Related to the energy crisis and other factors, the West experienced an
inflation crisis as well; annual double-digit inflation became a reality for the first time for most industrial nations. Civil RightsOn the twenty-year anniversary of the historic Supreme Court decision on school integration, fierce battles were still being fought on the issue, garnering national attention. The conflict centered mostly on issues of school
busing, as the site of conflict largely shifted from the South to the cities of the North. In Boston, for example, police had to accompany buses transporting black children to white schools. Meanwhile, baseball player Hank Aaron's breaking of Babe Ruth's career home-run title in 1974 was a significant and uplifting achievement, but its painful post-
script—the numerous death threats Aaron received from racists who did not feel it was proper for a black athlete to earn such a title—suggests that bigoted ideas of race in America were, sadly, slow to change Growing out of its roots in the 1960s, the movement to define and defend the civil rights of women also continued. 1974 marked a midpoint in
the campaign to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which declared: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State or account of sex." The amendment was originally passed by the United States or by any State or account of sex."
needed. Support for the ERA (which eventually failed) was regionally divided: while every state in the Northeast had ratified the amendment by this time, for example, it had been already defeated in Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana. Legislative action was stalled, meanwhile, in many other southern states, including North and South Carolina, Alabama Legislative action was stalled.
Mississippi, and Arkansas. In Crimes of the Heart, the characters seem untouched by these prominent events on the national scene. The absence of any prominent historical context to the play may reflect Henley's perspective on national scene. The absence of any prominent historical context to the play may reflect Henley's perspective on national politics: she has described herself as a political cynic with a "moratorium on watching the news since Reagan's
been president," as she described herself in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights. It may also be a reflection of Henley's perspective on small-town life in the South, where, she feels, people more commonly come together to talk about their own lives and tell stories rather than watch television or discuss the national events being
covered in the media. The South of Crimes of the Heart, meanwhile, seems largely unaffected by the civil rights movement, large-scale economic development, or other factors of what has often been called an era of unprecedented change in the South. Regarding the issue of race, for example, consider Babe's affair with Willie Jay, a fifteen-year-old
African American youth: while the revelation of it would compromise any case Babe might have against her husband for domestic violence, it presents a greater threat to Willie Jay has no option but to leave "incognito on the midnight bus—heading
North." Henley has made an important observation about race relations in Mississippi, in response to a question actually about recent trends in "colorblind" casting in the theatre. Henley stated in The Playwright's Art: Conversations with Contemporary American Dramatists that "it depends on how specific you're being about the character's
background as to whether that's an issue." In a play like Crimes of the Heart, "if you're writing about a specific time or place . . . then obviously race is important because there is a segregated bigoted thing going on."CRITICAL OVERVIEWBeth Henley did not initially have success finding a theatre willing to produce Crimes of the Heart, until the
play's acceptance by the Actors' Theatre of Louisville. From that point onward, however, the public and critical reception was overwhelmingly positive. Few playwrights achieve such popular success, especially for their first full-length play: a Pulitzer Prize, a Broadway run of more than five hundred performances, a New York Drama Critics Award for their first full-length play: a Pulitzer Prize, a Broadway run of more than five hundred performances, a New York Drama Critics Award for their first full-length play: a Pulitzer Prize, a Broadway run of more than five hundred performances, a New York Drama Critics Award for their first full-length play: a Pulitzer Prize, a Broadway run of more than five hundred performances, a New York Drama Critics Award for their first full-length play: a Pulitzer Prize, a Broadway run of more than five hundred performances, a New York Drama Critics Award for their first full-length play: a Pulitzer Prize, a Broadway run of more than five hundred performances, a New York Drama Critics Award for their first full-length play: a Pulitzer Prize, a P
best play, a one million dollar Hollywood contract for the screen rights. John Simon's tone is representative of many of the early reviews: writing in the New York Times of the early reviews: writing in the New York Times of the early reviews: writing in the New York Times of the Heart "restores one's faith in our theatre." Simon was, however, wary of being too hopeful about Henley's future success,
expressing the fear "that this clearly autobiographical play may be stocked with the riches of youthful memories that many playwrights cannot duplicate in subsequent works." Reviews of the play on Broadway were also predominantly enthusiastic. Stanley Kauffmann, writing in the Saturday Review, found fault with the production itself but found
Henley's play powerfully moving. "The play has to fight its way through the opening half hour or so of this production before it lets the author establish what she is getting at—that, under this molasses meandering, there is madness, stark madness, stark madness, stark madness." While Kauffmann did identify some perceived faults in Henley's technique, he stated that overall, "she
has struck a rich, if not inexhaustible, dramatic lode." Similarly, Richard Corliss, writing in Time magazine, emphasized that Henley's play, with its comedic view of the tragic and grotesque, is deceptively simple: "By the end of the evening, caricatures have been fleshed into characters, jokes into down-home truths, domestic atrocities into strategies
for staying alive."Not all the Broadway reviews, however, were positive. Walter Kerr of the New York Times felt that Henley had simply gone too far in her attempts to wring humor out of the tragic, falling into "a beginner's habit of never letting well enough alone, of taking a perfectly genuine bit of observation and doubling and tripling it until it's
compounded itself into parody." Throughout the evening, Kerr recalled, "I also found myself, rather too often and in spite of everything, disbelieving—simply and flatly disbelieving—simply and flatly disbelieving—simply and flatly disbelieving." In making his criticism, however, Kerr observed that "this is scarcely the prevailing opinion" on Henley's play. Michael Feingold of the Village Voice, meanwhile, was far
more vitriolic, stating that the play "gives the impression of gossiping about its characters rather than presenting them. . . never at any point coming close to the truth of their lives." Feingold's opinion, that the "tinny effect of Crimes of the Heart is happily mitigated, in the current production, by Melvin Bernhardt's staging" and by the "magical
performances" of the cast, is thus diametrically opposed to Kauffmann, who praised the play but criticized the production. Given Henley's virtually unprecedented success as a young, first-time playwright, and the gap of twenty-three years since another woman had won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, one of the concerns of critics was to place Henley in
the context of other women writing for the stage in the early 1980s. Mel Gussow did so famously in his article "Women Playwrights: New Voices in the Theatre" in the New York Times Sunday Magazine, in which he discussed Henley, Marsha Norman, Wendy Wasserstein, Wendy Kesselman, Jane Martin, Emily Mann, and other influential female
playwrights. While Gussow's article marked an important transition in the contemporary American theatre, it has been widely rebutted, found by many to be "more notable for its omissions than its conclusions" according to Billy J. Harbin in the Southern Quarterly. In particular, critics have been interested in comparing Henley to Norman, another
southern woman who won the Pulitzer for Drama (for her play 'night, Mother). Gussow wrote that among the numerous women finding success as playwrights "the most dissimilar may be Marsha Norman and Beth Henley." Lisa J. McDonnell picked up this theme several years later in an issue of the Southern Quarterly, agreeing that there are
important differences between the two playwrights, but exploring them in much more depth than Gussow was able to do in his article. At the same time, however, McDonnell observed many important similarities, including "their remarkable gift for storytelling, their use of family drama as a framework, their sensitive delineation of character and
relationships, their employment of bizarre Gothic humor and their use of the southern vernacular to demonstrate the poetic lyricism of the commonplace."The failure of Henley's play The Wake of Jamey Foster on Broadway, and the mixed success of her later plays, would seem to lend some credence to John Simon's fear that Henley might never again
be able to match the success of Crimes of the Heart. While many journalistic critics have been especially hard on Henley's later work, she remains an important figure in the contemporary American theatre. The many published interviews of Henley suggests that she attempts not to take negative reviews to heart: in The Playwright's Art:
Conversations with Contemporary American Dramatists, she observed with humor that "H. L. Mencken said that asking a playwright what he thinks of a dog." Crimes of the Heart, meanwhile, has passed into the canon of great American plays, proven by the work of literary critics to be rich and
complex enough to support a variety of analytical interpretations. Writing in the Southern Quarterly, Nancy Hargrove, for example, examined Henley's vision of human experience in several of her plays, finding it "essentially a tragicomic one, revealing . . . the duality of the universe which inflicts pain and suffering on man but occasionally allows a
moment of joy or grace." Billy Harbin, writing in the Southern Quarterly, placed Henley's work in the context of different waves of feminism since the 1960s, exploring the importance of family relationships in her plays. While the family is often portrayed by Henley as simply another source of pain, Harbin felt that Crimes of the Heart differs from her
other plays in that a "faith in the human spirit. . . can be glimpsed through the sisters' remarkable endurance of suffering and their eventual move toward familial trust and unity." Henley's "success in finding fresh explorations of [her] ideas." With this
nuanced view, Harbin nevertheless conforms to the prevailing critical view that Henley has yet to match either the dramatic complexity or the theart. Lou Thompson, in the Southern Quarterly, similarly found a sense of unity at the end of the Crimes of the Heart but traced its development from of the dominant
imagery of food in the play. While the characters eat compulsively throughout, foraging in an attempt "to fill the void in the spirit—a hunger of the heart mistaken for hunger of the stomach," the sisters share Lenny's birthday cake at the end of the play "to celebrate their new lives." CRITICISM Christopher Busiel Busiel holds a Ph.D. in English from the
University of Texas. In this essay he discusses Henley's dramatic technique. While Crimes of the Heart does have a tightly-structured plot, with a central and several tangential conflicts, Henley's real emphasis, as Nancy Hargrove suggested in Southern Quarterly, is "on character rather than on action." Her characters are basically good people who
make bad choices, who act out of desperation because of the overwhelming sense of isolation, rejection, and loneliness in their lives. Speaking of Babe in particular, Henley said in Saturday Review: "I thought I'd like to write about somebody who shoots somebody else just for being mean. Then I got intrigued with the idea of the audience's not finding
fault with her character, finding sympathy for her." This basic premise is at the center of Henley's theatrical method, which challenges the audience to like characters who do horrible things," Henley said in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights, "but whom you can still
like . . . because of their human needs and struggles . . . . I try to understand that ugliness is in everybody. I'm constantly in awe that we still seek love and kindness even though we are filled with dark, bloody, primitive urges and desires." Henley's drama effectively illustrates the intimate connection between these two seemingly disparate aspects of
human nature. Henley achieves a complex perspective in her writing primarily by encouraging her audience to laugh, along with the characters, at the tragic and grotesque aspects of life. Tragic events treated with humor abound in Crimes of the Heart, powerful reminders of the intention behind Henley's technique. For example, when Babe finally
reveals the details of her shooting of Zackery, the audience is no doubt struck by her matter-of-fact recounting of events: "Well, after I shot him, I put the gun down on the piano bench, and then I went out in the kitchen and made up a pitcher of lemonade." While Babe's story lends humor to the present moment in the play (a scene between Babe and
her lawyer, Barnette), we can appreciate the human trauma behind her actions. Writing in the New York Times, Walter Kerr identified in Henley's play "the ground-rules of matter-of-fact Southern grotesquerie," which is "by no means altogether artificial. People do such things and, having done them, react in surprising ways." As the scene continues
however, Henley may perhaps push her point too far; Babe's actions begin to seem implausible except in the context of Henley's dramatic need to achieve humor. Babe recounts: "Then I called out to Zackery, I've made some lemonade. Can you use a glass?'... He was looking up at me trying to speak words. I said 'What?...
 Lemonade? . . . You don't want it? Would you like a Coke instead?' Then I got the idea—he was telling me to call on the phone for medical help." In a realistic context the audience understands that Babe is still in shock, not thinking clearly. At the same time, however, it is difficult not to find her unbelievably dense—or, from a dramatic perspective,
becoming more of a caricature to serve Henley's comedic ends than a fully-realized, human character. Moments like this are seized upon by Henley's harshest critics; Kerr, for example, wrote that Crimes of the Heart suffers from her "beginner's habit of never letting well enough alone, of taking a perfectly genuine bit of observation and doubling and
tripling it until it's compounded itself into parody." Even Kerr admitted, however, that despite moments of seeming excess, "Crimes of the Heart is clearly the work of a gifted writer." Most other critics, meanwhile, have been more enthusiastic in their praise of Henley's technique. Far from finding in Crimes of the Heart a kind of parody, they have
elucidated how real Henley's characters seem. Hargrove offered one possible explanation for this phenomenon, finding that one of "the real strengths of Henley's work is her use of realistic details from everyday life, particularly in the actions of the characters. These details reinforce the idea that ordinary life is like this, a series of small defeats
happening to ordinary people in ordinary people in ordinary family relationships. Her characters unobtrusivelyWHAT DO I READ NEXT? The Miss Firecracker Contest (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1985). Henley's most successful play next to Crimes of the Heart. Also set in a small Mississippi town (Brookhaven), it follows the trials and tribulations of Carnellog (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1985).
Scott, a twenty-four-year-old woman with a bad reputation in town who seeks to redeem herself by winning the title of Miss Firecracker for the Fourth of July celebration. With a cast full of very odd characters who, like Carnelle, seek some kind of redemption from their lives, the play probes the grotesque even more so than Crimes of the Heart. While
some critics have suggested that Henley merely reworks the same ideas from play to play, others have found The Miss Firecracker Contest a fresh, original expression of Henley's unique view of life in small southern towns. The play was adapted into a film in 1989, starring Holly Hunter. Marsha Norman: 'night, Mother. Henley and Marsha Norman
are often compared and/or contrasted to one another because they each won a Pulitzer Prize for Drama in the early 1980s. Reading this play helps highlight the similarities and differences between the two playwrights. Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works (New York: Library of America, 1988) and The Complete Stories (New York: Farrar, Straus and
Giroux, 1971). Reading some of the work of this legendary writer of the "Southern Gothic" tradition, you can judge for yourself the validity of the connections numerous critics have drawn between her work and Henley's plays. Carol S. Manning, editor, The Female Tradition in Southern Literature (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993). A
collection of essays both on specific writers, and on topics such as "Southern Ladies and the Southern Literary Renaissance" and "Spiritual Daughters of the Black American South." Containing extensive analysis of Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, two writers of "Southern Ladies and the Southern Ladies and the Southern Ladies and the Southern Ladies and the Southern Containing extensive analysis of Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, two writers of the Black American South."
quite useful in placing Henley within a historical continuum of southern women writers, and examining common threads of experience with other writers from whom she differs in other ways. John B. Boles, editor, Dixie Dateline: a Journalistic Portrait of the Contemporary South (Houston: Rice University Press, 1983). A collection of eleven essays by
eminent journalists, presenting a variety of perspectives on the South, its culture, its history, and its future but constantly are doing the mundane things that go on in daily life."The roots of our modern theatre in ancient Greece established a strict divide between comedy and tragedy (treating them as separate and distinct genres); more than two
thousand years later, reactions to Henley's technique suggest the powerful legacy of this separation. Audiences and critics were either pleasantly surprised by Crimes of the Heart—finding the dramatic interweaving of the tragic and comedic refreshingly original—or, less frequently, were shocked by what appeared to be Henley's flippant perspective.
on life's difficulties. The scene in which the sisters learn that Old Granddaddy has suffered a second stroke in the hospital, and is near death, is another powerful example of Henley's strategy of treating the tragic with humor. Meg, feeling guilty for having lied to her grandfather about her singing career, is resolved to return to the hospital and tell
him the truth: "He's just gonna have to take me like I am. And if he can't take it, if it sends him into a coma, that's just too damn bad." Struck by the absurdity of this comment (for Meg, unlike Lenny and Babe, does not yet know that her grandfather already is in a coma), Meg'ssisters break into hysterical laughter. The resulting scene depicts them
swinging violently from one emotional extreme to the other. "I'm sorry," Lenny says, momentarily gaining control. "It's—it's not funny. It's sad. It's very sad. We've been up all night long." When Meg asks if Granddaddy is expected to live, however, Babe's response "They don't think so" sends the sisters, inexplicably, into another peal of laughter.
While on the surface, the laughter (both that of Lenny and Babe, and that generated among the audience) seems shockingly flippant, the moment is devastatingly human. The audience sees the deepest emotions of characters who have been pushed to the brink, and with no place else to go, can only laugh at life's misfortunes. While the mistakes her
characters have made are the source of both the conflict and the humor of Crimes of the Heart, Henley nevertheless treats these characters with great sympathy. Jon Jory, who directed the first production of Crimes of the Heart, Henley nevertheless treats these characters with great sympathy. Jon Jory, who directed the first production of Crimes of the Heart in Louisville, observed in the Saturday Review that "most American playwrights want to expose human beings. Beth Henley nevertheless treats these characters with great sympathy.
embraces them." With the possible exception of Chick, whose exaggerated concern for what is "proper" provides a foil to Lenny and her sisters, Henley's characters seem tangibly human despite the bizarre circumstances in which the audience sees them. "Like Flannery O'Connor," Scott Haller wrote in the Saturday Review, "Henley creates ridiculous
characters but doesn't ridicule them. Like Lanford Wilson, she examines ordinary people with extraordinary compassion." While in later plays Henley was to write even more exaggerated characters who border on caricatures, Crimes of the Heart remains a very balanced play in this respect. Jory noted that what struck him about the play initially was
this sense of balance: "the comedy didn't come from one character but from between the characters. That's very unusual for a young writer." While humor permeates Crimes of the Heart, it is often a hysterical humor, as in the scene where Meg is informed of her grandfather's impending death. Just as Lou Thompson has observed in the Southern
Quarterly that the characters eat compulsively throughout the play, a "predominant metaphor for... pathological withdrawal," so the laughter in the play is equally compulsive, more often an expression of pain than true happiness. By the conclusion of Crimes of the Heart, however, hysterical laughter has been supplanted by an almost serene sense
of joy—however mild or fleeting. Lenny expresses a vision of the three sisters "smiling and laughing together... it wasn't for every minute. Just this one moment and we were all laughing." In addition to drawing strength from one another, finding a unity that they had previously lacked, the sisters appear finally to have overcome
much of their pain (and this despite the fact that many of the play's conflicts are left unresolved). They have perhaps found an absolution which Henley, tellingly, has described as a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry," she stated in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights. "I've written about ghastly, black here is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry," she stated in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights. "I've written about ghastly, black here is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry," she stated in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights. "I've written about ghastly, black here is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry," she stated in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights. "I've written about ghastly, black here is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry," she stated in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights. "I've written about ghastly, black here is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry," she stated in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights. "I've written about ghastly, black here is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry," she stated in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights. "I've written about ghastly, black here is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry," she stated in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights. "I've written about ghastly with the play is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry, and the play is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry, and the play is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry, and the play is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry, and the play is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry, and the play is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry, and the play is a process of writing always helps me not to feel so angry, and the play is a process of writ
feelings and thoughts that I've had. The hope is that if you can pin down these emotions and express them accurately, you will somehow be absolved."Source: Christopher Busiel, in an essay for Drama for Students, Gale, 1997. Frank RichIn the following favorable review of Crimes of the Heart, Rich comments on Henley's ability to draw her audience
into the lives and surroundings of her characters. Rich argues that Henley "builds from a foundation of wacky but consistent logic until she's constructed a funhouse of perfect-pitch language and ever-accelerating misfortune." Rich is an American drama critic. [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions] [This text has 
to author restrictions]Source: Frank Rich, "Beth Henley's Crimes of the Heart," in the New York Times, November 5, 1981. John SimonIn the following review, Simon applauds Crimes of the Heart, asserting that the play "bursts with energy, merriment, sagacity, and, best of all, a generosity toward people and life that many good writers achieve only in
their most mature offerings, if at all."Simon is a Yugoslavian-born American film and drama critic. From time to time a play comes along that restores one's faith in our theater, that justifies endless evenings spent, like some unfortunate Beckett character, chin-deep in trash. This time it is the Manhattan Theatre Club's Crimes of the Heart, by Beth
Henley, a new playwright of charm, warmth, style, unpretentiousness, and authentically individual vision. We are dealing here with the reunion in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, of the three MaGrath sisters (note that even in her names Miss Henley always hits the right ludicrous note). Lenny, the eldest, is a patient Christian sufferer: monstrously accident
her energies and an unconscionable time dying. Babe Botrelle, the youngest and zaniest sister, has just shot her husband in the stomach because, as she puts it, she didn't like the way he looked. Babe (who would like to be a saxophonist) is in serious trouble: She needs the best lawyer in town, but that happens to be the husband she shot. Meg, the
middle sister, has had a modest singing career that culminated in Biloxi. In Los Angeles, where she now lives, she has been reduced to a menial job. She is moody and promiscuous, and has ruined, before leaving home, the chances of "Doc" Porter to go to medical school. She made him spend a night with her in a house that lay in the path of Hurricane
Camille; the roof collapsed, leaving Doc with a bad leg and, soon thereafter, no Meg. The time of the play is "Five years after Hurricane Camille," but in Hazlehurst there are always disasters, be they ever so humble. Today, for instance, it is Lenny's thirtieth birthday, and everyone has forgotten it, except pushy and obnoxious Cousin Chick, who has
brought a crummy present. God certainly forgot, because he has allowed Lenny's beloved old horse to be struck dead by lightning the night before, even though there was hardly a storm. Crazy things happen in Hazlehurst: Pa MaGrath ran out on his family; Ma MaGrath hanged her cat and then hanged herself next to it, thus earning nationwide
 publicity. Babe rates only local headlines. She will be defended by an eager recent graduate of Ole Miss Law School whose name is Barnette Lloyd. (Names have a way of being transsexual in Hazlehurst.) Barnette harbors an epic grudge against the crooked and beastly Botrelle as well as a nascent love for Babe. But enough of this plot-recounting
though, God knows, there is so much plot here that I can't begin to give it away. And all of it is demented, funny, and, unbelievable as this may sound, totally believable. "THE THREE SISTERS ARE WONDERFUL CREATIONS: LENNY OUT OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR, AND MEG OUT OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS IN ONE OF
HIS MORE BENIGN MOODS"The three sisters are wonderful creations: Lenny out of Chekhov, Babe out of Flannery O'Connor, and Meg out of Tennessee Williams in one of his more benign moods. But "out of" must not be taken to mean imitation; it is just a legitimate literary genealogy. Ultimately, the sisters belong only to Miss Henley and to
themselves. Their lives are lavish with incident, their idiosyncrasies insidiously compelling, their mutual loyalty and help (though often frazzled) able to nudge heart-lift. And the subsidiary characters are just as good—even those whom we only hear about or from (on the phone), such as the shot husband, his shocked sister, and a
sexually active fifteen-year-old black. Miss Henley is marvelous at exposition, cogently interspersing it with action, and making it just as lively and suspenseful as the actual happenings. Her dialogue is equally fine: always in character (though Babe may once or twice become too benighted), always furthering our understanding while sharpening our
curiosity, always doing something to make us laugh, get lumps in the throat, care. The jokes are juicy but never gratuitous, seeming to stem from the characters rather than from the author, and seldom lacking implications of a wider sort. Thus when Meg finds Babe outlandishly trying to commit suicide because, among other things, she thinks she
will be committed, Meg shouts: "You're just as perfectly sane as anyone walking the streets of Hazlehurst, Mississippi." On one level, this is an absurd truth. It is also a touching expression of sisterly solidarity, while deriving its true funniness from the context. Miss Henley plays, juggles, conjures with context—
Hazlehurst, the South, the world. The play is in three fully packed, old-fashioned acts, each able to top its predecessor, none repetitious, dragging, predictable. But the author's most precious gift is the ability to balance characters between heady poetry and stalwart prose, between grotesque heightening and compelling recognizability—between
absurdism and naturalism. If she errs in any way, it is in slightly artificial resolutions, whether happy or sad. . . . I have only one fear—that this clearly autobiographical play may be stocked with the riches of youthful memories that many playwrights cannot duplicate in subsequent works. I hope this is not the case with Beth Henley; be that as it may,
Crimes of the Heart bursts with energy, merriment, sagacity, and, best of all, a generosity toward people and life that many good writers achieve only in their most mature offerings, if at all. Source: John Simon, "Sisterhood is Beautiful" in New York, Vol. 14, No. 2, January 12, 1981, pp. 42, 44. FURTHER READINGBeaufort, John. "A Play that Proves
There's No Explaining Awards" in the Christian Science Monitor, November 9, 1981, p. 20.A very brief review with a strongly negative opinion of Crimes of the Heart that is rare in assessments of Henley's play. Completely dismissing its value, Beaufort wrote that Crimes of the Heart is "a perversely antic stage piece that is part eccentric
characterization, part Southern fried Gothic comedy, part soap opera, and part patchwork plotting. "Berkvist, Robert. "Act I: The Pulitzer, Act II: Broadway" in the New York Times, October 25, 1981, p. D4. An article published a week before Crimes of the Heart's Broadway opening, containing much of the same biographical information found in more
detail in later sources. Berkvist focused on the novelty of a playwright having such success with her first full-length play, and summarizes the positive reception of the play in Louisville and in its Off-Broadway run at the Manhattan Theatre,
particularly Broadway. Betsko, Kathleen, and Rachel Koenig. "Beth Henley" in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights, Beach Tree Book, 1987, pp. 211-22. An interview conducted as Henley was completing her play The Debutante Ball. Henley discussed her writing and revision process, how she responds to rehearsals and opening nights.
her relationship with her own family (fragments of which turn up in all of her plays), and the different levels of opportunity for women and men in the contemporary theatre. Corliss, Richard. "I Go with What I'm Feeling" in Time, February 8, 1982, p. 80. A brief article published during the successful Broadway run of Crimes of the Heart to introduce
Henley to a national audience. Corliss stated concisely and cleverly the complexities of Henley's plays are made of." Corliss observed that Henley's plays are "deceptively simple. . . . By the end of the evening, caricatures have been fleshed into characters,
jokes into down-home truths, domestic atrocities into strategies for staying alive." Henley is quoted in the article stating that "I'm like a child when I write, taking chances, never thinking in terms of logic or reviews. I just go with what I'm feeling." The article documents a moment of new-found success for the young playwright, facing choices about
the direction her career will take her. Feingold, Michael. "Dry Roll" in the Village Voice, November 18-24, 1981, p. 104. Perhaps the most negative and vitriolic assessment of Crimes of the Heart in print. (The title refers to the musical Merrily We Roll Along, which Feingold also discussed in the review.) Feingold finds the play completely disingenuous,
even insulting. He wrote that it "gives the impression of gossiping about its characters rather than presenting them . . . never at any point coming close to the truth of their lives." Feingold gave some credit to Henley's "voice" as a playwright, "both individual and skillful," but overall found the play "hollow," something to be overcome by the "magical
performances" of the cast.Gussow, Mel. "Women Playwrights: New Voices in the Theatre" in the New York Times Sunday Magazine, May 1, 1983, p. 22.Discusses Henley along with numerous other contemporary women playwrights, in an article written on the occasion of Marsha Norman winning the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Gussow traced a
history of successful women playwrights, including Lillian Hellman in a modern American context, but noted that "not until recently has there been anything approaching a movement." Among the many underlying forces which paved the way for this movement, Gussow mentioned the Actors' Theater of Louisville, where Henley's Crimes of the Heart
premiered. Haller, Scott. "Her First Play, Her First Play, Her
Based on an interview with the playwright, the article is primarily biographical, suggesting how being raised in the South provides Henley's "unlikely dramatic alliance" between "the conventions of the naturalistic play" and "the unconventional protagonists of
absurdist comedy" gives Henley what Haller called her "idiosyncratic voice," which audiences have found so refreshing. Harbin, Billy J. "Familial Bonds in the Plays of Beth Henley's work in the context of different waves of feminism since the 1960s. Hargrove,
Nancy D. "The Tragicomic Vision of Beth Henley's Drama" in the Southern Quarterly, Vol. 22, no. 4, 1984, pp. 80-94. Hargrove examines Henley's first three full-length plays, exploring (as the title suggests) the powerful mixture of tragedy and comedy within each. Heilpern, John. "Great Acting, Pity about the Play" in the London Times, December 5,
1981, p. 11.A review of three Broadway productions, with brief comments on Crimes of the Heart. "I regret," Heilpern mused, he found the play bizarre and unsatisfying because as a British critic he suffered from "a serious culture gap." Instead of a complex, illuminating
play (as so many American critics found (Crimes of the Heart), Heilpern saw only "unbelievable 'characters' whose lives were a mere farce. I could see only Southern 'types', like a cartoon." Jones, John Griffin. "Beth Henley" in Mississippi Writers Talking, University Press of Mississippi, 1982, pp. 169-90. A rare interview conducted before Henley won
the Pulitzer Prize for Crimes of the Heart. As such, it focuses on many biographical details from Henley's life, which had not yet received a great deal of public attention. Kauffmann, Stanley. "Two Cheers for Two Plays" in the Saturday Review, Vol. 9, no. 1, 1982, pp. 54-55. A review of the Broadway production of Crimes of the Heart. Kauffmann
praised the play but says its success "is, to some extent, a victory over this production." Kauffmann identified some faults in the play (such as the amount of action which occurs offstage and is reported) but overall his review of
the Broadway production of Crimes of the Heart, Kerr's perspective on the play is a mixed one. He offers many examples to support his opinion. Kerr is insightful about the delicate balance Henley strikes in her play—between humor and tragedy, between the hurtful actions of some the characters and the positive impressions of them the audience is
nevertheless expected to maintain.McDonnell, Lisa J. "Diverse Similitude: Beth Henley and Marsha Norman" in the Southern Quarterly, Vol. 25, no. 3, 1987, pp. 95-104. A comparison and contrasting of the techniques of southern playwrights Henley and Norman, who won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama within two years of one another. The playwrights
share "their remarkable gift for storytelling, their use of family drama as a framework, their sensitive delineation of character and relationships, their employment of bizarre Gothic humor and their use of the southern vernacular to demonstrate the poetic lyricism of the commonplace." Despite the similarities between them (which do go far beyond
being southern women playwrights who have won the Pulitzer), McDonnell concluded that "they have already, relatively early in their playwriting careers, set themselves on paths that are likely to become increasingly divergent." Oliva, Judy Lee. "Beth Henley" in Contemporary Dramatists, 5th edition, St. James Press, 1993. 290-91. A more recent
assessment which includes Henley's play Abundance, an epic play spanning 25 years in the lives of two pioneer women in the nineteenth century. Oliva examined what she calls a "unifying factor" in Henley's plays: "women who seek to define themselves outside of their relationships with men and beyond their family environment." In Oliva's
assessment, "it is Henley's characters who provide unique contributions to the dramaturgy." As important to Henley's plays as the characters for help. "Simon, John. "Sisterhood is Beautiful" in the New York Times, January 12, 1981, pp. 42-
44.A glowing review of the off-Broadway production of Crimes of the Heart, which "restores one's faith in our theatre." Thompson, Lou. "Feeding the Hungry Heart: Food in Beth Henley's Crimes of the Heart, which "restores one's faith in our theatre." Thompson, Lou. "Feeding the Hungry Heart: Food in Beth Henley's Crimes of the Heart, which "restores one's faith in our theatre." Thompson, Lou. "Feeding the Hungry Heart: Food in Beth Henley's Crimes of the Heart" in the Southern Quarterly, Vol. 30, nos. 2-3, 1992, pp. 99-102. Drawing from Nancy Hargrove's observation in an earlier article that eating and
drinking are, in Henley's plays, "among the few pleasures in life, or, in certain cases, among the few consolations for life," Thompson explored in more detail the pervasive imagery of food throughout Crimes of the Heart. Willer-Moul, Cynthia. "Beth Henley" in The Playwright's Art: Conversations with Contemporary American Dramatists, Rutgers
University Press, 1995, pp. 102-22. A much more recent source, this interview covers a wider range of Henley's works, but still contains detailed discussion of Crimes of the Heart. Henley talks extensively about her writing process, from fundamental ideas to notes and outlines, the beginnings of dialogue, revisions, and finally rehearsals and the
production itself.
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