

The Value of x

by Lisa Nanni-Messegee
and Todd Messegee

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DEDICATION

To Mary Lechter and Kevin Murray

STORY OF THE PLAY

The Value of x centers around Hayden Ferovick, a successful female physicist at the height of her career who is tragically reaching the end of her life. The dying woman recounts key moments where her gender had a profound effect on her journey as a scientist and mathematician. Hayden's story begins to interweave with two women who shared her same struggle over three hundred years ago. Emilie du Châtelet, a colorful, upper crust French scientist who befriends playwright/poet Voltaire, creates the definitive translation of Newton's *Principia* – but is later wiped from most history books. Mary Fairfax Somerville, a Scottish woman of modest means, fights for her right to educate herself and even *own* books in the early 19th Century. These true stories from history blend together to reveal a bigger picture about the continuing struggle of women in the fields of math and science. Inevitably, Hayden will die... but as she passes she is greeted by Emilie and Mary, who reassure her that energy doesn't go away – it merely changes form – and that wonderful things are ahead for Hayden.

PREMIERE PERFORMANCE

The Value of x received its world premiere on Saturday August 8, 2015. It was produced by Acting for Young People and performed at TheaterSpace at George Mason University. It was produced by Mary Lechter and directed by Lisa Nanni-Messegee with original choreography by Ahmad Maaty. Co-scene and prop design by Andrew Flack and Lorena Berger; co-lighting design by Megan Gasztonyi and Mark Ormesher; and sound design by Perry Melat. Costume design by Jessica Teaford. Dialect coaching by Rebecca Wahls and Adam Lemos. Stage manager was Kaity Cookson. Assistant Stage Manager was Katie Nguyen. See the original cast at the end of the script.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

12 actors (5 m, 7 w) and can expand up to 42 (16 m, 25 w, 1 flex)

This play is flexible in cast size. With clever staging and some quick changes, the play can be performed with as few as 12 actors (5 m, 7 w) and can expand up to 42 speaking roles plus extras. The only role that should not be double cast is adult Hayden.

PRINCIPALS

HAYDEN FEROVICK: American, age 30. Brilliant, confident, curious, searching for answers. Vital, full of life.

HAYDEN (16): Brilliant, hopeful, excited.

HAYDEN (10): Sweet, strong, knows what she wants.

EMILIE DU CHATELET (adult): French. Wealthy, genius, charming, beautiful, determined, confident, clever.

EMILIE (16): Brave, wild, creative, charming and very clever.

EMILIE (10): Excited, eager to learn, a fast talker.

MARY FAIRFAX SOMERVILLE (adult): Scottish. Nervous but hopeful. Math genius. The stakes are high for her.

MARY (16): Withdrawn, secretive, an outsider, passionate about learning math.

MARY (10): Very curious about the world to the point of distraction.

PETER: American. Hayden's father. Encouraging with the best of intentions, loving, concerned.

SIR WILLIAM FAIRFAX: Scottish, age 35, Mary's father, a Naval officer. Appalled, determined.

LOUIS-NICOLAS: French, age 50, real person from history. Confident, amused, exasperated and encouraging up to a point.

VOLTAIRE: French, age 44, real person from history. Although physically frail, he's dashing and a charming companion. A celebrity of his time; dynamic, brilliant, witty. Lights up a room, and is prone to dramatics.

SUPPORTING

GABRIELLE-ANNE: French, age 30. Emilie's mother, real person from history. Fiercely proper, disapproving, concerned with appearances.

RENEE-CAROLINE: French, age 14, Emilie's cousin, real person from history. Proper, manipulative.

MARGARET: Scottish, age 29, Mary's mother. Protective, defensive, loving, concerned.

SAM (12): Scottish, Mary's older brother. Sweet to his sister.

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SAM (18): An advocate, willing to break the rules.

ANNE OGILVIE: Scottish, age 18, real person from history. Mary's "cool" friend who is a very positive influence.

MISS GREER: American, age 23, math teacher. Distracted but encouraging.

KARL: American, age 30, a philosophy professor. Cute but academic. Clean shaven. More curious than confident.

MR. BELL: Scottish, age 30. A publisher. Skeptical, then amazed and changed by what he learns.

MR. JAMES: American, age 55. Busy, experienced professional, exudes confidence.

APRIL STEVENS: American, age 27. Professional assistant, helpful, clever, keeps her intelligence under the radar.

MISS PRIMROSE: Scottish, age 50, strict, brutal. Although the character name is fictional, the school did exist, and these teaching methods were employed.

MISS JENTON: British, age 30, speaks in a clear, crisp British accent. Elegant, prim, no-nonsense dance teacher.

JANE: Scottish, age 16. Leader, eager to prove she's fashionable, has a mean streak.

ELIZABETH: Scottish, age 16. Follower, wants to be "cool."

ISABELLE: French, age 19, loyal servant to Emilie, curious, dutiful.

LONGCHAMPS: French, age 18, personal attendant to Voltaire, real person from history. Loyal, dutiful, secretly admires Emilie.

DOCTOR SANDS: (Flex.) American, age 35. Honest, good bedside manner.

KELLY: American, age 10, the leader.

CHERYL: American, age 10, a follower.

MRS. KENDRICK: American, age 40. An elementary school English teacher, skeptical.

DE FONTENELLE: French, age 60, male, real person from history. Fascinated, has a soft spot for little Emilie.

KYLE: Scottish, age 16. Moves with confidence, has a playful air. He's intrigued by Mary and flirts with her. To Mary, it comes off as teasing.

PROFESSOR ZIMMERMAN: British, age 50, male, an Oxford Professor, academic, encouraging.

KEMP: French, age 29, male. Emilie's former tutor. Emilie's swordfight and gambling are true stories from history.

IMMANUEL KANT: German, age 50, famous philosopher, real person from history. Pompous.

GAW: Scottish, age 25, male. Sam's former tutor, paranoid.

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DENISE: American. Hayden's mom. Patient but concerned.

GRACE: Scottish, age 15, sweet, awkward, nervous.

EXTRAS: Classroom students, townspeople, shy girl, Miss Primrose's girls, a group of onlookers, Emilie (Dancer), Jacques de Brun, a judge, women of the court, a Scottish couple, and girls and boys at the dance lesson.

TIME AND SETTING

Present day, France 1716 - 1738, and Scotland 1790 - 1820.

Time slows and bends in this play. The play takes place over the course of a second – it's the moment between Hayden being alive and dead.

Within this bending of time, we see the real world (present day). We see Hayden's past, Emilie's past and Mary's past. Hayden is able to penetrate all of these worlds.

We are in various locations and time periods. The play works very well if the setting is kept simple, with only bits and pieces used to represent an environment and time period.

Each ACT has been divided into smaller scenes for rehearsal purposes, but there should not be full blackouts or long breaks between scenes. The action should flow continuously from one scene to the next, with the only real break taking place between ACT I and ACT II.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

At times Hayden watches the action and cannot be seen by other characters onstage. The moments she *does* interact are indicated in stage directions and through dialogue.

Some of the dialogue is in French. The actor should speak the line in French. For the actor's convenience, the line is followed with a parenthetical translation. Please do not say the parenthetical line in performance.

Individuals are seen at various ages. In order to simplify this, younger versions of characters are referred to by their name and age, such as Hayden (10) or Emilie (16). When the characters are adults, they are referred to as simply Hayden, Emilie or Mary.

SFX

EKG machine, Train whistle, Cell phone ringing (use present day ring tone), Knock on the door, Thunder

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ACT I

Scene 1 – Hayden’s Introduction

(AT RISE: The stage is dark. HAYDEN walks into a tight pool of LIGHT. She’s confident, professional. She addresses the audience.)

HAYDEN: I’m Hayden Ferovick. I’m a physicist, a scientist, and mathematician. The road that brought me to this point in my life has been challenging and...unexpected. And I have to admit, right now, I’m wondering what’s next.

(A LIGHT shift reveals the shadows of others on stage, with their backs to us in various areas. They are EMILIE, EMILIE (16), EMILIE (10), MARY, MARY (16), MARY (10), HAYDEN (16), and HAYDEN (10). If needed, ensemble players can fill in for younger versions of Emilie, Hayden and Mary. HAYDEN crosses DSL, where we see an empty hospital bed. SFX: the quiet, consistent beeping of an EKG machine can be heard.)

HAYDEN: *(Cont’d.)* Years ago, I was at my mother’s side in the final moments of her life. Just before the light behind her eyes faded she said that she was being greeted by Martha Washington... and Marilyn Monroe. They were coming to take her... *somewhere*. I waited anxiously to hear where – *(SFX: The quiet beeping of the EKG flatlines.)* – but no answer came.

(SFX: The flatline sound fades. The bed rolls offstage as if by an unseen force. HAYDEN watches it go for a moment, contemplative.)

HAYDEN: *(Cont’d.)* One of life’s great mysteries, right? Where does that energy go? Sometimes I find myself wondering who will be there to greet me when *my* day comes. As a scientist I’m always searching for ways to explain the universe. But some things just don’t add up.

End of Freeview

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