

Play Analysis: *Painting Churches* by Tina Howe

I. Given Circumstances

A. Environmental Facts

1. Geographical Location

- The play takes place in the house of Gardner and Fanny Church in Beacon Hills, a popular neighborhood in Boston, Massachusetts. This historic neighborhood is one of the oldest in the United States. In 1795, the Massachusetts State House was built in this neighborhood. This building and the surrounding area drew the interest of wealthy Bostonians and the area has remained affluent since then. It is known for its brick houses and sidewalks, gas lamps, and classical (Federal, Greek Revival, and Victorian) architecture. Since the area has been declared “historic,” the period architecture has been preserved. It is the traditional, historic nature of Beacon Hill that separates it from other Boston neighborhoods. It is known for being a small, tight-knit “village-like” community in contrast to the busy city streets. Beacon Hill is often associated with the most elite, upper crust of Boston society. One article refers to it as the “past and present home of the old-money elite.” Understanding the connotations associated with this neighborhood, Fanny’s embarrassment at Gardner’s mishaps makes more sense. She may be worried that her elite neighbors will perceive her and Gardner negatively. While Fanny wants to move to a smaller house to watch over him more carefully, she is also moving out of fear that Gardner’s old age will soil the Church family’s reputation with the Beacon Hill elite.
- According to *USA Today*, weather in Boston, Massachusetts is pretty unpredictable. Winters tend to be quite cold and summers fairly humid. The city’s coastal location, however, makes the temperatures less extreme than other parts of the state. The average high and low temperatures are 59 degrees and 43.6 degrees respectively. The city also gets a consistent supply of precipitation and it never really suffers from extended dry periods.
- Cotuit is a town on Cape Cod in the easternmost part of Massachusetts. According to the United States Coast Guard, Cape Cod is popular with both residents and tourists. It is described as having “quiet residents” amongst “sunny beaches” and “quaint towns.” In contrast to Boston, Cape Cod would seem like an easier

place for Fanny to watch over Gardner as he continues to struggle with his old age. The resident population in Cape Cod is 150,000, but it increases to three times that size in the summer months. Cape Cod contains 15 different townships, with individual villages populating each township. Cotuit is one of the villages in the township of Barnstable.

- SoHo (stands for South of Houston Street) is a neighborhood in the borough of Manhattan in New York City. It is known for its cobblestone streets and cast iron buildings. According to a historical article from the website “SoHo NYC,” the neighborhood was a haven for artists in the 1960s and “came to represent the hip, avant garde scene.” While Mags does not explicitly reference where she lives in New York City, she does mention that her latest art showing will take place at Castelli’s, a famous art gallery in SoHo. Since SoHo (especially during the 60s, 70s, 80s) was such an artistically sophisticated community, it makes sense that Mags may in fact live there. If not, I think it is safe to assume that she at least lives in a similar type of neighborhood in Manhattan or Brooklyn. Regardless, the quirky, “avant garde” nature of these neighborhoods makes for a sharp contrast with the more traditional, refined quality of Beacon Hill.

2. Date, Year, Season, Time of Day: April 20th-27th, 1978

- Date: The play does not provide a specific date for the action. It only indicates a “bright spring morning” for the first scene with each succeeding scene taking place within that same week. For my production, I have decided to set the play in late April (specifically the 20th-27th). From the scene descriptions (which I reference more explicitly in the “Time of Day” section), I concluded that Mags stayed with her parents for approximately a week before their move to Cape Cod.
- Year: Since the play was written in the year 1982 and Howe notes that the events of the play take place a “several years ago,” we can assume that the play takes place in the late 1970s. For my production, I have decided to set the play in the year 1978.
- Season: As already mentioned, the play takes place during the season of spring. Spring in Boston, MA is mild with temperatures averaging somewhere between 45 and 65 degrees. According to *USA Today*, Spring is one of the best seasons to visit the city of Boston.
- Time of Day:

- Act I, Scene I: Morning
- Act I, Scene II: 2 Days Later, Around Five in the Afternoon
- Act I, Scene III: 1 Day Later, Five in the Afternoon
- Act II, Scene I: 3 Days Later, Around Five in the Afternoon
 - Justification: Fanny starts drinking at one point, so we can assume it is around the couple's "happy hour," which in the previous two scenes occurs around five in the afternoon.
- Act II, Scene II: 1 Day Later (The Last Day), "Late Afternoon"

3. Economic Environment

- Throughout the play, Fanny references the family's economic well-being as a primary motivator for her and Gardner's move to Cape Cod. The character description for both Fanny and Gardner indicate that they come from "finer" families and, given the location of their house in one of the most expensive neighborhoods in all of Boston, it is safe to assume that the Church family belongs in the upper class (or at least the upper middle class). Despite their socioeconomic status, Fanny indicates several times that the family is struggling with money. In the first scene, Fanny is described as wearing a "worn" bathrobe (p. 9). As she is rifling through old belongings, she says of her Grandma's Paul Revere Spoons, "I don't care how desperate we get, these will never go! One has to maintain some standards (p. 10)." Later in the scene, Fanny says the following to Mags, "Things are getting very tight around here if you haven't noticed. Daddy's last Pulitzer didn't even cover our real estate tax, and now that he's become too dodderly to give readings anymore, that income is gone...(p. 25)." From these examples, it becomes clear that the Church family might be falling from their upper class economic status. By the end of the play, it's clear that Fanny's main motivation in moving is not the family's financial situation, but that does not negate it from being a secondary motivating factor. The Church family, though not poor by any stretch of the imagination, is falling down a few rungs on the socioeconomic ladder.
- During the 1970s and 1980s, the United States experienced its harshest economic downturn since the Great Depression. According to the US Department of state, stagflation – high rates of inflation combined with a stagnant economy – was the main cause for this economic recession. Unemployment rates peaked at

9% in 1975 and then subsided for a few years (including the year 1978 – the year in which the play takes place), but shot up again to 10.8% in the early 1980s. While the Church family makes no explicit reference to the effects of the economic downturn, it is clear that they were at least slightly affected by the economic slump plaguing much of the nation.

4. Political Environment

- Since the play is set in the United States, it can be assumed that the prevailing form of government is a representative democracy. Characters are granted rights to freedom of speech, religion, and protest. They are not living out of fear that an oppressive military state may punish them for their speech or behavior. The play's dramatic action is driven more by the politics of the Church family than the political environment of the United States or Massachusetts government. However, the prevailing attitudes and ideologies of said governments (particularly during this time period) may subtly color the behavior and shape the attitudes of the play's characters.
- The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of great protest and social upheaval in the United States. According to an article from the History Channel, dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War and later with the Watergate scandal created a national distrust in the United State government. The article also mentions a “conservative backlash” to the social liberalization of the late 60s/early 70s. Many middle and working class white Americans grew tired of “spoiled hippies and whining protestors” and also felt that the “government coddled poor people and black people at taxpayer expense.” This political movement naturally grew into the New Right, which advocated for less government and a return to “traditional social values.” This philosophy would lead to the rise of Ronald Reagan and social conservatism in the 1980s. In many ways, Mags resembles the counter culture of the 60s and 70s with her non-traditional clothing, her Pop Art influences, and her involvement in the avant garde art scene in SoHo. Fanny and Gardner, on the other hand, live a more traditional lifestyle. That is not to say that either of them would identify with the conservative philosophy of the Republican Party. Given their location in the urban center of Massachusetts – one of the most liberal states in the country – it makes more sense for them to identify with a more liberal political ideology. Still, this surge in

traditional thinking may influence some of Fanny's perception of Mags and her social circle. She shows disdain for Mags' "artsy friends" (p. 20) and characterizes Mags' eccentric boyfriends of the past as "creatures" – calling one "dreadful" and the other "peculiar" (pp.44-45).

5. Social Environment

- As indicated in the character descriptions, Fanny and Gardner Church both come from "finer" families. Gardner explicitly mentions growing up on Louisberg Square (p. 59), one of the most expensive streets in all of Beacon Hill. It is possible that both Gardner and Fanny's families have lived in the Beacon Hill area for multiple generations. This environment of tradition, elitism, and familial pride has a profound effect on the family's behavior and attitudes. It is clear that Fanny greatly values the Church's status in the neighborhood. She recalls her mother's artistic ability fondly. When discussing Mags' skills, she says, "[Mags] gets it all from Mama, you know...But talk about talent...that woman had talent to burn!" (23). Fanny also shows the importance of class status through disparaging remarks she makes towards Mags. At one point, she criticizes Mags's hair for being "common looking" and emphasizes that "no one in [her] family has *ever* had red hair" (p. 20). Later, when asking Mags to use her old sugarbowl to serve tea to her art students, Fanny snidely remarks, "Well, I'm sure none of [your students] have ever seen a sugarbowl as handsome as this before" (25). Again, part of Fanny's motivation to leave Beacon Hill is a fear that she and Gardner's old age will prove embarrassing enough to ruin the family's reputation among the Beacon Hill elites. She does not want to risk growing old in front of those who knew her and Gardner at the peak of their success.
- The play more broadly takes place in the New England area of the United States. New England is made up of the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts. The culture found in New England differs somewhat from other areas of the United States. In a study entitled, "What Are the Unique Traits of New Englanders," the authors elaborate upon eight different characteristics which are common to New England culture. I picked out a few traits which I found relevant to the characters presented in the play. The first trait (New Englanders Tend to Resist Change) helped to clarify some of Fanny and Gardner's motivations and attitudes.

Elaborating upon this trait, the authors note the following, “At its core, New England is known for people who ‘stayed and hung on,’ whereas others seeking opportunities may have gone west, to the south, or elsewhere. New Englanders are also known for hanging on to their family wealth gained in early days...” This helps to further illuminate why the Church’s decision to move is such a difficult one. By moving, they compromise their resilience as New Englanders. It damages their pride to acknowledge that they can no longer take care of themselves in such a home. This idea of “holding onto” the past also explains why Gardner so desperately holds onto his old poems and manuscripts in Act II, Scene I. Another trait observed in the study (New Englanders Tend to Value Tradition) explains how “New Englanders tend to have a sense of continuity with the past, partially because the past is so rich with significant events.” Fanny displays this trait in her prideful recollections of her mother mentioned earlier in the analysis. One final trait (New Englanders Tend To Be Self-Reliant) speaks to the importance of academics to New Englanders. The authors elaborate, “New England has the highest percentage of people across all regions with Bachelor’s degrees (21%) and with Graduate degrees (9.6%), compared to 15.7% and 6.7% respectively for the nation as a whole.” [Note: These statistics do not reflect data from the most recent census. They more accurately reflect the time period of the play.] It is clear from Gardner’s status as a poet and Mags’ education and status as an artist that higher education is of great importance to the Church family. The family also constantly references different poems and paintings as shows of their intelligence.

- One major factor of the social environment in *Painting Churches* stems from the elderly age of two of its characters. Since Fanny and Gardner are both between retirement and old age, I found it necessary to research the effects of age on family relationships to help clarify the actions and attitudes of the characters. In “Aging and the Family,” authors Stephen J. Bahr and Evan T. Peterson articulate the characteristics and common behaviors of individuals suffering from dementia. These included “impairments in memory, judgment and abstract thinking,” as well as “difficulty in naming familiar objects.” In the play, Gardner has a difficult time recalling memories of the past (such as Mags’ “masterpiece”). He also confuses the names of several acquaintances (On page 44, he

struggles valiantly with a name before Mags has to provide it for him). Another sign of dementia is “an increased risk of getting lost in familiar surroundings,” as well as “the inability to find one’s home due to a loss of visuospatial ability.” Fanny specifically mentions Gardner walking into their neighbor’s house and thinking he was at home (p. 24). Gardner also fumbles regularly and struggles to put away his coat properly. All of these examples indicate that Gardner is suffering from the early stages of dementia. The authors go on to explain how loved ones react to watching an individual age. They write, “Denials of the problems by both patient and family is usually the first reaction. Following denial come periods of anger, alternating with attempts to adjust to the situation.” When Mags comes home, she notices the problems with Gardner, but decides to ignore them. When Fanny tries to point out Gardner’s senility to Mags, she responds by insisting that “there’s nothing wrong with him” (p. 24). Fanny, meanwhile, is no longer denying that there is an issue. Instead, she turns her frustration into anger. When Gardner asks to help him locate one of his poems, she responds with anger and annoyance, “YES, I AM SURE I HAVEN’T SEEN IT! I JUST TOLD YOU I HAVEN’T SEEN IT” (p. 25). This anger turns into bitter laughter, as Gardner’s dementia becomes more of an impediment to the family’s packing. She says, “It means we can’t go out anymore. I mean what would people say...? My poet laureate can’t hold it in!” (p. 69).

6. Religious Environment

- Although the religion of the Church family is never explicitly stated, Howe has alluded to the family’s religious background in interviews. In “Speaking on Stage: Interviews with Contemporary American Playwrights,” Howe speaks about her desire to add minority characters to her latter plays. She says, “I sort of wanted to get away from the WASPy artsy-fartsy thing and I wanted to get away from New England.” From this reference, one can assume that the Church family belongs to the Anglican branch of Protestantism. Although their religion does not appear to overly color or influence their behavior, referring to the Church family as WASPs (White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestants) further confirms that their family belongs to a small group of wealthy elites.

B. Previous Action

- Fanny recalls a man from the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art wanting to purchase her Grandmother's Paul Revere Spoons. This is an example of Fanny grasping for an example of her family's high status. Now that Gardner is on the decline, she can only reinforce the family's prestige through recounting memories of the past (p. 10).
- Gardner recalls Aunt Alice giving them a silver tray. Fanny says it was actually her mother. This is an example of Gardner testing his memory to prevent its further decline (p. 12).
- Mags runs into the room and breathlessly recounts her delays at the train station to apologize for her lateness. She does so to prevent her parents, particularly Fanny, for harping on her for being late (p. 16).
- Mags elaborates upon how frustrating her past week has been. In doing so, she tries to gain the attention of her parents, who are busy fiddling with Fanny's zipper (p. 18).
- After Mags reveals the news regarding her new art show, Fanny mentions how her mother made a miniature of Henry James at the Atheneum, an art museum in Hartford, Connecticut. She mentions this to reinforce the family's elite status, but, in the process, makes Mags' achievement feel less important (p. 23).
- Fanny reminds Mags that she has not visited them in almost a year. She also tells Mags that Gardner walked into the wrong house a few weeks ago. She is poking and pinching at Mags to get her to notice Gardner's decline. She also guilties Mags for not visiting more often (p. 24).
- Fanny finds Gardner's old sledding galoshes. This triggers a memory of her and Gardner sledding on the Common during their youth. Fanny briefly grasps onto this memory as a way to distract her from Gardner's present state of mind (p. 30).
- As Fanny and Gardner jokingly recreate poses of famous paintings for Mags, she becomes increasingly annoyed with them not taking her art seriously. She then launches into a story from her first art show, in which Fanny criticized one of her portraits and embarrassed her in front of an important New York art critic (pp. 36-39).
- Gardner remembers his friend Pound buying him a pair of shoes in Rome. Again, he takes joy in remembering since he has been struggling so much with his memory as of late (p. 40).
- Fanny starts pestering Mags about not having settled down with a respectable man yet. She recalls all of Mags' past boyfriends with disgust and disappointment (p. 44).

- Mags recounts the story of being sent away from the dinner table to guilt her parents for not being more nurturing. She then continues the story of the “masterpiece” she created with crayons and a radiator. She does so to chastise her parents for not recognizing, affirming and praising her artistic ability at a young age. She brings all of this up to underline the point that her parents still do not fully appreciate the extent of her talent (pp. 48-54).
- Gardner’s recitation of a poem reminds Fanny of him during their younger years. She fondly recalls Gardner wooing her with poetry in their youth (p. 56).
- Fanny exposes Mags to the extent of Gardner’s decline by jokingly suggesting that she might kill herself. She then rationalizes the option of suicide by recalling how her Uncle Edmond jumped off the top of a church once he reached his 70th birthday (p. 62).
- As Fanny lays into Mags for criticizing her treatment of Gardner, she reveals that Gardner does not take her out anymore and that she has to amuse herself by going to thrift shops (p. 73).
- Mags finally confronts the changes in her relationship with her parents through recounting the story of losing her father amidst the phosphorous-filled ocean. In describing her emotional state at the time, she subtly acknowledges her fear of losing her parents, a fear that has become much more immediate as they enter the final stages of their life (p. 78).

C. Polar Attitudes

1. Margaret “Mags” Church

- How do I feel about my world?
 - Beginning: Despite her accomplishments, Mags Church still feels that the world is an unfair place in which she is often a victim. From her entrance, she is already blaming others for her problems. Instead of taking ownership over her lateness, she rattles off a list of events which prevented her from coming in on time (p. 16). Mags also fails to see the urgency of other people’s problems in comparison to her situation. When Fanny initially tries to speak to Mags about Gardner’s decline, Mags dismisses her concerns and says she’s “exaggerating” (p. 24).
 - End: By the play’s end, Mags has decentered from her perspective and realized that the magnitude of her parents’ problems overshadow her need for affirmation. While she still craves affirmation, it has become less important than her parents’ well-being. Mags is “moved to tears” at the

play's end by the beauty of her parents' relationship, not their admiration of her portrait (p. 83).

- How do I feel about my relationships?
 - Beginning: Mags feels admiration for her father because she shows more respect for her artwork and lifestyle than Fanny does. Upon greeting her parents, Mags initiates the hug with her father, but “pulls away” from the hug with her mother (pp. 17-18). At the same time, Mags tries to ignore Gardner's decline at the play's beginning. She rationalizes his behavior by saying “he's abstracted...that's just the way he is” (24). At the play's beginning, Mags' feels hurt by her relationship with Fanny. She is aggravated mostly by her mother's continued refusal to acknowledge her skills and accomplishments in any meaningful way. This motivates her lashing out at both parents at the end of Act I, Scenes II (regarding her first art showing), and III (regarding Mags' childhood “masterpiece”).
 - End: By the play's end, Mags has come to better understand the gravity of her parents' situation. As she pages through her father's scattered manuscript, she realizes the extent of his decline (p. 66). While Mags may still feel some resentment towards her mother, she has come to better understand her predicament after witnessing firsthand the extent of Gardner's decline and listening to her mother explain her primary motivation for moving to Cape Cod (p. 73). She also realizes the importance of holding on and cherishing her relationship with her parents, as they enter their later years. She conveys this through her retelling of the phosphorous memory (p. 78).
- How do I feel about myself?
 - Beginning: Mags does not feel completely confident or validated, despite her career successes. This lack of confidence manifests itself in her need for attention and praise from her parents, specifically when she announces the news of her recent booking at Castelli's art gallery (p. 22).
 - End: By the play's end, Mags feels validated by her parents' approval of her portrait. She exclaims gleefully, “They like it...they like it!” (p. 82). However, as mentioned earlier, her need for validation has somewhat

subsided at this point, because she realizes her parents' concerns have become more important.

- How do I feel about my prospects?
 - Beginning: Mags is uncertain of her ability to paint her parents and, in the process, come to an understanding of her relationship to them. She says, "That's why I've always wanted to paint you, to see if I'm up to it. It's quite a risk" (p. 48).
 - End: By the play's end, Mags feels more confidence in her understanding of her parents and their impending deaths. Through sorting out the emotional baggage from her past and exposing herself to the reality of her parents' situation, she has come to paint them (understand them) in a more meaningful way. Realizing how little time they have left, she chooses not to rush her parents out of the house once Kitty honks for them. Mags, with great sympathy and understanding, allows her parents (and herself) to bask in their joyful dance, before they leave to face their unavoidable mortality (p. 83).

Since Mags is the most primary character, her shifts in attitude are the most meaningful to the story and its themes. Fanny and Gardner's primary roles are to initiate these attitude shifts within Mags. That being said, Fanny and Gardner also go through shifts in attitude, albeit on a smaller, less dramatic scale.

2. Fanny Church

- How do I feel about my world?
 - Beginning: Fanny feels hopeless about the world at the play's beginning. She is trying to help Gardner by moving to their cottage in Cotuit, but she is also fairly pessimistic regarding her future. At several points, she casually mentions the possibility of suicide. Upset at Mags' lateness, she says, "Well, if she doesn't show up soon, I'm going to drop dead of exhaustion. God, wouldn't that be wonderful?...Then they could just cart me off into storage with all the old chandeliers and china..." (p. 15).
 - End: Over the course of the play, Fanny makes known her frustrations and, by the end, she has possibly reached an acceptance regarding her and Gardner's fate. While she does not explicitly reference this shift of attitude in

dialogue, Fanny's joyful waltz with Gardner suggests she is in a better state of mind (p. 83).

- How do I feel about my relationships?
 - Beginning: Fanny feels frustration in regards to her relationship with Gardner. Since his decline, she has felt lonely and bored. She tells Mags, "He doesn't spend any time with me anymore" (p. 24). Fanny expresses disappointment towards her relationship with Mags. She is upset Mags does not visit more often and is aggravated by her refusal to acknowledge Gardner's behavior. In argument with Mags, she says, "I'm just trying to get you to face the facts around here" (24).
 - End: Over the course of the play, Fanny becomes more frustrated by both Gardner and Mags. By the end, after she has made plain her frustration, she shows some affection for both of them. While looking at Mags' portrait of the couple, she flirts with Gardner, "Now, you look absolutely darling. Good enough to eat!" (81). Fanny's affection for Mags is less profound. She may still harbor some lingering resentment, but Fanny does manage a few compliments regarding Mags' portrait. This suggests that Fanny has somewhat forgiven Mags for her self-absorption. She notes, "Yes, she got my dress very well, how it shows off what's left of my figure...My smile is nice too" (81).

3. Gardner Church

- How do I feel about my relationships?
 - Beginning: Throughout the play, Gardner shows affection for Fanny, but also frustration with her lack of patience. Their conflict does not really come to a head until Act II though. When Fanny starts carelessly packing Gardner's books and manuscripts, he gets livid. He shouts, "YOU DON'T JUST THROW EVERYTHING INTO A BOX LIKE A PILE OF GARBAGE! THIS IS A BOOK, FANNY. SOMETHING I'VE BEEN WORKING ON FOR TWO YEARS...!" (p. 65). Early in the play, Gardner superficially praises Mags, instead of saying something meaningful regarding her personality or her artistry. After briefly complimenting her on winning the art show at Castelli's, he returns to his saltines rather than meaningfully engaging the conversation any further (p. 22).

- End: After their tense conflicts in Act II, Scene I, Gardner has reignited his affection for Fanny. As they are looking at Mags' painting, Gardner playfully flirts with her. When she mentions how well Mags has painted her dress, Gardner notes how it looks "very becoming...awfully becoming" on Fanny (p. 81). By this point, Mags has opened up to Gardner and expressed sorrow in regards to losing her parents (phosphorous monologue). This increases Gardner's affection for Mags even more and leads him to more substantively compliment her artistry. He says of her portrait, "Good lighting effects!...You're awfully good with those highlights" (p. 81).
- How do I feel about myself?
 - Beginning: Gardner feels lost and confused in regards to himself. He struggles to remember names, recall memories, and even is losing some of his motor skills. Howe notes that he is constantly dropping papers (p. 12). This state of confusion continues throughout the play as Gardner searches for nuggets of information, memories, or pieces of poetry to hold onto, in the hopes that it will return him to his former self.
 - End: By the play's end (after Fanny has exposed his decline through revealing the disorganization of his study), one can assume that Gardner is more aware of his lowered mental capacities. He feels more optimistic after Mags praises him for teaching Toots how to recite poetry (p. 76). The fact that Howe ends on Gardner lovingly dancing with his wife, while beautifully articulating the look and feel of a Renoir painting, indicates that Gardner is in a better place, despite the continuing challenges posed by his age (p. 83).

II. Dialogue

Margaret “Mags” Church

A. Choice of Words

Mag’s choice of words indicates that she has benefited from a strong education both at home and in school. She uses words such as “passé,” (p. 22), “abstracted” (p. 24), “languishing,” (p. 54), “iridescent,” (p. 78), and “disdain” (p.70). These words indicate a well-developed vocabulary. At the same time, Mag does not flout her vocabulary to show off her intelligence. She mostly communicates with simple words and phrases. Sometimes, she even incorporates slang such as “Jeez” (p. 19) into normal conversation..

B. Choice of Phrases

When Fanny or Gardner do not react or listen to Mags, she tends to use more exaggerated, colorful phrases to get their attention. When she’s telling them about her new art showing, she says, “Do you know how good you have to be to get in there? It’s a miracle...an honest-to God, star-spangled miracle!” (22). When she is yelling at Fanny later in the play, she repeats this tactic, “It’s so cruel...you’re so...incredibly cruel...I mean, YOUR DISDAIN REALLY TAKES MY BREATH AWAY! YOU’RE IN A CLASS BY ITSELF WHEN IT COMES TO HUMILIATION...!” (p. 70). Mags also uses phrases which indicate a sarcastic, witty sense of humor. As she is preparing her portrait, she cracks a joke about Rembrandt, whose artistic philosophy runs counter to her aesthetic. She says, “Rembrandt, eat your heart out! You 17th Century Dutch hasbeen, you” (p. 31).

C. Choice of Images

Mags uses a lot of similes and metaphors in her dialogue. This further clarifies her as a highly educated individual, while also illuminating her more imaginative side. When describing a hat Fanny wore to one of her shows, Mags says she was sure it “would take off and start flying around the room” (p. 37). She describes some of her former friends in animal-like terms. She mentions that one boy has a “weird nail” on his finger that “looks like a talon” (p. 44). She describes another girl as a “giraffe” (p. 46). Mags also uses a simile to describe her physical appearance as a child when her parents sent her away from the dining table. She says, “I looked like a scarecrow what with the bags under my eyes and bits of crayon wrapper leaking out of my clothes” (53).

D. Choice of Peculiar Characteristics

Mags calls her mother “mummy” (p. 28) instead of “mom” or “mommy.” I found this peculiar because I thought only English families used that word. She also makes loud nonverbal noises in reaction to extreme stimuli. When Mags locates

her easel, she loudly reacts, “AHHHHHHH, here it is” (p. 20). When she is eating a bowl of tapioca, she exclaims “Mmmmmmmmm...” (p. 42) in delight. In reaction to her mother suggesting Lyman Wigglesworth as a potential husband, she shouts, “Uuuuugghhhhh!” (p. 44) in disgust.

E. The Sound of the Dialogue

Mags’ dialogue tends to have a rambling quality to it. Since she tends to go on rants, it sounds like an endless babble of words spoken at a quick pace. The list-like nature of her rants also contributes to her dialogue’s rambling quality. For example, see Mags first speech (in which she recounts her trip from New York to Boston) on page 16.

F. Structure of Lines and Speeches

In her dialogue, Mags tends to use simple, complete sentences, unless she is telling a story or attempting to make a broader point. In those cases, she pauses in the middle of sentences to insert an interrupting thought, or she uses more complex sentences (often with lists) to better convey her point. All of this shows that Mags is well-educated, but also prone to rambling and wordiness. She displays these characteristics when explaining why she enjoys painting portraits. She says, “You can be as plain as a pitchfork, as in articulate as mud, but it doesn’t matter because you’re completely concealed: your body, your face, your intentions. Just as you make your most intimate move, throw open your soul...they stretch and yawn, remembering the dog has to be let out at five...To be so invisible while so enthralled...it takes your breath away!” (pp. 47-48).

Fanny Church

A. Choice of Words

Much of Fanny’s word choice indicates both her age and her social class. She constantly uses the word “darling” in reference to both Gardner and Mags. This term was more often used in the 1950s, when Fanny was in her 30s and 40s. Fanny also uses the word “distinguished” (p. 10) to describe respectable men and “cachet” (p. 15) to describe items of great prestige or significance. These two word choices identify her as not only belonging to a higher social class, but also seeing great importance in her status.

B. Choice of Phrases

Fanny uses a lot of idioms and clichés. These indicate her age, as well as the more whimsical nature of her personality. She speaks of items costing a “pretty penny” (p. 9) and tells the impatient Mags to “hold [her] horses a minute” (p. 26). Fanny also uses a lot of French phrases, which she uses to project an image of sophistication. She uses the French phrase “comme il faut” to describe her and Gardner’s proper appearance. Later, she uses the phrase “finite la commedia” (meaning “the farce is over”) to bitterly describe her and Gardner’s situation.

Later in that monologue, she uses the phrase “L’homme propose, Dieu dispose!” (meaning “Man proposes; God disposes”) to describe her inability to fix her situation (p. 73).

C. Choice of Images

Fanny’s use of images reveals her exaggeratory tendencies. At one point, she disapproves of Gardner’s clothing and says he “looks like some derelict out on the street” (p. 45). At another point, she compares posing for a portrait to “Chinese water torture” (p. 57). When describing the mess in Gardner’s study, she proclaims, “WE NEED A STEAM SHOVEL FOR THIS!” (p. 64). Fanny’s images also reveal her alarming obsession with death and suicide. In the first scene, she says, “This damned move is going to kill me! Send me straight to my grave!” (p.13). She then speaks of dropping dead of exhaustion and notes, “God, wouldn’t that be wonderful?...Then they could just cart me off into storage with all the old chandeliers and china...”(p. 15).

D. Choice of Peculiar Characteristics

Fanny engages in a lot of yelling in the play. Often, she is yelling across rooms to get the attention of Gardner or Mags, but she also yells an unusual amount in normal conversation. This amount of yelling indicates that she is at the height of her irritation with Gardner’s declining mental abilities. These details also reveal that Fanny is naturally a loud personality. Even when she joyfully greets Mags, Howe writes her dialogue in all caps: “OH, DARLING...MY PRECIOUS MAGS, YOU’RE HERE AT LAST” (pp. 17-18).

E. The Sound of the Dialogue

Similarly to Mags, Fanny’s dialogue also takes on a rambling quality. Her dialogue differs in that it usually includes more exclamation points, as Fanny speaks at a faster clip and a more excited tone than her daughter. Fanny’s dialogue is also punctuated with more uses of all caps. These piercing moments juxtapose with the more rambling segments to create a dynamic, slightly erratic, pattern of speech.

F. Structure of Lines and Speeches

The structure of Fanny’s speeches tends to consist of short, simple sentences which are sometimes interrupted by interrupting thoughts and pauses. She uses less complex sentences than Mags. Although she rambles, Fanny tends to get straight to the point. Her sentences are very concise and direct. Her pauses are not lapses in thought process, but rather her assessing how what she said has affected the other person. This is seen most clearly in her rant directed at Mags on pages 72-73.

Gardner Church

A. Choice of Words

Gardner's choice of words (with the exception of his poetry recitations) seems less sophisticated due to his old age. He tends to use very simple words to communicate. When responding to others, he will sometimes simply respond with a "yes" or a "right." With the decline in his mental capacities, he is less capable at retrieving his more complex vocabulary. Gardner also tends to use swear words more often than Mags and Fanny. His utterances of "OH SHIT" on page 12 and again on page 58 are signs of him losing control over his use of language. Normally, someone of his standing would not act on such an impulse, but, with his aging, he has lost some of that mental process.

B. Choice of Phrases

Gardner tends to repeat the same phrases over and over again. On several occasions, he refers to Mag and other women as "damned attractive" (p. 20) or "awfully attractive" (p. 33, p. 52). He also uses the phrase "wet your whistle" at two different points in the show (p. 19, p. 35). He repeats these and other key phrases, because he can recall them easily when he is expected to say something. This is a clear sign of someone who is suffering from a decline in mental capabilities, specifically dementia.

C. Choice of Images

Gardner only uses images when he is referencing poetry. He is usually reciting poetry that he is analyzing for his new book of criticism. The poets he regularly references include William Butler Yeats, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, and Theodore Roethke. Looking at research on the work of these poets, many of them have written poems contemplating old age, death, and the cruelty and humiliations of life. These are themes which undoubtedly would resonate with Gardner at this point in his life. Gardner also uses these poems as a way of bringing order to his life. When he cannot make sense of his current situation or is not following the conversation taking place between Fanny and Mags, he often recites a few lyrics of a poem to provide himself with a sense of purpose or meaning. In Act II, Scene I, when Gardner madly reciting poems, Fanny tells Mags, "He can't give up the words. It's best he can do" (p. 68) and she hands him another poem.

D. Choice of Peculiar Characteristics

Gardner, like Mags, also uses the word "Mum" instead of "Mom" (p. 17). He also, like Fanny, yells a good portion of his dialogue. Most of this yelling takes place when he is communicating with Mags or Fanny when they are in different rooms. However, he also yells when he gets irritated or angry with Fanny. This happens at the beginning of the play when he's trying to convince Fanny that his

coat was designed by Lily Daché (p. 14). It also happens when Fanny attempts to pack his overcoat (p. 40) and most profoundly when she starts packing his study (pp. 65-67).

E. The Sound of the Dialogue

Gardner's dialogue reads this rambling than the other two characters. His sound is simple and concise, but also vague – as if he had not quite finished his thoughts yet. These moments of vagueness are contrasted with outburst of confusion or anger. Gardner's pauses also differ from the other two characters, because his pauses do not come from an assessment of another's reaction, but rather to lapses in his mental process. The following quote shows how Gardner's pauses indicate his declining mental capabilities: "NOW HOLD IT...! JUST...HOLD IT RIGHT THERE...! (p. 65).

F. Structure of Lines and Speeches

The structure of Gardner's sentences tends to be fairly simple. He uses less complex sentence structure than Fanny and Mags. His one speech contains a lot of pauses which interrupt the middle of sentences. These pauses are not interrupting thoughts (like Fanny and Mags). Instead, they are pauses that Gardner takes to connect the dots when articulating complex sentences. He says, "I'm a child again back at 16 Louisberg Square...and this stream of moving men is carrying furniture into our house...van after van of table and chairs, sofas and loveseats, desks and bureaus...rugs, bathtubs mirrors, chiming clocks, pianos, ice boxes china cabinets...but what's amazing is that all of it is familiar..." (pp.59-60).

III. Dramatic Action

Act I, Scene III, Pages 49-54

Beginning Line – “Gardner: I couldn’t find the ice.”

Ending Line – “ Mags: They are strong...very very strong...”

Unit 1: The Apology

- G staggers
- F snaps
- G limps
- M pats
- G whimpers
- M massages

G stumbles F snaps M caresses

Unit 2: The Reminder

- F nudges
- M pokes
- F dodges
- M squeezes
- F tugs
- M tightens
- F wiggles
- M clamps
- F wriggles
- M hammers

M grabs F loosens

Unit 3: The Recollection

- F scratches
- G gropes
- F stings
- G grips
- F pecks
- G clutches
- F prods
- M taps
- G handles
- F slaps

G handles F shoves M taps

Unit 4: The Search

- F deflects
- G reaches
- F flicks
- G shoos
- F smacks

G searches
F slaps

Unit 5: The Guard

- M pokes
- F swats
- M pinches
- F stomps

M pricks
F blocks

Unit 6: The Revelation

- M stabs
- M cuts
- M twists
- G clasps
- M uncovers
- G tightens
- M points
- F masks
- M exposes
- G clenches
- F pricks

F covers
M points
G clenches

Unit 7: The Confrontation

- M pumps
- F sticks
- M strokes
- F snaps
- M boosts
- F shakes

M boosts
F shakes

Unit 8: The Explosion

- F begs
- G taps
- M slashes
- F grovels
- G pokes
- M fumes
- M slices
- F whimpers
- M jabs
- G reaches
- M grinds
- M crushes
- M beats
- F caresses
- M stings
- M burns

M beats
F pleads
G reaches

IV. Moods

Unit 1: The Apology

- Mood Adjectives:
 - Feels Sticky
 - Tastes Watery
 - Smells Musty
 - Sounds Raspy
 - Looks Disorienting
- Mood Metaphor:
 - This unit is like a whimpering dog begging for help.

Unit 2: The Reminder

- Mood Adjectives:
 - Feels Icy
 - Tastes Bitter
 - Smells Burnt
 - Sounds Hushed
 - Looks Scattered

- Mood Metaphor:
 - This unit is like a small child struggling to kindle a flame with a lighter.

Unit 3: The Recollection

- Mood Adjectives:
 - Feels Hot
 - Tastes Greasy
 - Smells Decayed
 - Sounds Shriill
 - Looks Orange
- Mood Metaphor:
 - This unit is like fleas nibbling away at a dead carcass.

Unit 4: The Search

- Mood Adjectives
 - Feels Jagged
 - Tastes Sour
 - Smells Stale
 - Sounds Loud
 - Looks Angled
- Mood Metaphor
 - This unit is like a bird pecking aimlessly for a specific worm in a tall patch of grass.

Unit 5: The Guard

- Mood Adjectives
 - Feels Sharp
 - Tastes Hard
 - Smells Sweaty
 - Sounds Rumbling
 - Looks Harsh
- Mood Metaphor
 - This unit is like a family quickly and intensely building a barricade with sandbags in preparation for an impending flood.

Unit 6: The Revelation

- Mood Adjectives
 - Feels Stinging
 - Tastes Acidic
 - Smells Rancid
 - Sounds Piercing
 - Looks Red
- Mood Metaphor
 - This unit is like a mouse furiously escaping the clutches of its predator.

Unit 7: The Confrontation

- Mood Adjectives
 - Feels Rugged
 - Tastes Dried Out
 - Smells Stuffy
 - Sounds Croaking
 - Looks Dark Blue
- Mood Metaphors
 - This unit is like a rattling car sputtering out smoke, as it slowly runs out of gas.

Unit 8: The Explosion

- Mood Adjectives
 - Feels Burning
 - Tastes Flavorless
 - Smells Noxious
 - Sounds Deafening
 - Looks Wounded
- Mood Metaphors
 - This unit is like a doctor cautiously, but purposefully, inflicting the pain necessary to heal a patient.

V. Characters

Margaret “Mags” Church

A. Desire

Mag Church wants love from her parents. More specifically, she desires approval and affirmation of her artistic abilities. From her monologues at the end of Act I, Scene II (regarding her first art showing) and Act I, Scene III (regarding her childhood “masterpiece”), Mags reveals that her frustrations with her parents has been a constant obstacle throughout her life. She directly tells them at one point, “You just don’t take my seriously! Poor old Mags and her ridiculous portraits...” (p. 36). Through painting her parents, she also hopes to better clarify her relationship with her parents. Mags understands the inherent difficulty to this task and acknowledges it verbally during Act I, Scene III. She says to her parents, “That’s why I’ve always wanted to paint you, to see if I’m up to it. It’s quite a risk” (p. 48).

B. Will

Mags displays her strength in attaining her goal through her persistence and her ability to stomach difficult situations. Even though it is difficult for her to do so, Mags finds the strength to confront her parents regarding their treatment of her. In doing so, she learns more about herself and others. She refuses to give up, no

matter how much her mother's comments (regarding her appearance, her art style, her social circle) hurt her. She also refuses to give up once she fully realizes the extent of her father's decline. She dives head into conflict with her family and emerges with a better understanding of her relationship to them.

C. Moral Stance

Mags values both her personal success and her family. At the beginning of the play, her personal success is more important. This is why she seeks the approval of her mother and father. Upon entering the house, Mags almost exclusively talks about herself – her ordeal at the train station, her busy schedule, and her new art show. She does not stop to ask her parents about their well-being. The closes she comes is telling them how much she is going to miss their house – again, a very egocentric statement. When Fanny tries to inform Mags of Gardner's decline, Mags ignores her because she does not want to face the facts. The reality of her father's decline is distracting her parents and preventing them from giving her their approval. All that being said, Mags still values her parents to a certain extent. The fact that she seeks their approval means that they are important to her. By the end of the play, once she realizes the transition taking place in her parents' lives, she realizes her need for affirmation is less important than developing a strong relationship with Fanny and Gardner.

D. Decorum

Mags was raised by Fanny and Gardner in a fine Bostonian neighborhood, so her behavior is not boorish or unmannered. That being said, Mags does not completely identify with the upper-crust New England decorum projected by her parents. Her posture is probably more relaxed than her parents, and her gait is less refined. She does not show as refined table manners when she is eating and, at one point, is described as slurping down her food. Mags also cares less about her physical appearance than her mother. She is not afraid to dye her hair a different color or dress in "tomboy" clothes. In the play's index, Howe describes her as wearing an assortment of t-shirts and pants. Her more casual fashion taste runs counter to Fanny's more formal sensibilities. Mags also shows little concern for

E. Summary List of Adjectives

- Persistent
- Self-Centered
- Casual
- Stubborn
- Artistic
- Bitter
- Needy
- Individualistic

- Wanting
- Hopeful
- Proud

F. Initial Character Mood-Intensity (beginning of scene):

- Heartbeat: A touch faster than normal
- Perspiration: light sweating on forehead
- Stomach: Knotted
- Muscle Tension: Tight in arms, hands
- Breathing: Average rate and depth

Fanny Church

A. Desire

Fanny desires help more than anything. She is overwhelmed by Gardner's declining mental capabilities and is seeking someone to share the burden with her, or at least better understand her situation. Specifically, she wants Mags to notice what's going on and provide support. Her obstacles includes Gardner's deepening decline (which makes her struggle harder on a daily basis) and Mags' refusal to acknowledge the problem, while instead bringing up painful memories from the family's past. Fanny also desires loves from her husband, but this desire is not as easily achieved now as it was back when the couple was still young. She wants to live her life normally, but she is hampered by Gardner. She reveals to Mags that she would "much rather stay in Boston with the few friends [she] has left" than look after her aging husband (p. 73). More immediately, Fanny simply desires to move the family out of the house in a timely manner.

B. Will

Fanny possesses a strong will in attaining her goals. Like Mags, she is persistent and constant in her drive to get what she wants. When she finally gets through to Mags at the end of Act II, Scene I, she is relentless in both her bluntness regarding her and Gardner's future, as well as her criticism of Mags' behavior. She is crafty in her abilities to motivate Gardner, as seen through her "pretend dive bomber" tactic which helps him to pack up his study (pp. 71-72). Although Fanny displays great strength, she also reveals frailty in her dialogue regarding suicide. On several occasions, Fanny jokes or references suicide as an option for her and Gardner. While her personal strength prevents her from attempting suicide, the fact that she keeps bringing it up signifies her uncertainty.

C. Moral Stance

Fanny values above all her family and her family's standing in society. In the case of Gardner, her valuing of family allows her to put his needs first. Instead of selfishly attempting to live in their Boston townhouse, she decides to move the family so that she can better look over him. While Gardner's behavior may

sometimes cause her to become impatient or, at worst bitter, she ultimately means well. In the case of Mags, Fanny's valuing of the family's class status prevents her from fully connecting with and appreciating her daughter. Instead of accepting her daughter for her individuality, Fanny constantly nags Mags by criticizing her appearance and artistic sensibilities. She shows remarkably little sensitivity for how her dismissive words might affect her daughter's self-esteem.

D. Decorum

Fanny's decorum is revealed through her social class. Her upper-class upbringing causes her to project a straight, dignified posture and a calm, light gait. Despite her upbringing, Fanny can still come off as rather tactless in social situations. This is evidenced through Mags' description of Fanny's behavior at her first art showing in SoHo. It is possible that Fanny cared less about her decorum in this social setting, since she would likely not come across someone she knew. Fanny is unafraid to look foolish, at least in the presence of her family. For example, she takes great joy in goofily imitating different paintings with Gardner at the end of Act I, Scene II. Finally, Fanny cares a great deal about her physical appearance. She dresses in her best clothes, even on days when she is not leaving the house. Fanny also takes great pride in her clothing, especially her signature hats. In fact, she takes such pride in her clothing that she gets offended when Gardner suggests that hat designer Lilly Daché also designed his coat.

E. Summary List of Adjectives

- Stubborn
- Traditional
- Persistent
- Silly
- Ignorant
- Loving
- Boisterous
- Opinionated
- Stressed
- Anxious

F. Initial Character Mood-Intensity (beginning of scene):

- Heartbeat: Slightly Faster (Excitement)
- Perspiration: Light, forehead
- Stomach Condition: Calm
- Muscle Tension: Tight Jaw
- Breathing: Normal Rate and Depth

Gardner Church

A. Desire

Gardner desires order and clarity in his life. With his mental health on the decline, he is struggling to make sense of his day-to-day life. He often finds himself lost and confused while in conversation. He experiences difficulty recalling names, places, and memories and is even struggling with some of his motor skills. He wants to return to his normal self, but he is constantly blocked by his crippling mental abilities. He clings onto memorized poems to provide himself a sense of order.

B. Will

Gardner possesses a strong will in attaining his desire. He struggles valiantly throughout the play to make sense of his life. He only comes close to giving up when he is struggling to formulate words to express him. This, however, makes his will considerably weaker than the play's other characters. Since Fanny and Mags have better control over their mental capacities, they are more competent in achieving their goals. Gardner's goal is also much more frustrating as his obstacle is far beyond his control. Since Gardner cannot prevent himself from aging, he continues to fight to retain some sense of order, but he will never reverse his aging and return to his younger self.

C. Moral Stance

Gardner values his life's work and his family, although he may put slightly more emphasis on the former as opposed to the latter. This is most evident when he physically hurts Fanny to prevent her from mishandling his books and manuscripts (p. 65). That being said, Gardner recognizes the need to affirm the actions of both his daughter and his wife. He constantly compliments both of them on their physical appearance and praises (albeit superficially) Mags' artistic achievements. One of the strongest moments of Gardner's moral stance comes in Act I, Scene III. As Mags is mercilessly criticizing herself to Fanny's delight, Gardner knowingly interrupts her by asking her if she wants a refill on her drink (p. 47). His intentional choice to cut-off Mags' self-loathing subtly reveals the value he places in his family's emotional well-being.

D. Decorum

Since Gardner's upbringing is similar to Fanny's, they share much of the same decorum. His gait and posture are straight, poised, and proper. Gardner displays good manners and conveys them in a calm, yet resonant, tone. Gardner differs from Fanny in his ability to control his decorum. With his declining health, Gardner is unable to control his balance. He is constantly tripping over himself, dropping papers, runs into objects and is even prone to wetting himself. These disabilities prevent him from coming off as poised and refined. Gardner also

cares less about his appearance than Fanny. While he dresses more formally than Mags, Fanny is constantly criticizing him over his choice of clothing.

E. Summary List of Adjectives

- Lost
- Confused
- Kind
- Proud
- Intelligent
- Well-meaning
- Hopeful
- Frustrated

F. Initial Character Mood-Intensity (beginning of scene)

- Heartbeat: Fast
- Perspiration: Heavy, Armpits and Forehead
- Stomach Condition: Dropped
- Muscle Tension: Tight Shoulders
- Breathing:: Fast Rate and Shallow Depth

VI. Idea

A. Meaning of Title

- The title *Painting Churches* refers to Mags painting a portrait of her parents, Gardner and Fanny Church. The title takes on new meaning when interpreted metaphorically. Mags is really painting her parents to better understand her relationship to them. She is attempting to see them from a more honest perspective. Mags sees this as both a risk and a challenge. In the end, Mags completes her portrait of her parents and comes to a greater understanding of her relationship with her parents and how that relationship will change as they transition into their elder years.
- When interpreted literally without any knowledge of the play, the title could refer to the act of painting a church. This, much like Mags' proposed portrait of Gardner and Fanny, seems like quite the difficult task. A church also works as a metaphor for a parent. To their children, parents share many resemblances to churches. Parents, like churches, are persons with whom we bestow great reverence, respect, and obedience. Also much like Churches (i.e. religions, not buildings), children tend to recognize the flaws of their parents once they grow older and develop a more complex outlook on the world.

B. Philosophical Statements

The characters in *Painting Churches* rarely make any overt philosophical statements. Most of the play's themes come from the results of the actions the characters take. However, the characters do make a few more philosophical observations which shed even more light onto the play's main ideas.

- “The great thing about being a portrait painter you see is, it’s the other guy that’s exposed, you’re safely hidden behind the canvas and easel. You can be as plain as a pitchfork, as in articulate as mud, but it doesn’t matter because you’re completely concealed; your body, your face, your intentions” (p. 48).
 - This quote sums up Mags’ philosophy for most of the play. Instead of taking a step back and observing her own behavior, she criticizes her parent’s behavior – both in the past and present. It is not until Fanny confronts Mags at the end of Act II, Scene I that Mags starts to realize her narcissistic tendencies.
- “Paint us...?! What about opening your eyes and really seeing us...?” (p. 73).
 - With this quote from Fanny, Howe is trying to communicate one of her main ideas: meaningful communication between individuals leads to a more truthful perspective on relationships. Instead of ignoring a problem (as Mags does with her father’s illness and Fanny does with her refusal to acknowledge her poor treatment of her daughter), Howe advocates putting everything out in the open in the hopes of strengthening relationships.
- “...Even as I was reaching for you, you were gone. We’d never be like that again” (p. 78).
 - This quote touches upon another of Howe’s main ideas – the importance of cherishing one’s time with family before it is too late. With her parents reaching their elder years, Mags realizes the importance of cherishing each moment with them before they disappear from her life and into her memories.

VII. Metaphor

- Light Imagery
 - Light is heavily emphasized from the very first moments of *Painting Churches*. Howe describes the light which enters from the soaring, arching windows as alternating between “harsh” and “dappled.” The harsh light symbolizes the tension which plagues the Church household. The dappled light symbolizes the family’s softer, imaginative side (Fanny and Gardner’s antics, Mags’ humor, etc.). Later in the scene, it is revealed that Fanny has

created a special cut-out lamp which dapples light across the room. This works to reinforce the play's lighting imagery. Lighting imagery is also used in reference to Renoir paintings. Fanny and Gardner reference a Renoir painting of a couple dancing in which the light "twinkles in the trees" to create a "marvelous glow" (p. 83). The harsh vs. soft contrast is also apparent in the show's music. Howe explicitly references Chopin's waltzes as appropriate scoring for the show. This music, while light and whimsical (soft), also features a blunter, heavier undertone (harsh). Mags' artistic influences also feature a soft (Impressionist) vs. harsh (Pop Art) contrast.

- Gardner's Dream
 - In Act II, Scene I, Gardner recounts a recent dream to Mags. In the dream, Gardner is back at his old house and movers are carrying familiar items into his house. Gardner watches as all of these items go by. He then watches as the movers carry people away. As one of the movers carries his bed away, Gardner attempts to jump on to it. He continues, "Just as I'm about to land, the bed suddenly vanishes and I go crashing down to the floor like some insect that's been hit by a fly swatter!" (p. 61). This dream symbolizes Gardner's fear of death. Him watching the movers carry familiar items away from him mirrors life getting away from Gardner. As he fights to find order and clarity in his life, he falls flat on the floor.
- Toots
 - Toots the bird in many ways represents Gardner. Toots repeats simple words and phrases, while also reciting poetry. Toots' literal cage represents Gardner's metaphorical cage – his body and its declining mental capabilities. Finally, Toots recites the poem "Gray's Elegy," which has been described by scholars as a "meditation on death." This makes sense given Gardner's developing fear of his own mortality.
- Boxes
 - The boxes which fill the space for the majority of the show also work as a metaphor. As the Church family is sorting through these boxes, they are also sorting through their "emotional baggage." As the tension mounts and more problems are revealed, the stage becomes messier to mirror the fractured relationships on stage. By the play's end, the Church family has revealed and resolved all or most of their "emotional baggage" and the stage is clear of the

resulting mess. Through this metaphor, Howe reinforces her main idea that families must communicate their problems to strengthen their relationships.