Acting Edition

The Insanity of Mary Girard

by Lanie Robertson

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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For
ROSEMARY SEMINARA
whose support
and affection
has helped me
preserve
my own sanity.

THE INSANITY OF MARY GIRARD was first produced at The Painted Bride Art Center by Theatre Center Philadelphia on July 4, 1976. The producer was Albert Benzwie. It was directed by Cat Hebert; set and lighting designs by Cat Hebert; the production stage manager was Boris Grant. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

MARY GIRARD ..... Aldonna Page*

THE WARDER ..... Parry Kraatz

MRS. LUM ..... Sandy Rose

STEPHEN GIRARD ..... Cat Hebert

MR. PHILIPS ..... Christopher Whalen

POLLY KENTON ..... Bonnilu Young

MRS. HATCHER ..... Rebecca Goldstein

* Ms. Page was later replaced by Donna Dundon.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

MARY GIRARD: Mary is 29 years old, very pretty, strong peasant woman. Her coloring is dark, her hair long. She wears a fashionable, expensive dress.

THE WARDER: A strong man, Mary's age or older. He is dressed in knee breeches and barefoot. He wears a puff-sleeved shirt that is open at the neck and the sleeves are rolled up.

MRS. LUM: Mary's mother is in her late 40's. She wears good, clean clothes, but nothing fancy. She has a small lace skull cap on her head, a plain dress, and a shawl.

STEPHEN GIRARD: Mr. Girard is 39 years old. He is immaculately dressed in a fancy suit of frock coat and knee breeches, white socks and fine leather shoes, possibly of patent leather.

MR. PHILLIPS: Is the same age as Mr. Girard, and his appearance is very similar to that of Mr. Girard except that his clothing is all much rougher of texture. He should give the impression that "there but for the grace of God" goes Mr. Girard.

POLLY KENTON: Polly is about the same age as Mary. She is very pretty and does not have the rough strength of Mary. She appears both more intelligent and more sophisticated than Mary. She wears a lace cap, a fine but plain dress of expensive material. A gold watch is pinned to her bosom.

MRS. HATCHER: A woman in middle age. She is poor and dresses very plainly, with matching white cap and apron. Her dress is simple and of cheap material.

CHARACTERS
(In Order of Their Appearance)

MARY GIRARD, a very attractive woman of 29 years.

THE FURIES, three women, two men of any age.

THE WARDER, a man of middle age.

MRS. LUM, Mary's mother.

STEPHEN GIRARD, Mary's husband, ten years her senior.

MR. PHILLIPS, a steward of Pennsylvania Hospital and a man in his forties.

POLLY KENTON, a young woman.

MRS. HATCHER, a woman approximately Mary's own age.

TIME: A Saturday night in the Fall of 1790.

PLACE: A lunatic cell in the basement of the Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia.

NOTE: Although the events presented in this play are based on fact, there has been no attempt to accurately portray the personalities of those responsible for the incarceration of Mrs. Stephen Girard.

CHORUS: The FURIES should be presented in the following way:

FURY #1 should play the role of THE WARDER.

FURY #2 should play the role of MRS. LUM.

FURY #3 should play the role of POLLY KENTON.

FURY #4 should play the role of MR. PHILLIPS.

FURY #5 should play the role of MRS. HATCHER.

Fury #1 should think of himself as a "regressed child."

Fury #2 should have "delusions of grandeur."

Fury #3 should be an "obsessive/compulsive."

Fury #4 should be "active/passive" usually in a catatonic state.

Fury #5 should be an "hysteric."

The segments of lines should be almost equally divided among Furies 1, 2, 3, and 5. Fury #4 should say much less but always the "Dr. Rush" references. Fury #5 should deliver most of the "God" and "Jesus" words, etc.

The Insanity of Mary Girard

AT RISE *the stage is bare except for* MARY GIRARD *who is seated, bound in the* TRANQUILIZING CHAIR. *This is a device used for "excitable patients" who were insane or believed to be. There are leather straps to bind down the wrists, the arms, the chest and thighs, iron rings to go about the ankles, and a square box that swings down over the head. As the* LIGHTS *gradually* COME UP, *several figures* ENTER *from different directions. These are the* FURIES. *They circle about the chair. One of them lifts the box and we see* MARY'S *face for the first time.*

MARY GIRARD *is a very attractive woman, twenty-nine years old. Her eyes and hair are dark. She seems at first asleep or in a coma. Then she becomes very aggitated and strains against her bonds.*

FURIES. (*Tauntingly.*) Mary. Mary Girard. Polly. Polly. Polly-Mary. Girard.

MARY. (*Screams.*) Who are you? Stay away from me. No. Let me out of here. Do you hear me? Set me free at once.

FURIES. Oh, she wants. To be set. Free. At once. Oh, no. We mustn't. Do that.

MARY. Set me free, I tell you. Who are you? How dare you laugh at me! How dare you!

FURIES. Oh. She's so. Indig. Nant. Quite the fine lady. Isn't she? No one would think. Her husband was. Well-to-do. Would they, Mary?

MARY. What do you want of me? Did you come here to torment me?

FURIES. We want nothing, Mary. Only to comfort you. To aid you. Be with you in time of travail. Do whatever we can. Or may. Or might.

MARY. Then for God's sake set me free. If I stay in this chair any longer I shall go mad.

FURIES. Oh, say that and. We'll never let you out. Dr. Rush's chair is always successful. Such a good doctor! Dr. Rush!

MARY. Please set me free. Please!

FURIES. Does she promise? To behave? Would she try? To run? Away?

MARY. No. I promise I won't run away. I won't.

FURIES. Besides. She has no place. To run. Except into the wall.Which we can do, but not her. Not you, Mary. Not you.

MARY. Who are you? What are you? Tell me.

FURIES. We're no one. Nothing. Inmates of the asylum. Like you, Mary. Figments of your imagination. Air. Less than. Smoke. A puff. A poof. Of nothing. Nothing, nothing. Nothing. (*The* FURIES *set* MARY *free.*)

MARY. If you are nothing, then I must be mad. I can see you, hear you. (MARY *grabs at them but they elude her.*)

FURIES. No, you mustn't touch us. For then we would have to. Tear you apart. We don't exist. We are ghosts. Your friends. Selves of yourself. Fiends and angels. We know nothing. Except everything. You know. Or want. To know.

MARY. You know everything I want to know?

FURIES. Certainly. Assuredly. Definitely.

MARY. Then tell me. Tell me everything I want to know.

FURIES. What do you? Want to know, Mary?

MARY. Tell me where I am? And how long I've been here.

FURIES. (*Disappointed.*) That's too simple. It's no fun. You know that already. The Penn. Sylvania. Hospital. The same. As it was. This morning.

MARY. This morning? How long have I been here?

FURIES. It's the same day. As it was before.

MARY. I can't have been here only a matter of hours. It's not possible! Oh, being in that chair is horrible. Horrible!

FURIES. Of course, it's horrible. It's supposed. To be. That's what you. Get for. Being crazy. Crazy Mary Girard.

MARY. But I'm not crazy. You know I'm not.

FURIES. You must be! Mr. Girard had you admitted. As a lunatic, paying patient. The doctors have agreed. To keep you here. As long as Mr. Girard. Continues to pay. Your bills. And quite a lucrative account. You'll prove to be. For a lunatic, Mary.

MARY. (FURIES *laugh at her frustration thru this.*) It's all a misunderstanding. When I see the doctors, when I speak to Mr. Girard, it will all be corrected. It's a mistake, I tell you. And that chair. I thought I'd go mad.

FURIES. She will. In time. She sounds positively. Stark raving. Mad. That chair is one of the. Prized possessions. And inventions of. Dr. Rush. He positively. Loves it. And. So do we.

MARY. I couldn't move. I couldn't see anything. No sooner was I strapped into it than I began to itch.

FURIES. Nerves. Only nerves. Or madness.

MARY. I couldn't even scratch my arm. And then my eyes began to tear and I couldn't wipe them. And

there was such a roaring in my ears. I thought I would go . . . that it would drive me. . . .

FURIES. Yes? Go. On. Don't stop. We want. To hear. Everything.

MARY. All sounds were strange, distant, as though I were under water, drowned without being dead, and it seemed so terribly hard to breath. Later I fell asleep and had such dreams that I woke up screaming. Then I thought I was being smothered, coldly, carefully smothered with an enormous pillow that kept getting larger and larger. First it seemed the size of that box, but then it was as large as the room. Then it grew to the size of the entire hospital. And I knew that it would continue growing. Smothering not only me but everyone. The size of the city. And then the state. And then the size of the entire United States. And I awoke screaming.

FURIES. And you see. No one was. Smothering you at all. You were only here. Experiencing the effects. Of the Tranquilizing Chair.

MARY. And the echo in the box of my own screams . . . It was horrible! Oh why would they put me in such a thing? Surely they know I'm not mad.

FURIES. But it's the. Proper treatment. For your type. Of madness. Everybody knows. There are two kinds of. Madness. The Torpid. And those subject to. Excitation. Dr. Rush. Has invented. Two appliances. To be used for. The treatment of. The mad. The gyrator. Or revolving machine. That shakes them up. The other is. The tranquilizing chair. For types like you. Ones subject to. Excitation. Or claims of. Sanity.

MARY. I feel weak, faint.

FURIES. It's only natural. After the. Bloodletting.

MARY. Bloodletting?

FURIES. It's quite regular. Quite customary. Mary.

Quite natural. It lessens greatly. Your protestations. Of sanity. From you they took. Thirty ounces. Of blood.

MARY. Was that the itching of my arm?

FURIES. Yes, you see. You didn't feel. A thing. You see how well. The chair works. Now, Mary?

MARY. Ah! I must get out of here. I must. I can't have been here for only one day. It isn't possible.

FURIES. Less. It's only now. Near midnight. Soon it will be Sunday. You'll be able to hear. The bells. From all the churches. Stephen Girard will be in his usual pew. Mary. Praying for your soul. No doubt.

MARY. (FURIES *laugh throughout.*) I must see him, talk with him. I'll ask him to forgive me or to let me pass away to some other place, pass out of his life as though we'd never met.

FURIES. The idea! Did you ever? Hear of such a thing? Horrid. Shocking. Disgraceful. A dreadful idea. For a married woman. To have. Leave her husband? She must be. Mad.

MARY. If you know anything about me you know that my marriage was the worst thing that ever happened to me. Until this.

FURIES. The hussy! I must say. I'm shocked. And this from. A woman legally bound. To a husband for thirteen years. She sounds like. A woman of. The streets. A common whore. A bawdy house tart. A tenpenny slut.

MARY. (*Furious.*) How dare you speak to me like that. I'm Mrs. Stephen Girard! I don't have to tolerate your taunts and jeers. Get out. Get away from me and get out!

FURIES. (*Afraid of being sent out.*) Oh, No, don't, Mary. Don't send us off. Or shut us out. We're only trying. To help you. Mary. To put mildly. What

you're bound to hear. Tomorrow. Only then it will be. So very much. Worse.

MARY. No one would dare talk to me in such a manner!

FURIES. They will, Mary. And worse. Much worse, Mary. The ones on the streets. The ones at those windows. The ones who come daily. To stare and point. And laugh at the lunatics. To mock them. Try to frighten them into fits. Or convulsions. Or seizures. Of the most horrid kinds. And it works beautifully, Mary. You'll be surprised how often. And how violently the seizures come.

MARY. I don't believe you. I don't believe there are people like that, people who do things like that. It's . . . cruel. People aren't like that. I'm sure they're not.

FURIES. (*Laughing.*) She has so much. To learn. You mustn't undervalue the power of an accusing finger. The amusement people derive from the suffering of others. The superiority they feel when they see those less fortunate. They relish it. Revel in it. Rejoice for it.

MARY. It mustn't be allowed. I'll speak to someone about it.

FURIES. (*In glee.*) Speak to someone! Mustn't be allowed! Glorious! Wonderful. Mary, can't you see how large? The windows were made? So the people wouldn't have to stoop? To see in?

MARY. They'll not look at me. Not here. I couldn't stand it. I'll be gone before they come. And if I'm not I'll hide from them. Under the covers of the bed or under the bed if necessary. I won't have them laughing at me. I couldn't stand it, I tell you.

FURIES. No! Poor Mary. If you hide. It'll make matters. So much worse. The attendants will pull you

out. Chain you there where the manacles are. Facing the windows. No, Mary. It's much better. If you don't hide.

MARY. You said you know all I want to know. Then tell me how to get out of here. Please. Please.

FURIES. We can only. Show you. Yes, show you. You have to start. At the beginning. By seeing. The warder of. The cells.

MARY. But I saw him this morning. He won't help me.

FURIES. You have to. See him for. He's the beginning. And if you are to. Know the end. You have to begin at the. Start. (FURIES *place a short cape on* MARY'S *shoulders, a muff on her hands, and a hat on her head.* WARDER *enters. He is a young man about* MARY'S *age.*)

WARDER. Here ye go. This way. In here, Mary. That's yer name, ain't it?

MARY. My name is Mrs. Stephen Girard. You will call me by that name if you address me again.

WARDER. Oh no, I don't. I calls ye Mary. I have it on strictest orders not to call ye any such false name as that.

MARY. I am Mrs. Girard. There is nothing false about that.

WARDER. Oh, well, ye'll be right at home. We got the Queen of France an' the King of Poland in here, too. Call yerself whatever ye will. It'll cut no ice with me. I calls ye Mary because I was told by Mr. Girard hisself I was to so call ye.

MARY. But you know who I am. You came to my home in your carriage to bring me to see the doctor. You know I'm Mrs. Girard.

WARDER. I went to Mr. Girard's home. Not yers.

All I know is yer Mary. More than that I don't want to know.

MARY. But I'm his wife, Mary Girard.

WARDER. I'm tellin' ye true. It's Mary ye be and Mary ye'll remain as far as I'm concerned. Unless ye take to bein' the Queen of Sheba or somebody else. Then I'll be callin' ye that.

MARY. (*Handing him some money.*) Look, I have some money. . . .

WARDER. (*Taking it.*) Oh, ye'll be glad ye give this to me. I'll see ye get some real food some of the time. Somethin' to keep up yer strength instead of this gruel all the time. Maybe a pint a somethin' warmin' on occasion, huh?

MARY. You don't understand. I came to see the doctor, and you're to take me back to my home at once.

WARDER. Home? This room's yer home now, Mary. It's cheery, too, in daylight. That is, if ye'll be able to see much daylight fer all the admirers ye'll be entertainin' in them winders up there.

MARY. What admirers?

WARDER. Tomorrow's sabbath. Lots of folks'll be out an' in a holiday mood. You'll see fer yerself then, I figure.

MARY. I won't be here tomorrow. I came to see the doctor about a . . . a personal condition. Where is he, sir?

WARDER. Me name's Frankie. Ye be good to Frankie, an' Frankie'll be good to ye, too, Mary. (*Pause.*)

MARY. I demand that you take me to the doctor at once.

WARDER. Snooty, ain't ye. Wants to see the doctor at once, do she? Well, doctors don't come round at once. They're due sometime week after next. I guess

ye'll wait till then, all right. I'll just take yer hat an' cape an' muff so's ye can get to feelin' right at home, Mary.

MARY. Stay away from me!

WARDER. If that's the way ye want it. (*Calls.*) Aides here! (FURIES *enter and snatch* MARY*'s cape, muff and hat from her.*)

MARY. No, stop. Please. You mustn't do this.

(FURIES *exit.*)

WARDER. Oh, things will be worst by a yard if ye act like that too frequent.

MARY. Do you have any idea who my husband is?

WARDER. Yep. I know who ye claims he be.

MARY. He's the wealthiest man in the city of Philadelphia.

WARDER. Wouldn't serprize me a notch.

MARY. Possibly the wealthiest in all the Republic.

WARDER. Yep. That too. (*Pause.*)

MARY. (*Speaking rapidly.*) If you keep me here against my will, you will be making a terrible mistake. He might sue this hospital, its board of directors, you and everyone connected with it.

WARDER. Nope. Don't think so. Seems I know more 'bout yer Mr. Girard than ye do, Mary.

MARY. I doubt that anyone in your position would know anything at all about the likes of Mr. Girard. But your superiors will.

WARDER. All I know is that it was Mr. Girard hisself who said yer lunatick an' asked most kindly that ye be put here. That's all I know.

MARY. That's a lie. How dare you impugn my husband's name with such a lie.

WARDER. Some says ye done some of that impugnin' yerself, Mary Girard.

MARY. (*Striking at him.*) How dare you! (WARDER *ducks her blow and slips out of the cell. He closes the door.*)

MARY. What are you doing?

WARDER. Lockin' the door to yer new home. It's customary.

MARY. You can't keep me here. You cannot. Where am I? Is this a prison? What authority do you have to do this? I want to go home. Please. Don't do this to me! Please! Please!

WARDER. I'm only doin' what I gets paid for doin'. It's my job. I only takes orders from 'em what's higher up, Mary.

MARY. But surely you can see this is wrong.

WARDER. There yer wrong, Mary. I'm not paid to see what's right or wrong. It's not my business. My business is lockin' ye up. The rest is not my business.

(*The* FURIES *enter laughing.*)

MARY. You will drive me mad.

WARDER. It's not my business. My business is lockin' ye up. The rest is not my business.

MARY. You will drive me mad!

WARDER. It's not my business. My business is lockin' ye up. The rest is not my business.

MARY. Answer me! Is this a prison?

WARDER. That's real insultin', that is. This is the Pennsylvania Hospital. Founded by Mr. Franklin hisself, for treatment of sick poor folk. Lucky fer him he died this year, otherwise he might be highly offended by the way yer talkin' 'bout his fine hospital. An' ye are in the ward fer the mentally deranged. The place fer lunaticks, in plain speech.

MARY. But I'm not a lunatic.

WARDER. That's not fer ye or me to say. That's fer Mr. Girard to say. He be yer legal guardian an' he's the one who put ye here.

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