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UTILIZING THE SPECTATOR PERSPECTIVE

IN THE ACTING PROCESS

by

Jocelyn K. Matsuo

B.A. Pitzer College, 2006

A Thesis

Submitted to the faculty of the

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Louisville, Kentucky

May, 2013

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JOCELYN K. MATSUO

M.F.A. in Theatre Arts

A Thesis Approved on

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By the following Thesis Committee:

Dr. Amy Steiger

Michael Hottois

Dr. Gordon Strauss

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ABSTRACT
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April 9, 2013

This thesis is an examination of my goals and outcomes as a theatre practitioner in the role of Beatrice in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* at the University of Louisville, in November, 2012. In Chapter One I will define my goals in theatre. I will discuss how I have succeeded and failed in pursuit of these goals and assess the causes of each. I will also address the challenges of teaching acting and theatre and how these goals relate to each other. In Chapter Two I will explain my acting process and its application to my thesis performance. In Chapter Three I will recount previous training (including the University of Louisville) and performances. In Chapter Four I will autopsy the production, paying close attention to the effects on the audience. In Chapter Five I will conclude with future plans and lessons from this specific situation.

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CHAPTER ONE: WHY I MAKE THEATRE

I do theatre because I love communicating with other people. My goal is increasing understanding of the common experience and deepening our connection as human beings. Creativity is necessary in theatre artistry. You must find a way across the void between you and other people. I believe Emerson when he says that, “in every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts”(93). I explore and test thoughts that are common to us all, so that we can surprise ourselves with that commonality. How can you get your audience to understand what you understand? How can you understand your audience? What is the most potent, concise way of transferring understanding and recognition into the audience’s head? How do you use what you can glean from their thoughts? Answering these questions is my ultimate artistic pursuit.

On stage I communicate with other actors and the audience in many ways, outputting information through my body and voice—stature, breathing, shape, word choice, volume, spacing, inflection, pace, pitch, dialect —the options are limitless. I attempt to pack as much thought and information into the message I send out as possible. I also concentrate on inputting information by listening to the feedback the other actors and audience give me. I use that information to hone my tactics and achieve the goal of interpersonal understanding and entertainment. When actors, crew and audience are all in the same space, at the

same time, we can multiply the strength of the message we aim to convey and the thinking we explore.

I appreciate storytelling and stand-up comedy, both forms of theatre by individuals. However, forging a group with a common goal is more fulfilling. I help when people need it and they help me. It's "family-esque." Together, we can try more possible interpretations, we can explore and we can find the most effective, potent, clear piece to present.

Steering the group toward message clarity requires vision. An obvious method is to attempt an overarching theme, broad enough for any audience. Alternatively, it is also easy to attempt to reach a specific audience by catering your message to them. Too broad a message will bore, an overly specific message will alienate and confuse. Skillful theatre applies our knowledge of the specific audience as a way to deepen the complexity of our message. Keeping that message poignant to the broader audience encourages the broad audience to empathize with the specific.

I believe that we can keep expanding our knowledge of our own society. Challenging those knowledge boundaries increases everyone's understanding of the human condition and exposes those moments of recognition. When I am watching theatre I want to see my own thoughts in other humans. Tuning my consciousness as a spectator informs my consciousness as a performer.

Some of the theatre I have been most passionate about was outreach created for a very small part of the community, such as *Wrong With Me*, a project I spearheaded that looked at Bipolar Disorder and Depression through the

perspectives of college students. To address college students we needed their skeptical point of view to relate to them, instead of the usual health talks (of which college students receive a great number) that only offer the most 'healthy,' though practically unattainable solution.

Tailoring the message, you instantly give the audience assurance that you empathize with them. They may be more willing to trust your judgment and suspend their disbelief. It feels good to have people address you directly, this is why phone sex operators still exist in a world of free Internet porn. We must capitalize on this capacity. This is the theatre's strength and film's weakness.

Film and theatre have similar goals, to tell a story, to inspire, to scare, to elicit an emotional response and, let us not forget, to sell tickets. In terms of consumption, they appear generally similar; the audience sits in rows of seats, usually in the dark, the onus of entertainment is relinquished. During the rehearsal process of *Much Ado About Nothing* I used Netflix to watch the Kenneth Brannagh film version. If our goal and Brannagh's were the same—to tell this story, using these lines—why produce this piece, already done so many times before, available to us in the comfort of our living rooms, with amazing starring actors and much larger budgets? Why did we make different choices than Brannagh? The exchange between audience and live actor is unique and valuable.

The audience/live actor exchange is perishable. Film's strength lies in its reproducibility. The filmmaking process functions to achieve perfect takes once and make exact copies. The story, emotional content, montage effect, all stays

nearly the same whether you are in 3-D glasses at a midnight showing or snuggling with your iPad in bed. Theatre, however, is never the same experience twice, it happens in the audience's presence. Actor's Equity will deem a show 'fixed,' but it is never exactly the same. From film's perspective, this might seem a flaw of theatre. From theatre's perspective, film is incapable of responding to its audience. People talking in a movie theater will not change the film. In theatre, anything can change, everybody sees everybody, everybody hears everybody, etc.

Most people's first experience with audience-hood in a theater usually happens at a film. Watching film has conditioned audiences against reacting. The audience's inability to affect the story leaves them as voyeurs. Acting is thus conflated with the state of being watched. Being watched is desirable, it gives our actions, feelings and thoughts value. That attraction to the audience's attention changes the actor/audience relationship. The relationship becomes unidirectional; the actors only speak and the audience only listens. This change is detrimental to the communication possible with live actors. The roles of actor and audience are not freely interchangeable in a given piece, however we must honor the ability of both parties to change the product. If we do not, we should just go see a movie.

Even though anything is possible, we must accept responsibility for the following aspects of the audience's experience: the play must be loud enough for the audience to hear what we are saying, bright enough for them to see what we want them to see, interesting enough to keep their attention, and conceptually

sound for them to trust us and accept our message. We must honor the time the audience spent in coming to the theater.

1.1 CHALLENGES OF EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

Our audience's engagement at the University of Louisville occurs as a side effect. Our primary mission is to "educate the theatre students" (louisville.edu/theatrearts). We have a problem with audience members texting and using cellular phones while performances are occurring. The way we address this behavior is by docking the grades of the offenders. Fortunately most of the audience is attempting to pass theatre classes, otherwise we would have no recourse when they tried to distract our theatre students' education. This is not how the actor/audience relationship functions in the real world. If eighteen-year-olds are bored, they text.

At the University of Louisville's Theatre Arts Department, we know our audience. We sell more than seventy-five percent of our tickets at a student-rate. We read the papers our Enjoyment of Theatre pupils write on our performances and productions. We have an extreme advantage on messaging, because we have had so many productions with such a consistent pattern with which to experiment, including years of feedback. We also have a fairly captive audience. People who take our classes must see the shows as part of their grade. Barring any attempt at widening our audience base, we know for whom we are performing and they are incentivized to pay attention. This foreknowledge should make our productions wildly effective and acclaimed.

Fortunately, most of our graduate students are not only theatre creators, we are teachers, and in our Enjoyment of Theatre and Acting for Non-Theatre Majors classes, we have the chance to enhance students' understanding of our productions. Students are required to read the play ahead of time, and afterwards write analyses taking into account the history of how the play has been produced in the past. This is all good. The University should be awarding credit to students who make an effort to include themselves in the academic community, and it is our job as teachers to make sure that happens. As actors, however, we want to exemplify the virtues that have granted theatre so long a life as an art form. Let the lectures remain in the classes. If we are to honestly do our job as teachers to prepare our students, we can trust our audience to think critically about the entertainment we provide. If we only learn how to educate at the expense of learning how to create an entertaining spectacle, we have damaged our theatre students' ability to earn a living as working theatre practitioners, as well as their teaching prowess.

Theatre is meant to entertain the audience and to feed its creators. Theatre is a job, and we are here to improve our ability to earn a living at it. Our experience here should teach us what obstacles exist in the current markets for our chosen profession. We need to know how to get hired, how to sustain ourselves, and we need to know how to sell tickets to repeat customers who expect something more for their money than the opportunity to support us as a charity. Audience members can see what is bold and exciting art and will gladly pay for it.

Let us not sacrifice the audience's enjoyment and our own training at the altar of false education. If we deny our students and our audience the chance to critically approach our best work, we have undereducated everybody. We turn our non-theatre-major undergraduates into a legion of uninformed spectators, and our graduates into mere educators, not actors, lacking the skills necessary to work on stage or the experience necessary to honestly teach. We can only pay lip service to exciting art of the past, perpetuating the decline of theatre artistry and theatre education. If we continue to teach the Enjoyment of Theatre class, we ought to present those students with enjoyable theatre. Otherwise, we risk dissuading them from becoming future audience members, rather than inspiring them to begin a new cultural passion.

For my thesis production, originally an adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Professor James R. Tompkins chose to adapt the script to our audience's perspective, hoping to communicate with them in a way that would heighten their understanding of theatre as a whole. Jake Beamer played Benedick as his thesis role. He and I shared Professor Tompkins's objective. We wanted to show the students fun theatre—that it is, in fact, a form of entertainment and has been throughout history.

This goal seems especially fit for *Much Ado*. The play was not commissioned by a royal and Shakespeare needed to present the ticket-buying public with something engaging (Brooke 128.) He had to fill the audience, after all. We can do the same, and present Shakespeare's engaging product while

attempting Shakespeare's goals. He would not have sold tickets with a play boasting historical accuracy.

Adapting the script posed other possible upsides. Some slang terms which are currently very politically incorrect and completely irrelevant to story could be changed or eliminated. We could save some of our budget by requiring fewer and less costly props, all while preserving the meter and the structural integrity of the poetry. The audience might understand the characters and the story, instead of encountering unintelligible words. With these things in mind, we chose to abandon some of the original text where it seemed to occlude its own intent. Dogberry (Braden McCampbell), it seemed, might be able to play his malapropisms¹ more effectively. If all words were recognizable to the audience, the audience might then recognize that the character was manipulating the language, rather than mistaking the written text for the actor fumbling over difficult words, or worse, nothing but more unintelligible, antiquated vocabulary. This is an important literary distinction. Malapropisms are also referred to as Dogberryisms, after this character (Thompson 271).

We (Professor Tompkins, Beamer and I) went through the script, word-by-word and slightly adjusted for sense. The vast majority of the substitutions, more than sixty percent, were 'if' for 'an,' which is historically accurate, though has been abandoned in current practice. For Instance, in the original script the Messenger asks Beatrice "I see, lady, the gentleman [Benedick] is not in your

¹ Named for Mrs. Malaprop from Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775) (Auburn, 257) which post-dates *Much Ado About Nothing* (1599)]

books[?]²” Beatrice replies “No; an he were I would burn my study.” In our version Beatrice replied, “No; if he were I would burn my study.” We replaced obscure words with their annotation from the Princeton, Yale or Norton Shakespeare complete works. Consulting multiple editors’ versions provided options in our pursuit of the best possible product.

We also replaced obscure mythological references with currently common ones from a variety of sources, using the students’ knowledge base when possible. An obvious task was the elimination of ethnic slurs. When there was any difference of opinion on whether to change a word, we always left the original text in our adaptation. Our goal was to use the text for its positives (clever character development, plot, jokes, meter and linguistic structure) while eliminating the most confusing and alienating words. We wanted the students to engage with the work unencumbered by historical vocabulary, un-alienated by bigotry and actively enthused about theatre.

We based our changes on the following maxims: the optimal change was to omit unintelligible clauses and concatenate remaining words into clear sentences, (this is common practice with current productions). If we could not cut the lines for sense, we changed individual words (including ‘if’ for ‘an,’ as I reported earlier, ‘revealed’ for ‘discovered’ was also common). The other changes were taken from the annotations: ‘Whore’ for ‘stale,’ ‘warrior’ for ‘squarer,’ ‘clay’ for ‘marl,’ etc. When we updated the mythological and historical references with current cultural equivalents based on the salient characteristic. A

² All quoted Shakespeare is from *Princeton Complete Works of Shakespeare*, cited in bibliography.

“hair from the Great Cham’s beard” became a “hair from the great ZZ Top’s beard.” The reference to Genghis Khan (obscured by vernacular) is not as important as the line that contains it. Benedick, attempting to convince the Prince (or Don Pedro) to send him away, is listing impossible tasks on which he ought to be sent. Those updates were changed back to the original language first when we heard that some faculty took issue with our adaptation. We considered them cosmetic changes meant to pique the ears of the students as ‘non-Shakespearean.’ They were not central to our goal.

We did not change the meter in the verse. All of our substitutions in the verse were made very carefully, including the appropriate word-stress, to maintain meaning as well as aural integrity. We value verse as an aspect of our source material even though *Much Ado About Nothing* has the second-highest rate of prose in Shakespeare’s canon³. Verse itself does not hinder students’ understanding.

The spirit of the piece is important. The humor in a comedy is important. The comedy is not as funny if we prevent our audience from engaging with the jokes. We wanted to achieve humor, where and how Shakespeare originally applied it.

On September 6, 2012, the chair of the department, Dr. Rinda Frye, informed us that we would not be allowed to change Shakespeare’s words. Her arguments were that the audience expected to hear the original language, and that it “was a general no-no,” and looked amateurish. She granted that when we

³ *Much Ado About Nothing* has a rate of seventy-one percent prose. Only *Merry Wives of Windsor* (eighty-six percent) has more. (Morris 28)

were professionals, we were free to look amateurish and would be able to do whatever we wanted. We complied, reverted our scripts, and redoubled our efforts to maintain clarity through the original language.

I am not concerned with how people perceive my professional state. I believe that the work we put into the changes was justified and would have actively aided us in pursuit of our collective goal to teach our actors as well as our students. It would have added to the experience of those who saw the play, and could have spawned discussions around the very issue of adapting Shakespeare and other historical or intercultural works. Any apparent amateurism would have been obscured by laughter and enjoyment.

Dr. Frye was also concerned with us lowering the piece beneath our audience's intelligence level. I think that generally this is a good argument and we were mindful of this challenge as we adapted our version⁴. I believe that our audience is capable of understanding the concepts associated with the historic language. However this changes the goal of the piece. Attempting to teach vocabulary or even poetry through a play is a mismatch of form and function. If this is our goal, we would be better served by adding to the production's content or changing the format. We could include a program, as we do with children's theatre, about the words themselves, perhaps assign a complimentary info-packet, or provide subtitles as in modern Noh productions (Kaula 62). Education and entertainment are two different goals, and as theatre creators, we need to know which to prioritize, and then choose our tools and make our decisions

⁴ Dr. Frye had not read our version on Sept. 6, 2012, when she informed us we had to revert to the original language.

according to those priorities. If we forsake entertainment for too long, in any performance, the audience's attention will be lost.

In the following chapters I will discuss how I pursue my goal of entertaining the audience. Using examples from my previous training, my training at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA), the University of Louisville and my professional experience, I will explain my procedures and my analysis of my own work. I will also discuss obstacles I confronted in this production and my strategy for the future.

CHAPTER TWO: MY ACTING PROCESS

My general acting philosophy is to try a lot of things and when something is right, do it again. I test it to make sure it really is right. The right choice might not have been predicted. An audience must diagnose what works and what does not. That audience may be a director or cast mates, before a public audience sees the show. Feedback from those experiences will instruct me on how to better listen to myself. My preparation and performance are geared for freedom when an audience is present. Each ounce of attention should go outward and any spent on what I am supposed to do is wasted.

When I get a script, I give it a chronological read-through, looking at the order of plot points and French scenes. Then I put it down for as long as I can while I think about what I remember and what questions I have. Next, if I am playing a certain character, I will go through and note all the things said about my character, either by myself or other characters. That evidence will be the basis of my characterization. The things said about my character's self usually vary greatly from the things other characters say about him or her. That variation gives me excellent clues about my character's psychology and self-consciousness. During this detective work, I am also searching for possible audience interpretations and making decisions about reinforcing their beliefs or

contradicting them. I also note all the things my character says, looking for the character's values and point of view.

Then I will start to learn my lines. I do this by rote, playing 'add on,' three words at a time. If the lines are in verse I will learn one verse line at a time. It is imperative that I repeat the words out loud and get the words into muscle memory. I change my body position during this process to avoid fixing the memory to one physical position. This allows me to throw myself into experimenting in the rehearsal room. I also use varying pitches during memorization. Lack of dynamic change is a common pitfall in my preparation process. If I fail to address pitch range my performance will sound robotic and hinder the audience's understanding. The more possibilities I explore, the more secure I feel to explore farther, providing me with a wealth of options from which to make the most effective choices. These experimentation and critique cycles continually teach me to create consistent performances that are understandable and engaging, while at the same time achieving my performance goals. Knowing the piece well allows me to relax and experience the performances with the audience.

I then learn cue lines and take note of who speaks before me (and if I interrupt), as well as who gave me the impetus to speak. This gives another layer to my character's psychology as well as giving me a visual and physical cue from the other actors. Usually during this point I start to examine my status in the play, relative to others as well as general, social character traits, age, gender, parental status, history with other characters. This is when I hold myself to the rubric of

realism. I ask, "Does this make sense?" as opposed to, "Does this happen this way in real life?" Real life is boring, and an audience will use its own believability-rubric as they watch. I ought to use an internal rubric as well.

This is where I like to start rehearsal. It has been my experience in University of Louisville academic theatre that this is not where educational theaters like to start. I do not alienate myself from the group by coming to the first rehearsal off-book. I try to be one of the first ones memorized, but not the only one brown-nosing on the first day. I do not learn my lines as well in University of Louisville Theatre. I keep pace with the group after we set an off-book date. I will certainly complete memorization before that date, however I go in to the first rehearsal familiar but not word-perfect.

For Beatrice, I had memorized the scenes that Jake, Professor Tompkins and I had previously worked through, but of course would have to make changes when the entire cast was present. I am fortunate to have been so comfortable with both of these team-members. Jake and I would work outside of rehearsal to memorize lines together and we helped each other with scenes in which we did not appear. I am lucky if I can get friends to do this during other rehearsal processes, and my husband earns a lot of points this way.

In my general process, during rehearsal, I ask a lot of questions and am very free with offering up my ideas about how I originally interpreted the play. I find that directors are very glad to have this feedback, and when I direct, I certainly appreciate the opportunity to find out how other people see and

understand. When people will not admit their lack or difference of understanding, errors occur more easily.

I always wear movement pants. I always wear a good bra, and a high-necked shirt. Self-consciousness about clothing is one of my major pet peeves. I am drawn away from period pieces with restrictive clothing, I allow my body to do what is comfortable. Restriction can and will come later. I did use character shoes in this rehearsal process, which is odd for me. I have difficulty walking in heels, so I wanted regimented practice with them. I also invested in very short heels, one inch in height, to minimize the change to my skeletal alignment from my normal state.

I write down every note that I ever receive. I systematically fill the script with notes allowing me to really see the history of the note-giving process and analyze past notes. During the note process I always write on the back of my script first and work backwards, everyday, making sure that I keep every note that I receive in the script at all times. I am able to interpret simple statistics on how many notes I am getting, and whether they are specific lines and spots or are general. If they are general, how can I find specific moments to change something I'm doing and send a different message? Are we getting a lot of group notes? Are those for me? Those questions contextualize my director's feedback over time and steer my experimentation. Notes can be given for a variety of reasons, however my trust in other spectators' ability to interpret what I present has to be solid, if so, I will implement every note. If I decide to ignore one, which happens very rarely, my objection has to be well thought out and the note must

be contrary to, at least, my priority of audience engagement. If I find a note objectionable, I will attempt to compromise and find another way to achieve harmony with the director and my artistic principles.

As we near performance, I will inevitably reach a point where I need to try to achieve consistency and stop experimenting (though not completely, it will suck the suspense right out of the performance). Usually the group will feel this together. Crunch time will set in around the time of the design run. As I go for consistency I start to augment the notes I receive from others with notes of my own. I note my thought patterns with spectator notes to sharpen my results. As I learn, I pick up new images and new 'thoughts of the day' to keep my performance flexible and dynamic. Audiences can see when actors have short-cut intentions and repeat the results of a moment from a previous performance without impetus. Audiences do not like that, as it denies their presence.

As I go into performance, I try to have fun, and find my love for theatre with an audience. If I have prepared sufficiently, my goal of complete physical confidence frees my focus from the chronology of events. I can really listen, to the other actors and audience. I can play and imagine within the framework of what our group constructs together and love theatre the whole time. As Beatrice, I had fun the whole show. I recall thinking "Oh I can't wait to do this bit" each time I went on stage. That excitement and anticipation have kept me in theatre for decades.

CHAPTER THREE:

MY ACTOR-TRAINING

3.1 Pre-University of Louisville

I had 'been in plays,' but Frank Gerrish was my first real exposure to actor-training. He ran the Jr. Shakespeare Company out of University of Utah classrooms. I was a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Company (for middle school aged students) from 1995 and then moved up to the King's (high school) Company in 1998. My first role was Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was totally zany. I had a very odd, characterized walk, I held one arm straight out in front of me and the right fist at my armpit and would take one big step at a time while dragging the other foot. That walk changed my thinking about theatre. You could play a character so outside 'normal people.' When I learned it, I thought theatre was just open.

I remember loving when adults laughed at that character. Character could be anything. There was a lot of emphasis on not holding anything back, all suggestions were encouraged and you were rewarded for making bizarre, bold choices (especially because I did not fit ingénue type roles). I carved out a place for myself at that tender age of eleven as quirky, playful and experimental.

In high school I was able to maintain large roles in most productions because our high school was so small. My class had seven members. We were able to develop a tight working group of focused, reliable folks. Also our audience

was the same every night. I learned to rely a lot on the interaction between the audience and myself. It had to be fresh. I wanted laughs.

Then in college I decided not to major in theatre. I took acting classes and was very involved in various student productions. I met my husband in an intermediate acting class and we produced pieces together. Eventually, in my junior year, I was cast in main-stage, faculty-directed plays. They were not as fun. I kept doing extra curricular theatre with other students. My husband and I founded our company when he graduated in 2007.

I graduated in 2006. For the year in between, I was lucky to attend the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. I studied at LAMDA that whole year and received a LAMDA diploma (totally unrecognized in the US, except socially for the LAMDA name) in Classical Acting. The training there was stellar. Each class involved totally losing your head in the challenging work. Also our year was filled with twenty-four (eventually twenty-one, due to the rigorous cutting) students from around the world who were serious about the work and were very aptly talented.

There were four different subjects covered: Voice, Movement, Acting and Singing, all of which were geared to give the students very deep knowledge as part of their professional actor toolkit. The school's philosophy was palpable, they trained you in many different techniques and you were to take whichever you could most effectively employ. That was the goal, employment.

I embraced the challenges of the program, partly because of my age when I entered. I was directly out of college and eager to prove myself outside of what I

saw as limited American academia. The vast number of techniques offered meant that the days were extremely long. I spent eighty hours every week working and occasionally seeing professional examples. To brutally summarize what I took from the program, besides specific, niche skills like Lecoq clown and flamenco, I learned to really throw myself into work and take risks. The audience does not want to watch you conserve your abilities.

My husband, Ben Acland, and I produced a few comedies in Los Angeles. We got day jobs. I felt theatre being sucked from my life and I plunged into the improv scene to keep training. I like improv and I naturally found sketch comedy because the two worlds are intertwined. I decided that I might want to teach theatre at some point and I ought to start the path to getting a degree that would allow me to do so, as well as afford me a lot of extra time creating. The University of Louisville accepted me, late, the day I auditioned.

3.2 My Time at University of Louisville

My first semester of University of Louisville's M.F.A. Acting program was difficult. "Acting: Realism" with Professor Tompkins was taught the way I might expect a company to be structured. The goal of the class was to test how real we could make a piece of theatre, learned through open scenes. Open scenes are scenes with no information outside of dialogue. The missing elements include a specified relationship between characters, a location, a time of day, a time of year, etc. The assignment required the goals of the character as well as an appropriate level of urgency. Those details were filled in through our presentations. We would all watch and then go through and point out the parts

that were unreal. Then eventually we worked into, “How can this also be interesting?” This structure placed importance on the ability of actors to convey information to the audience.

The “realism-ization” goal of the class clashed with my instinct for interesting, entertaining theatre. The pursuit of “real-life” theatre pushed us towards choices that were banal, and everyday. In hindsight, it did not have to encourage that, however we had all been told that we were on academic probation and we had to achieve high enough marks to stay funded through the program, if not flat out expelled. My notes included wrong situational choices. For instance, I chose to interview Billy Flood for a job at American Apparel (a company which we had heard would not hire overweight individuals). This choice was deemed incorrect because the interviewer would know that the interviewee (Flood) would not be a candidate for the sales associate position the moment they walked in the door. I, however, continued with the interview and told him why he would not be a candidate. This would not happen in real life. A more real situation might be that the interviewer would keep the interview short and avoid a discrimination lawsuit, which would have been the “correct” choice.

Meanwhile, in Dr. Rinda Frye’s “Graduate Voice I” class, we were working in-depth with the Linklater vocal system. We were told the first day that emotional subjects would come up, we were to allow them in class, and we were not to talk about them outside of class. The overall goal of the class was to allow an emotional therapy for the actor. We were to use our emotions from our lives in

our work. In this class the goal of theatre overall seemed to be an emotional release for the actor, creating a similar response for the audience.

This semester I was in Dr. Frye's production of *Measure for Measure*. I played Mariana. Mariana was a sad character. From a plot point of view, she was a *deus ex machina* that gave Angelo a willing wife. The emphasis of this Shakespearean process was in the actors feeling the language. We "dropped-in" the text, a technique from Shakespeare and Company based in Lenox, MA. The actors were aurally fed the lines and asked many questions in quick succession, while they repeated the lines. The questions were shaped in a way to elicit different options for how to say each word. I was never actually dropped in because my role was so late in the play and by the time we got to me, everyone had stopped dropping in. This exercise was interesting as an actor, because we did not memorize our lines beforehand. Our first experience with the text was hearing the lines as we were looking at the other actors. The exercise ultimately begat a product where the actors' focus was how they were saying their lines and the audience was largely ignored, so I believe this hurt the audience's engagement with the production.

We also took "Introduction to Grad Studies" with Dr. Russ Vandenbroucke. In this class we decided to produce a short piece in Studio Theatre based on the It Gets Better campaign, whose goal is preventing teen suicide. The subject matter was not most important to me, however, it was a great opportunity to work with my colleagues on something that was not realism. We had a good time and were able to figure out how to work as a group, which eventually manifested as

the class goal. We were able to use our own personalities and we were able to entertain the audience.

In the spring semester, second year, we continued with Dr. Frye and Linklater voice, though we shifted our focus from vocal production to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). This was an odd focus. In Linklater's book, *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*, Linklater criticizes teaching with the IPA because it creates an overly intellectual actor, "to the detriment of the aesthetics of language" (Linklater 13). The actor disconnects from his/her body. I agree with this sentiment. In my experience, IPA is an inefficient tool for use on the fly. My past experience with the IPA has been purely analytical and descriptive. Using the IPA as a prescriptive tool for dialect work at the University of Louisville was difficult because of the breadth of tonal options. Using the IPA to diagnose phonemes in our recorded samples required multiple playbacks. The ambiguity of the phonemes appeared in our monologue presentations.

There is also some valid debate over whether we are actually attempting accuracy of the dialect. Heavy dialect can sacrifice intelligibility for an audience. Many times we had to adjust the accuracy because the dialects we chose were impeding the audience's ability to distinguish words. We also worked on a 'hidden dialect,' which in my previous training we had referred to this as "trans-Atlantic dialect," meaning a dialect of un-discernible origin. My regular dialect is very close to a hidden dialect. I was under less pressure than the students who had maintained their southern dialects.

I was given Ophelia's speech, "O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown ...
" Dr. Frye told me to "put some of my own experience in it [the monologue]" while she instructed my work on the piece in class. I did. I found reliving a sexual assault uncomfortable. After working through it, my classmates said it was "powerful." I was given other attempts at working pieces throughout that class and ultimately decided the use of that past experience was unreliable. I worked with a Japanese American dialect on a Hana speech from *And The Soul Shall Dance*. In performance, I found that it was more theatrically viable to use a Japanese character impression I had built earlier than substitute phonemes. I currently believe that the audience's ability to understand my emotional state has more to do with my own relaxation, rather than emotional release. This emotional recall technique was a negative experience of realism and 'the method' as Stanislavsky's system is stereotypically taught. In terms of the vocal goals, I found that we had largely ignored our stated goals from the beginning of the year, in favor of emotional experience. My goal had been to use my entire body in vocal production.

The "Actor's Theatre Louisville Acting Workshop" with Zan Sawyer-Dailey was a treat. Zan had us work on audition monologues specifically. The goal was quite clear: we were improving our audition skills and therefore our chances of getting hired as actors. The work was tailored to each individual piece. Overall I took away a casting director's perspective and gained a lot of confidence in myself and in letting my personality show during auditions. We also got to see all of the Humana Festival plays and some were very satisfying. During the final

showing for this class, a train drove through behind the Thrust Theater as I performed my monologue. The main comment I received was about how well I handled the monologues, including the train. The train affected my feedback's focus.

My faith in feedback as the primary means of evaluation was tested this semester, outside the classroom. I was threatened with expulsion from the program. Dr. Frye told me in her office that she doubted I have 'the soul of an actor,' though she had yet to teach me in an acting class. I am not sure that I have the soul of her ideal actor. I do not doubt my own skill or approach to acting, however I did not want the embarrassment of being kicked out of the University of Louisville's theatre department. So I chose to try to convince Dr. Frye of my commitment to the work.

We also had "Pedagogy" with Dr. Frye. The focus of this class was open scenes again. We used the same open scenes. We worked them and, as teachers, we critiqued them. I had to teach the classes three times, which I was told had never happened before. This required repetition was used as evidence that I do not have 'the soul of an actor' or know enough about acting. The third time I taught in front of all performance faculty for them to judge if I had the knowledge to stay employed by and enrolled in the department. I delivered a very safe, however appropriate, lesson. Professor Tompkins's criticism was that I should have critiqued Jake Beamer for playing a quality. I am not opposed to qualities if they convey information to the audience. This was a note concerning realism.

In the fall of 2011 we continued Linklater work in “Graduate Voice III.” We worked with international dialects and phonetic substitutions. My “comfy” dialect (Japanese from the previous semester) had been international (as my father is an immigrant to this country) which was the focus of the other students. I worked on Spanish, Russian and German this semester and again found that the most accurate substitutions seemed to rob the audience of a character experience and made it harder to understand me. As classmates, we adjusted pieces together until we were satisfied with performance viability. In class, we pursued the goal of expelling sufficient emotions.

“Graduate Acting IV” was Dr. Frye’s Shakespeare class. The goal of this class seemed to be getting some classmates comfortable with Shakespeare’s work (inevitable with such varying levels of experience). In the first week Dr. Frye told us that she ‘didn’t care if we knew the names’ of the types of verse lines, as long as she could play them. No class time was spent on verse lines. My training at LAMDA was very thorough in terms of textual analysis and I am familiar with the names of verse line categories and I know how to diagnose them and play them in practice (during *Much Ado About Nothing* rehearsals Jake Beamer, Lauren Street and I gave a small lecture on these types of verse lines). Also the scenes we chose were not verse heavy, so perhaps the most difficult part about Shakespeare was lost on the class. We worked with the first folio, so that we could exploit the alternate spellings of words therein. These orthographical anomalies are theorized to denote emotional (or emphasized) intonation or

delivery change. This is something we had worked with in LAMDA. I did employ this technique in my research of Beatrice.

We focused on *Richard III* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Dr. Frye produced *Richard III* on the main stage concurrently and she expressed desire to direct *Merry Wives of Windsor* the following year. We were divided into scene partners and then left to our own devices to cut, direct, and act the scenes, which would all be shown on a particular day. I played Anne to Billy Flood's Richard III, and everyone else also played that scene. The most memorable version of this scene was Gary Brice playing Richard III [Plantagenet] as Pimp-laganet. It was hilarious. It was a very bold and original choice, which would have earned him higher marks in other classes. The meaning of the piece was not considered. Brice's apparent lack of understanding of the lines, character and objective prevented Dr. Frye's enjoyment of the scene, and Brice was interrogated, a technique Dr. Frye had covered in "Pedagogy" as a way of moderating students' respect for coursework. We were assigned character research essays for this class. The questions on the character research were standard, not connected to Shakespearean acting particularly. The questions were things like "Where are you from? Who were your parents? What are your religious views?" These are all good things to consider, typing them out in this essay format was busywork meant to ensure all members were preparing appropriately. The feedback I got on them was the word "Good."

For *Merry Wives of Windsor*, I played Mrs. Fainall in two scenes. We applied the same process and worked the scenes ourselves. *Merry Wives of*

Windsor contains slapstick humor and is generally more straightforward than *Richard III*. There are also more characters' actions (added by editors), which allowed us to work more quickly towards an entertaining product. I was comfortable with Shakespeare's work for this entire class. The new information I got out of this class was reading *Merry Wives of Windsor*, which I had not done.

In "Performance Theory," taught by Dr. Amy Steiger, we worked with many authors whom I had previously read as an undergrad in the media studies department at Pitzer College, though I had never discussed them with performers. Taught from an analytical perspective, the class gave me helpful practice in writing about my own performances academically.

The final project for Performance Theory was to use three different theories of performance we had explored in class to make three projects with the same focus. Jake Beamer, Cara McHugh, Lauren Street and I used writings on the performance goals and styles of Bertolt Brecht, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Augusto Boal to create a piece. We theatrically interpreted a list (originally compiled by Debbie Hudson⁵, via Internet sources) of the steps to take in the case of an active shooter on campus. Our Brechtian piece was a direct instructional address to the audience. We told people what to do in the case of a shooter: get out of the building, hide in locked rooms, and rush the shooter if you encounter them. We sang Foster the People's "Pumped Up Kicks," a pop song about school shootings. We did a little dance. The goal of that piece was to inform audience of the 'correct' course of action.

⁵ Business Manager of the Theatre department.

Then we employed Meyerhold's biomechanics (a very bastardized version, due to our practical inexperience) and wove together an abstract scene dealing with the trauma of carrying dead bodies away after a mass shooting. The goal of this scene was to shock the audience and give them time to internalize the action. This scene seemed to physicalize an emotional reaction, which scrambles the mind and actually hinders people's ability to act (similar to what occurs during the trauma of a shooting). For the last piece, we employed Boal's techniques from *Theatre of the Oppressed*. We created a reproducible improvisation of two shooters, breaking into the theater where we performed. During the performance, we repeated this improvisation until members of the audience rushed the shooters (Jake Beamer and myself). We used very bright Nerf guns.

The description of the piece does not express the care that went into making this program palatable for an audience. Gun violence had not found its recent momentum as a political issue. The original list appeared on a flyer deposited in student mailboxes and did not garner much attention. The purpose of the piece was to get people to rush us. In the case of a real shooting, our audience would know to rush, greatly increasing the chance of everyone's survival. We wanted results-oriented training to defend all our lives. Handing out the list without such training seems to merely buck liability and soothe anxious minds. We did several things with the performance toward this goal.

During the Brecht piece, we smiled, we danced and held up instructional signs as if we were "boxing ring girls." We looked the audience directly in the

eyes. This sequence was to effectively transfer the chronology of the steps everyone would use in the following pieces, similar to the standard safety speech given at the beginning of an airline flight.

In the Meyerhold piece, we moved through biomechanics poses. We used the symbols of pain and anguish to elicit shock and confusion, in hopes the audience would forget the direct, verbal message that they had just received and combat a possible hurdle that occurs during traumatic events.

For the Boal-style piece, Jake and I burst out from behind the curtains, guns drawn and ready. We advanced on the audience, yelling tactical jargon to each other moving very quickly. In the first round, we were able to completely subdue the audience and we shot a couple audience members using our Nerf rounds. Cara and Lauren called "Reset!" We left the thrust stage for the wings again. We reloaded, made eye contact with each other and burst out from behind the curtains again. Again, no one rushed. People cooperated with us and cowered between their chairs, they completed the narrative they have probably seen. Cara and Lauren called "Reset!" again. As we reset I saw Billy Flood and Will Salmons make eye contact and coordinate that they were close to me and might try something. The third time, Jake and I burst out onto the stage, Billy Flood and Will Salmons rushed at me and picked me up and carried me off stage. I was not able to fire a shot, even though I had seen them preplan their move. I will certainly rush an active shooter after experiencing the difficulty of shooting under pressure. We achieved our goal of imparting the information, and as a side effect, we created compelling theatre. We made the audience decide to

get out of their seats and rush us. We made their brains switch from “normal audience member” to “hero.”

In the spring of 2012, we had “Acting IV,” “Voice IV” and another acting workshop with Zan Sawyer-Dailey. We were able to choose scene work that we wanted to explore. The amount of pieces one works on in a Sawyer-Dailey class is only limited by the motivation of the students. I was in six separate scenes and worked on as many projects. The goal of the class seemed to be getting practice in taking direction, which is something many (though not all) of us have experienced. As a great chance to exercise some artistic will, the class was very enjoyable.

In “Graduate Voice IV,” we continued working on dialects and the International Phonetic Alphabet. This semester was focused on diagnosing and then creating one’s own cheat sheet for a new dialect. I worked with Farsi and German. The challenging aspect was combining a wide range of specific samples into a snapshot of the common aspects of the entire accent, while prioritizing those phonetic substitutions for teaching the accent to others. It was much easier to base the substitutions on one individual and do an impression. The goal of the entire voice course seems to be to widen our cast-able range (by adding possible nationalities) and teach us how to teach ourselves new dialects. The work seemed to generate a lot of paper in transcription, though it seems that auditory practice was more effective at making the sounds repeatable in muscle memory. We ignored vocal production beyond a basic warm-up.

My first semester of my third year, we took "Graduate Acting V" with Daniel Hill. This class had a simple goal to perform two plays as a class. The lessons we took were from *Our Lady of 121st Street* and *Così*. On both projects we practiced script analysis, rehearsing, developing character and performing. Many community members were invited to view our performances.

We also took "Movement III" with Professor Tompkins, focusing on neutral mask. He encouraged us to pare down the unessential movements, leaving a neutral character—a person from whom traits cannot be drawn—to tell a story. We then expanded this work into the elements of nature—Fire, Water, Earth and Wind—and then also colors—Yellow, Blue, Red, and Green. The theatrical goal was to interpret and then communicate abstract terms to the audience avoiding distracting personal habits.

3.3 Extra Curricular Activities at University of Louisville

Back in my first semester, I went to the studio theatre interest meeting. Studio Theatre's resources and production freedom were major factors in my decision to come to University of Louisville. Also attending that meeting was Michael Kuhl, director of the Louisville Chapter of the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA, a support group for the diagnosed sufferers and their families). He had received a bequeathment and wanted to use it for some theatre outreach to University Students. I was under the impression that he wanted something similar to *The Vagina Monologues*⁶ and he informed me about another similar project on mental illness done at Stanford University.

⁶ By Eve Ensler

I did not want to do something similar (in format) to *The Vagina Monologues*. However, I do believe that I have a unique perspective, relatable to a young, college-aged audience, and I am capable of producing projects on my own. I felt I was the one person who was appropriate to take on this project, and arranged to meet Kuhl at the Heine Brothers Coffee Shop on Eastern Parkway and Bardstown Road.

We had the meeting, and discussed our different goals for the project. We also talked about how the Studio Meeting had seemed emotionally cold to him. I could understand that perception. In the past three years I have learned that Studio Theatre is constantly presented projects by people who are enthusiastic about their work. Usually, the goal is to excite the students enough to drop their current projects and commit to work for authors (who were not willing to make that commitment). In the vast majority of cases the students who have that kind of passion and drive already have exciting projects. *Wrong With Me* was a fortunate exception. I was free to commit because I had just arrived in Louisville.

We arranged for me to attend DBSA meetings. At the first official project meeting I met Dr. Gordon Strauss, of the Psychiatry Department (who had also been attached to the project). I verified that I had complete ownership of whatever the final product was to be, Kuhl replied “we have no interest in that [ownership]” and we began. I decided the original central question of the piece would be, “What is ill as opposed to what is healthy?”

At DBSA meetings I found myself sharing as a member of the group. They always introduce with their names, job and diagnoses, and I followed suit. The

first time I attended Michael let people tell “their stories” very broadly and I got to listen and take notes. I went to tea across the street with people after the meeting and chatted. I started to set up interviews with DBSA members and with some of Dr. Strauss’s patients, who responded to a flyer he was kind enough to set up in his office. The interviews took a while. There was always an initial period for the person to become comfortable enough to share their opinions beyond the classic lines that they might offer on a first date. I was interested in how they thought about their own personalities, minds and illness.

The writing on this piece took a long time. I worked on it through an independent playwriting class with Dr. Vandembroucke and over the following summer. I pushed the original performance date back four months. It seemed like I was lacking an artist’s point of view on the original script. At that point, the script was more of a report of what I had found, similar to the other outreach projects. I was unsatisfied with the level of honesty and lack of engaging humor.

The essential part of this project was to target the young audience. That seems to be the pitfall of outreach projects at this level. College students feel like they know how to take care of themselves and outreach is a waste of time they could be spending with friends. These were the students we wanted to engage. We wanted people who had not considered the possibility that they might be mentally ill, or have a family member or friend who might be mentally ill to confront this possibility and open their minds to possible courses of action.

I consider the piece successful. It was attended by hundreds of students and we were given the opportunity to tour to other locations, including University

of Louisville Medical School's Psychiatric Grand Rounds meeting in April. I had many conversations with audience members, including therapists, doctors, diagnosed peoples, families and laypersons. Mental illness (and associated behaviors, including suicide) can be shameful. *Wrong With Me* comforted local community members and prepared students.

In the discussion panels we held after the show, a patron asked Michael Kuhl what they should do if someone they know had changed suddenly and they suspected suicidal thoughts. Kuhl answered, "They should be blunt about it and ask 'Are you thinking about suicide?'" That direct response surprised most people in the room, including myself. I hope the rest of that audience shared that feeling of responsibility to take an active role in preserving the members of our community.

In the fall of my third year, a professor from the business school was referred to me as Studio Coordinator. They had a course for first semester students to learn about how to keep themselves safe and have a productive college experience. Previously they had some theatre students come in and do a presentation about safety. Their students had really enjoyed it. They wanted to do it again. University of Louisville's PEACC program (Prevention, Education and Advocacy on Campus and in the Community) directed me toward a compelling issue: students were being drugged at bars downtown and waking up in unknown hotel rooms. They would call the University of Louisville or the PEACC program for help getting back to campus. The goal was to give students the opportunity to practice the skill of extricating a drugged girl from a dangerous bar situation. We

presented tactics from different roles so that the solution could include our entire community.

The range of possible audience responses can make this subject matter challenging. This message motivated me because of the direct impact it could have outside the theater and my penchant for addressing the audience's perspective suits me extremely well for such delicate subject matter. In every audience you are probably addressing someone who has been raped. I took on the project and worked with my husband, Ben Acland, to devise a script with the goal of giving a poignant and effective presentation that could make these students agents against rape in their community.

We used a pastiche of an elementary age educational theatre presentation as a way to start the piece. This tool lets the young, cynical audience know that we are aware of their reaction to the presentations they are often handed (we have also endured them as part of our current college system's preventative measures). In the story, we took the naive perspective of a girl and her friends out at a bar. The rapist (played by Brandon Satterly) entered loudly, gregariously and conspicuously. He then made the target (played by Cara McHugh) turn around, close her eyes and plug her ears so that he could drop the very large, visible pill into her drink. She became so obviously influenced by the pill that she laid on the floor of the stage. These behaviors were obviously not real. We played against realism through the entire scene, and included jokes and in-group slang. The characters used acronyms commonly employed on Twitter. For instance, the rapist encouraged the target to drink more using the phrase

“YOLO,” meaning “You Only Live Once,” as famously tweeted by Ervin McKinness before he died in a car crash (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/13/ervin-mckinness-driving-drunk-tweet-yolo-dies-car-crash-duc_n_1880348.html). We got laughs. The audience was engaged. After the scene we asked, “What was wrong with that?” The students raised their hands and made corrections to the believability errors. They got to take ownership of how the scenario played out. We used their knowledge to improve our story. (This was all pre-planned, and we worked into a different script as the piece continued). Trusting them to fix the scenario was a drastically different tactic than the report of rape statistics that introduced our piece.

We then used Boal techniques to let the students practice approaching the rapist, the target, the bartenders, the friends and strangers in different situations throughout the imaginary bar. We asked them how they thought the situations were going and what was strange about participating in between each exploration. We kept them actively thinking about what they and their classmates were trying.

The students really enjoyed the presentation, and they certainly got the message that we were on their level. I am still curious about how the program affected them and their decisions in the real world. That curiosity will endure, as most of them are not able to legally enter bars.

Wrong With Me and the business school project, which we titled *The Business*, were major contributors to my happiness at University of Louisville. Both of these projects had clear, meaningful objectives which were important to

me personally and that I was able to create mostly from scratch. They challenged my ability to compose and effectively communicate a message to an audience. However, as an actor, my skills of interpretation and performance require working with other people's plays. My ability to analyze and then convey information in a representational setting was tested in our production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. The following analysis allowed me to give our mostly student audience a coherent, conceptually accurate and fun evening.

CHAPTER FOUR:
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

4.1 Textual Analysis

The central tenets of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* are the idea of requited love, the "set-up," and the fear of appearing foolish if one's love is not requited. The characters manipulate the world around them by providing false information to each other to affect the romantic outcomes. The characters deceive each other with compelling messages and convincing acting. Beatrice refuses to show love to Benedick until after she is certain that he loves her. She is fooled by Hero, Margaret and Ursula. Likewise, Benedick will not show love to Beatrice until the Prince, Leonato and Claudio beguile him into believing that she is pining for him.

Claudio's insecurity drives him to ask the Prince to woo Hero on his behalf. When the Prince tells Claudio that Hero is worthy of love, Claudio is suspicious, "You speak this to trick me, my lord." After Hero is successfully wooed, Claudio (fooled by Don John, Borachio and Conrade) thinks Hero has been untrue. Claudio will not marry Hero until he is certain she has not been unfaithful. The Prince and Claudio use the wedding to "shame her" publicly, to illustrate the severity of the offense. The Friar, Leonato, Benedick and Beatrice use the same tactic and convince Claudio that Hero has died, thus shaming

Claudio into agreeing to marry an unnamed cousin, who is actually Hero (the plot is ultimately exposed to everyone's joy and relief).

There seems to be a requisite assurance that one will not be hurt by taking the risk of professing one's love, or even loving, unrequited. Everyone wants love. They have an obstacle in the fear of coupling incorrectly, which would make them appear foolish and vulnerable. In each plot, we see a planning phase, where conspirators address the goal they would like to achieve and strategize, and then we watch as they attempt to fool the deceived. Eventually we get to watch the deceived admit that the plotters were correct in their assumptions. The audience watches the entire process of gulling, behind the scenes. The suspense of attempting to fool the characters (who were only resisting due to their desire to control perception by the very characters fooling them) is undercut by the character's true feelings. This is the "*Nothing*," about which there is "*Much Ado*."

The comedy comes from the characters' struggle to execute their plans. For instance, in the plot to trick Benedick into believing that Beatrice has confessed her love for him, the Prince defines the goal in Act II, scene i. "I will teach you how to humour your cousin that she shall fall in love with Benedick and I will practise on Benedick that... he will fall in love with Beatrice."

A few scenes later, we see Hero imparting this plan to Ursula and Margaret: "Whisper in her [Beatrice's] ear and tell her... our whole discourse is all of her...bid her steal into the pleached bower, there will she hide her, to listen our propose." Margaret complies and Hero explains Ursula's charge. "Our talk must

only be of Benedick... let it be thy part / To praise him more than ever man did merit....” Beatrice enters, Hero and Ursula successfully gull her, and by the end of the scene, Beatrice is convinced to love Benedick (“I will requite thee”).

The comedy of friends falsely reporting love in each others’ best interest takes a seismic turn when characters begin threatening to withhold love to manipulate their partners. Beatrice threatens that if Benedick does not kill Claudio “there is no love in him [Benedick.]” Benedick does not kill Claudio, however he is “engaged” by this ultimatum. Claudio tells Hero at their first attempted wedding “For thee I’ll lock up all the gates of love,” threatening to revoke his love for anyone. These threats add suspense for the audience. Shakespeare threatens the audience with a tragedy, making the happy ending a satisfying relief.

Professor Tompkins’s blurb for the show was ‘[the play] about gossip and getting played.’ Our show was about gossip. Characters sent messages, took picture evidence and made notes via text and cell phone. Gossip also implies getting things wrong, or exaggerating. Don John’s gossip about Hero’s unfaithfulness was hurtful and led to his arrest under the charge that he “was a villain.” The Prince used gossip for the good of Benedick, Beatrice, Claudio and Hero. The lovers all reaped the benefits of “getting played.” In this world concerned with image management, love requires an agent. I hope the audience sees the truth in this critique of self-consciousness. At the end of the play Benedick jokes that the Prince “looks sad,” and Benedick instructs him to cure

this and “get thee a wife” as Benedick has done. The Prince, as the love agent, has removed himself from the fun.

4.2 Character Analysis: *Beatrice*

Beatrice is a lover. Other characters manipulate her. The plotting and deceiving, in which she participates, aims to convince Claudio and the Prince that Hero has died of grief after her public shaming. We only see her actively plot once, with Benedick (the sole plot-executer) and her involvement is fairly minimal. She drives Benedick to action by illuminating the gender inequalities and Claudio’s rudeness in confronting Hero publicly. She is conscious of the image maintenance that is socially imperative to her gender and the importance of class position as a member of a wealthy family. Her position in the family is more difficult to discern.

Beatrice is not fiscally equal to Hero, as Leonato and Don Pedro both refer to Hero as Leonato’s only heir. Leonato calls himself Beatrice’s “uncle and guardian.” During the final hoax wherein Claudio is to marry Hero’s “cousin,” Antonio claims to have only one daughter, who looks like Hero. There is no mention of Beatrice, so we can assume that she is not Antonio’s daughter⁷. We know that her parents have been absent from her life and that she is older than Hero (who is old enough for marriage). She has had woosers and she “mocked them out of suit” (Leonato, Act III). Beatrice has also been intimate with Benedick once before the play, which she refers to in Act III: “he won it [her love] of me with false dice, therefore your grace may well say I have lost it.” She willingly

⁷ This could also be a mistake perpetrated by Shakespeare or through the system by which his plays were recorded. Though a mistake is possible, it is better to maintain faith in the playwright.

confesses this and refrains from concealing it. She risks the consequences of this admission, and eschews the social image adjustment, which is status quo.

Beatrice's most common character descriptors in the script are "wise," "witty" and "d disdainful." She never calls herself as such, though Hero, Leonato, Don Pedro, Claudio and eventually Benedick all refer to her as such. She acknowledges that Benedick calls her disdainful, "Is't possible disdain [herself] should die when she hath such meat food to feed it as Signior Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain when she come in your presence." She claims to know that Benedick called her disdainful in mask during the party in the second act. Hero calls her disdainful twice during the gulling scene, knowing that she is listening. Though upon hearing this from Hero, (who is supposedly truthful, because she is outside of Beatrice's presence) Beatrice swears to change her behavior.

She self-deprecates and has a clear vision about what people should perceive. Leonato tells her in act two that she perceives "shrewdly," and she replies that she has "a good eye, Uncle, [she] can see a church by daylight." She also comments to the Prince after Hero is won by Claudio, "Thus goes everyone to the world but [her] and [she] must sit in the corner and cry 'Heigh-ho' for a husband." She is critical about her own situation and does seem to perceive shrewdly. She sees herself as an equal person, despite her gender. "Adams sons are [her] brethren"

Another example of her shrewd perception and critical judgment comes after the attempted wedding. She sees herself as wronged because Claudio

rejected Hero so publicly: “What? Lead her on until they come to take hands, then with public accusation, bare-faced slander, unmitigated rancor...” She has a strong ability to see the big picture in terms of social justice and consequences to Hero, who will be ruined. Her critical thinking and metaphoric analysis are what other characters refer to when they speak of her wit. At the same time she listens to what other characters say about her and is vulnerable to their criticism: “Am I condemned for scorn and pride so much?” She decides to change her behavior based on—she believes—reliable feedback, “Contempt farewell and maiden pride, adieu. No glory lives behind the back of such...”

Leonato mentions her general disposition multiple times when talking to the Prince, “She is never sad, but when she sleeps. There is little of the melancholy element in her.” She “was born to speak all mirth and no matter,” and she speaks quite a lot. In the first scene, she very publicly engages in witty, disrespectful exchanges with her father and the messenger. She disrespects Benedick and gives her father reason to explain her insults to the messenger. “There is a merry war between her and Signior Benedick, they never meet but there is a skirmish of wit between them.”

Beatrice is a feminist. She sees the inequality of Hero’s ruin by Claudio and speaks out against it. She does not conform to society’s standards and does not take any husband at the beginning. She wants the choice of marriage or not. She will not change herself. She wants a husband who is her equal and she values herself highly. Female audience members respond strongly to this portrayal.

The argument could be made that she does this because she had been Benedick's lover before, which turned her into a man-hater. This, however, is not really implied in the text and defying the gender roles of patriarchy is a normal reaction. This was clearly the case in Shakespeare's time, as there are many examples of defiant women in his plays.

Making the choice to play her as a man-hater is a caricature. This portrayal will lead to a trap when she has to actually love and marry Benedick. There is the possibility that she is faking love. She never says that she loves him in soliloquy. She says that she "will requite" his love, not that she does currently. However, she tells Benedick "I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest." If she is faking that line, the audience will dislike this overly manipulative person. This evil, conniving portrayal makes her an enemy to the audience and will turn them against her. I chose to ensure that she was lovable. *Much Ado* is a comedy after all, and we already have a villain.

Playing Beatrice as open to happiness is vital. She was probably in love with Benedick at some point. It was probably painful for her to have that end. This choice makes the connection with Benedick stronger at the end (although riskier, as she is burdened by doubt from her previous experience).

While Leonato is interrogating Hero (after Claudio leaves her at the altar), Beatrice admits she was not with Hero the night before her wedding. Where was she? The last time we saw her, she found out Benedick was in love with her (really or plotted). Then Hero sent Ursula to retrieve Beatrice and she was ill, which seems like something Hero, Ursula and Margaret would have noticed.

They have not seen Beatrice since before five o'clock⁸ at night, right before the wedding. If she had been in Hero's bedchamber, she would have seen Margaret and Borachio, and would have been able to vouch for Hero's chastity.

Where Beatrice was the night before the wedding is a mystery. We know the wedding takes place on Monday, as Leonato cautioned Hero and Claudio to "wait" until then. This detail tells us between two and six days pass between the wedding and when the Prince decided on his plan to ensnare Benedick and Beatrice into love. We see Benedick with his beard shaved for Beatrice before Don John convinces the Prince and Claudio that Hero has been unfaithful. Benedick has evidently planned to woo Beatrice before his beard re-grows, and the attempt must have been that night. I attributed Beatrice's illness to staying up all night, weakening her immune system. I chose the explanation that Beatrice was with Benedick the night before the wedding. I conveyed this information by focusing on Benedick as we entered the attempted wedding scene and giving a short glance to him before confessing that she was not Hero's bedfellow the previous evening. A lack of sleep would also support Beatrice's rant at Claudio's misbehavior. (This information was subtle, and the audience might not have perceived it).

The next time we see Beatrice and Benedick together, Jake Beamer and I showed noticeably more affection while the characters joke with each other about why they fell in love. They have probably spent quite a bit of time together since reigniting their romance. Yet, their relationship has not changed since the

⁸ We cut Beatrice's line "'tis five o'clock, cousin" from this production.

wedding because Beatrice asks Benedick “What hath passed between you and Claudio?”

The last time that we see them both is during the final scene. They try to deny their romance publicly, confronting the conspirators who convinced them of each other’s love. Leonato has had enough, “Come cousin, I am sure you love the gentleman.” This denouement shows the overall goal of the show to be love and not trickery. Without further argument, Beatrice and Benedick admit their romance and happiness simply because Leonato says, ‘Come on.’

In our production we followed this ending with a dance performed by the entire cast, as well as (sometimes) Professor Tompkins. We chose to dance “The Wobble,” a popular club dance whose steps are widely known by college aged-students. During two of the performances students stood up and danced with us. Lauren Street choreographed the curtain call to this song and we all danced off stage with huge smiles on our faces.

4.3 This Rehearsal Process

I started this acting process by reading through *Much Ado About Nothing* and talking to Professor Tompkins. The questions I had were: Is Beatrice’s line count really so small? Why does the Prince attempt to marry Beatrice? Why does Leonato doubt his daughter when he hears accusations of Hero’s adultery? Why does Beatrice lack a retort in the end of the play (as Kate has in *Taming of the Shrew*)? I re-read for French scenes and possible doubling, given our department’s maximum of twenty-three cast members.

We then cut the script. This varies from my 'regular' process. Normally I would not participate in the cutting process, and this was a treat. Professor Tompkins, Jake Beamer and I went through line-by-line, cutting many lines and making sure that every necessary word was understandable enough to the audience, as discussed above. The original script was one hundred eighteen pages, while our working version took up seventy-four.

At this time, I defined the message of the piece: That listening to and peddling hearsay have consequences. It is important that the audience understands the language, as its active defiance of the action is the play's salient conflict. I fully supported adapting the text. Professor Tompkins had largely decided these conceptual aspects, however, I appreciated my role as a sounding board. What I appreciated most was his respect. He told me that he recognized my work on *Wrong With Me* and that he could see what I was trying to do. This earned my trust and felt vindicating after the expulsion threats from my first year.

We talked about how to relate our thoughts about the text to our future audience. Hearsay and gossip are still very current issues. We would tell the play's story to the student audience using contemporary design and semiology. We deepened the complexity of our message to the audience by actively addressing barriers that prevent understanding. Our t-shirts were literal name-tags and we were color-coded for occupation, making it easier to tell us apart.

We could also elegantly compare historical themes with current practice and capitalize on the students' and our entire audience's daily interactions, enhancing everyone's understanding of the story and the theatre artistry applied.

Cellular phones, tabloids and constant email communication remind us how gossip and hearsay still drive modern society. For instance, when the Messenger (Patrick Taft) “delivers” Claudio’s Uncle (Derek Wahle) texts via his smartphone instead of on paper, we get an instant reaction that transcends the spoken line.

The script adaptation took several meetings over the summer, about sixty total hours. This in-depth time gave us a large amount of table work and we often broke from our task to discuss other interpretations of the play. One disagreement occurred about Hero’s level of attractiveness. Professor Tompkins wanted to cast (and eventually did) a physically attractive Hero. Hero’s level of beauty is confirmed by Claudio, The Prince, Leonato and Antonio. I argued that we should play Hero as clearly ugly (requiring prosthetic features). Overall this would intensify the stakes of Hero’s virginity in contemporary setting. Also, playing Hero as very attractive eliminates jokes. If she is pretty, and people say so, they are stating the obvious, while those who say she is not pretty are expressing negative personal or emotional sentiment, and neither will get a laugh. However, if she is distinctly un-pretty, those who say she *is* pretty are cementing our overall concept of hearsay in opposition to truth, and those who admit she is not pretty have established their cynicism and crude judgment with the audience, both of which give the opportunity for actors to distinguish their character’s point of view and elicit humor.

We also entertained the idea of positioning Claudio as equal to Hero this way and making him a giant nerd, lowering his social status and increasing the pressure to love Hero. The evidence we had to support this was that the

Messenger claims the Prince had bestowed many honors upon Claudio and he had done "the feats of a lion" in "the figure of a lamb." I maintain that this would have worked and it would have been a bolder interpretation of the characters. Professor Tompkins decided against this interpretation in favor of emphasizing Claudio's post in the military in the beginning. Disagreements aside, the whole process of arguing and deciding those things as a group increased understanding on everyone's parts and fostered a coherent, tested concept that we were able to employ.

Then I learned my lines. As usual I did this by rote, one scene at a time. Beatrice only has one monologue in blank verse so I was not able to get much help from the meter. Usually when playing Shakespeare's text, I am a staunch supporter of John Barton's line-speaking technique, as mentioned above. A main difference from my natural speech is a predisposition to focus on the end of the line, to aid audience understanding (Barton 40). I employ this technique, of course, not at the expense of the sense of the English (as Barton suggests). If any technique is visible, it has not been mastered. I also marked Trochaic stresses and Alexandrines. I used these metric anomalies to inform my decisions about Beatrice's reasoning and emotional state. I made choices about the intention of her lines, but refrained from fixing the stress pattern.

Professor Tompkins's ideal performance of Shakespeare relies on defined characters. Each character's type, accent, and accessories were discussed before casting. Beatrice would not have an accent. We decided against this because her bookishness and heavy use of logic in her jokes made her a brainy

and educated type. We eventually decided she was a teacher by profession, based on our interpretation of Benedick's insult, "You are a rare parrot-teacher." The prominence of one archetype led us away from adding the complication of accented speech.

Professor Tompkins, Jake and I started rehearsing some of the scenes during the summer, first only monologues and then scenes between the two of us. The work was quite detailed and I remember thinking when we started actually rehearsing with the cast that the scenes were too detailed for us to maintain. The experiments were not all successful. We took what we learned about the character tendencies, chronology and content and went back to the drawing board if necessary.

When we got back to school, I was off-book with the exception of the final scene. We auditioned people with Professor Tompkins. We had twelve male roles to fill and thirteen males auditioned. The males were sorted into roles. The female casting was more confusing and disheartening. We had many women audition. With the addition of Lauren Street to the thesis pool, we had two named women's roles left to cast and a few roles that could be cast as either gender. Tompkins fell in love with Elisabeth Riddle for Hero. She was very bubbly, young-looking and fit his aesthetic of Hero as a virtuous lover.

Ashley Smith, a second-year graduate student, was cast as Ursula. This was not set until callbacks because Professor Tompkins required a German accent. The accent had been decided due to Ursula's use of non-sequiturs and

constant clarification questions, as well as the name Ursula. The other accents in the show had not been predetermined.

With the cast in place, we had the first read through where we distributed the cuts and changes to all actors. We knew there was some pushback on changing the language, so during this phase we abandoned our changes dealing with current cultural references, such as the ZZ Top example mentioned above (if we were forced to defend our choices, we were going to pick our battles). Everyone sat in a circle. We were equal.

We started rehearsal the next week, parceling out pieces of the first act, and were only required in the room when we were called to work that evening. We were also informed that we needed to be doing a warm-up each evening to prepare us for the professional world where people warm up before every performance.

Lauren Street and I traded off working specific issues during warm-ups and as time went on Street took over and we developed some cast-specific warm-ups that we felt built our bond and lightened our hearts after a long day of school. Play was important to the group as a whole. We laughed through rehearsals, fostering a group attitude that 'this is a comedy and we are a family.'

I employed Daniel Hill's (our concurrent "Acting V" professor) suggestion to use post-it notes to keep track of blocking notes to prevent my script from becoming uncontrollably messy. I did not keep using that suggestion as the blocking changed so regularly that my post-its lost their adhesive. The blocking was never permanent. This kept me on my toes and probably stole my focus.

Professor Tompkins and I have spoken about blocking changes since the play's closing.

In the first few weeks my repeated notes were to keep my voice in my chest, 'have more fun with it' and 'it's all about you.' I think my view of Beatrice was growing from a cynical straight-man to Benedick, who would quip mainly to show her superiority, into a ham who loved to engage in quick verbal banter and loved having an equal. As we moved into the middle of the play, we spent a lot of time working on the gulling scenes wherein the Prince, Claudio and Leonato gull Benedick, and Ursula and Hero gull Beatrice. The structure of Beatrice's gulling came quite easily. Hero and Ursula would cover Beatrice in orange peel. It was a surface joke, which the location of the scene in "Antonio's Orchard" was the main textual support. The men's gulling scene went through many stages of development and changed entirely in concept many times.

I was lucky to be involved in the idea generation. My favorite part about rehearsal is shaping the presentation for the audience. In this situation we were changing the activity that the men were performing so that their main goal, convincing Benedick that Beatrice was in love with him, would be obscured to Benedick. However, we were failing to keep this goal obvious to the audience. The main problem we worked around was that each activity we tried (such as corn hole) seemed to obfuscate the character's deception goals.

I also engaged in some dieting and exercising at this point. That is unusual for me, but I felt that the physical specifications for some of our jokes were limiting, and I wanted to make the intentions as clear as possible. The

shock our small audiences experienced when I first grabbed Jake Beamer's upper thigh and he twisted my nipples was necessary for the audience to understand the severity of the fights between us. We made the fights personal and broke normal rules. The symbolism in the genital-augmentation Benedick and Beatrice both fake was an early idea that we trusted. This harmonized with their drive to maintain others' opinions. It also made a nice message in the end, that when they accept each other, that they can abandon those superficial pursuits. We needed Jake's penis and my breasts to look clearly big. To make the chicken cutlets more obvious I had to make my waist smaller. I succeeded in this partially because I had no time to eat (I was also assisted by nylon body-shapers).

I should also mention that I was receiving many notes at this point that I needed to age Beatrice up to forty years old. In the mornings, in the Repertory Company's *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*, I was aging Manyara down to sixteen. The main manifestation of the age difference was the vocal change to the chest resonance in Beatrice from the nose in Manyara. I started warming my chest resonator up before the group warm up in the evenings and this abated the notes.

We continued experimenting and adjusting. When we entered technical rehearsals, I felt it necessary to attend dry tech (usually actors are excused while designers, stage managers, electricians and the director program the light cues). I was the only thesis performer there. This was important to me because of the family atmosphere we were trying to create, as well as the fear that I was working

so hard, that if I stopped, it would all collapse. I worked many more hours on this piece than I would normally. I felt like Professor Tompkins's right hand.

During technical rehearsals I found that a nylon body-shaper successfully helped my boobs look bigger. I worked with my hair bun stuffing. I worked with my glasses. I also worked with my age makeup (the main difficulty was maintaining it through the show while applying it subtly enough for the small space). Occasionally I screamed in the after-wedding scene. I tried to avoid screaming for my own vocal health, and also because a screaming woman can read as uncontrolled and irrational. I kept the same routine for my offstage time and developed a clear path through the play. From the beginning of technical rehearsals through the performances we continued with *Mufaro* performances in the morning. My dance sequence also became more serious as I fixed the choreography. Improvisation was not consistent enough for the bright lights. I added a step from PSY's "Gangnam Style" (Psy, YouTube.com), which was at the height of its popularity, to involve the students' culture.

We did have an audience in our final dress rehearsal, students from Daniel Hill's Indiana University Southeast acting class. Professor Tompkins told us all to do something that we had never done before. Everyone was on his or her toes, and I picked two things: I totally gave up and sat during the after-wedding scene and I whined and sobbed pitifully with the Prince before he asked me to marry him. Professor Tompkins told me he loved the sitting and giving up before launching into the tirade in the after-wedding scene. Professor Tompkins later told me that the whining was mugging and it did not work. I think Beatrice

mugs and I do the impression, of “Grape Lady” (<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/grape-lady>), well and it is one more detail that was specifically intended to reach the student-aged audience. I kept both. The audience that night was very much with us. They loved us and they laughed a lot with us. Also Professor Tompkins’s neighbors were in the audience, and they loved it so much that they came back a second night for opening (they cancelled flights as he reminded us all).

4.4 The Performances

Each performance night I noted the overall response from the audience. Later in the year Melanie Henry, who manages the box office, gave me the ticket sales data for the show. I have inserted the percentage of total ticket sales that were charged the special student-rate⁹. I am presenting this data because I believe the audience responds differently based on its members and I believe in measurable results as well as my own perception as valuable evaluation tools.

Tompkins’s neighbors were disappointed as we were flatter on our opening night without as much audience response. Though many people I trust liked the Wednesday night performance, they were more difficult to read. The tickets sold to this audience were more than eighty percent at student-rate. The higher-than-average student rate was concurrent with this quiet audience. I found myself digging in and using more emotional vigor during the tirade after Hero is left at the altar. I also majorly messed up an entrance during that night. Jake

⁹ This data is fallible. Predictable inaccuracies include: ticket sales may not equate to audience members, students without their identification would have purchased tickets at the public rate, I have not included the data on compensatory tickets, whose holders might receive the play differently, and countless other variables which I have not even fathomed.

changed how he delivered some of my entrance cue lines and I just did not hear my cue while he was writing his love letter. Each night I gave Professor Tompkins a ride home, and we did a blow-by-blow. He was kind about the missed entrance.

Thursday night was definitely an off night as well. Thursday's ticket sales were the highest at student-rate, over eighty-three percent (again the high student-rate correlated with a difficult performance). The audience was quiet and we had trouble getting them to laugh. Friday night was different. We had some amazing participation. Enjoyment of Theatre Students left the theatre telling their friends that the show was "Awesome." A girl got up and did "The Wobble" with Jake. Student-rate tickets were less prevalent at seventy-two percent. My mom came on Friday night. Before the show she told me that she was afraid of not understanding the plot. She was planning on coming back Saturday night with a script to read along. I really did not want her to read along. That made me wish we had changed the language. (I suspect she was intimidated by my previous University of Louisville Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, and wanted to be able to ask informed questions).

My mom did not read along the second night. She said she understood more even without reading. Saturday night's audience was not as with us as Friday night's had been, however it was still strong. A girl got up and wobbled with me for a verse. Saturday night had our lowest percentage of student-rate tickets at just under seventy percent (although I would have expected that Friday would have had the lowest student-ticket rate). Sunday afternoon was my

weakest performance. I was getting really tired and ill. However, Dr. Gordon Strauss saw that performance and was very kind and exuberant when I talked to him after the show closed. Both Sunday shows had student-ticket rates close to the average (slightly over seventy-five percent), the matinee's rate was seventy-three while the evening performance had seventy-eight.

Sunday night was the last performance, and Professor Tompkins added an entrance for me with the Prince, so that we would illustrate the length of my conversation with him. The entrance gave Beamer an extra chance to glare at me. We were still experimenting. The whole thing was still a process.

I had many students approach me in the weeks after the show and tell me that I 'kept the show alive' for them or that I was his/her 'favorite.' That validation was nice to have, however, vague. The things that I think stood out to them are the dance, including the Gangnam Style, the direct address, the mugging, and even the tirade. Those are some of the flourishes I offered that were met with palpable audience reactions, which I suspect drew that feedback. Those are the times when I could look out into the audience's eyes and have a tiny, knowing exchange. No one came up to us to say how accurate the text was, or how much they learned from the production

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

I have neglected a large portion of our audience. With seventy-five percent students, we still have a large portion of our audience who has no transcript-related motives in their attendance. Also, students are multi-faceted. Many of them can handle dramatic critical analysis, and my arguments ignored the students who might have come to the play without a requirement. This is clearly illustrated by Friday night's performance. The crowd was alive and we still had fifty-four Enjoyment of Theatre student tickets that evening. The students we were fighting for were the ones who were lost due to boredom, a small number, which we might have regained because Beamer grabbed my boobs.

Theatre is not a math problem. Every performance does only happen once. There are a lot of variables and it is difficult to measure results. Even the results I did measure (only attendance) should not define the piece. Eight hundred forty five people attended the show. The net revenue from this show was eight thousand forty-two dollars. These numbers seem small to me after arguing so strenuously to say "if" in place of "an." The principle of what we were trying to achieve was not lost with the textual updates. The changes were small pieces of a whole production that, I believe, worked.

We did engage audience members. People laughed. The audience overall understood the story, students included. I still believe that changing the script would have increased the entire audience's connection with the piece, however we were still effective with the material we ultimately chose to use.

As a cast, we formed a tight group and made a lot of new friendships. We also built a solid story for the audience to enjoy with us. That entertainment did not cost the show its educational properties. Usually education and entertainment can enhance each other. They are both valid and important goals, and every theatre practitioner will have to choose which to prioritize on every project.

In the future, I will change Shakespeare. I have performed Shakespeare both for historical accuracy and for modern entertainment in the past. That's the luxury of performing in more than one play. I believe my reaction was so strong in connection to this piece because somewhere along the line we developed the attitude of "it's good enough." It's good enough to pass the class, it's good enough to keep me enrolled, it's good enough for me to teach.

I will never again allow "good enough" to limit my potential and I will keep striving to incorporate both education and entertainment in my theatre, outside academia. Entertainment and Education are not opposing forces. They are necessary parts that cannot be extricated from each other. Strip clubs enlighten your brain and textbooks can be pleasurable. Keeping the appropriate balance for each project will help me reach future audiences. I will also encourage risk-taking from my colleagues the choice to revert the script to the original language meant that we never tested our adaptation (which I regret).

I hope the audience got some real thinking out of this production. We spent many hours plotting, we got to watch them fall for our deception, and ultimately it was for their own good.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Jocelyn Matsuo

7224 Chamberlain Ave

St. Louis, MO 63130

801-859-4647

jocelyn.matsuo@gmail.com

EDUCATION

University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

M.F.A. Theatre Arts: Acting/Performance (Anticipated - 2013)

Thesis: "Utilizing the Spectator Perspective in the Acting Process"

Advisor: Dr. Amy Steiger

London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art

LAMDA Diploma: Classical Acting (2007)

Tutor: Stephen Jameson

Pitzer College, Claremont, CA

B.A. Social Media Semiotics (2006)

Thesis: "The Re:_____ Series"

Advisors: Alexandra Juhasz and Dr. Carmen Fought

EXPERIENCE

Graduate Teaching Assistant, 2010 - 2013

University of Louisville

Courses: Enjoyment of Theatre, Acting for Non-Majors

Graduate Coordinator - Studio Theatre, 2012 - 2013

University of Louisville

Repertory Company, 2011 - 2013

University of Louisville

Digital Video Publisher, 2007-2011

Hulu LLC

Instructor, 2009-2010

Claremont School of Theatre Arts

Courses: Acting, Voice

Intern, 2005

Pukka Films, London, UK

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Founding Member, 2005 - Present

The PoorHouse Theatre Co.

GRANTS/FELLOWSHIPS

Diversity Fellowship, 2011-2013

School of Interdisciplinary and Graduate Studies

University of Louisville

Improv Studies Grant, 2011

Theatre Arts Department

University of Louisville

AWARDS/HONORS

Virginia Princehouse Allen Award for Acting, 2006

Pomona College Theatre Department

Most Useful Hack Project, 2011

Hulu LLC

SKILLS/QUALIFICATIONS

- Final Cut Pro and Adobe Creative Suite
- Microsoft Office, Mac Pages, Numbers and Keynote
- Social Media Platform list upon request
- Digital Asset Management, Edius, MPEG Streamclip, VLC, Quicktime, YouTube