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NOURISHING THE RELATIONSHIP:
AN ACTRESS AND HER CRAFT

By

Pacey Lizette Walker
B.A., Alabama State University, 2003

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Department of Theatre Arts
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May, 2006

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A Monograph Approved on

April 11, 2006

by the following Thesis Committee:

Thesis Director

DEDICATION

This monograph is dedicated to my Lord and Savior
Jesus Christ, who has been my sustaining strength throughout this journey,
and
my beloved family who encourages me to follow my dreams.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank God for all of his many blessings. I would like to thank Dr. Lundeana Thomas for her immeasurable assistance and guidance in writing this monograph. I would also like to thank Dr. Russell Vandenbroucke for directing my thesis performance in *Night Sky* and I thank him for being on my thesis writing committee. Thanks to Dr. Edna Ross for the time and energy she contributed to this process as a committee member.

Many thanks to my mother and father, Sherry and Willie Walker, for their love. I thank my sisters, Stacy and Traci, and my niece, Jatariel, for their support. I also thank Nefertiti Burton and Jim Tompkins for their guidance over the past three years. Many thanks to all of the faculty members of the Theatre Arts department for their selflessness in aiding my artistic growth. It was wonderful acting with my little brother, Eric, and I wish him the best. Finally, I would like to thank my classmates for their support and love. May God bless everyone in his and her future endeavors.

ABSTRACT

NOURISHING THE RELATIONSHIP: AN ACTRESS AND HER CRAFT

Pacey Lizette Walker

May 13, 2006

This thesis is divided into six chapters covering my evolution as an artist. The introduction features the growth and awareness I have attained, spanning the past three years, since I arrived at graduate school. Chapter One discusses my approach to the character of Anna while Chapter Two focuses on my research of Aphasia and Astronomy as they relate to the script of *Night Sky*. Chapter Three explores the audition and rehearsal processes and the outcome of those processes as experienced in the performance. In Chapter Four, I reflect on the experience of *Night Sky* and examine ways I could have possibly made my performance better. Finally, Chapter Five exposes final thoughts about my present state and future plans. This monograph is a testimony of the continuing maturation of my relationship with the craft of acting, highlighted in my thesis role as Anna in Yankowitz's *Night Sky* (1991).

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INTRODUCTION

GROWTH AND AWARENESS

For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11

“Being” has been defined by the late actress Beah Richards as “human existence lacking no essential characteristics, perfect, in a complete and perfect state” (Interview). Before arriving at graduate school, I was taught the significance of not just portraying a character, but totally “being” a character. Dr. Tommie Stewart, my mentor, taught me this concept of acting after she studied with Beah Richards. Although I clearly understood what “being” was as an undergraduate at Alabama State University, I did not know how to embrace it as an actor. I was thankful that my acting foundation was built on finding the total truth in the art, but I did not know how to be fully present, living moment-to-moment, as my characters.

When I reached the University of Louisville (UofL), I arrived with the specific hope of becoming, through intensive training, the best actress my potential would allow. Graduate school was to be the “potter’s house” that would both break and mold me into the “present actor.” In Joseph Chaikin’s *The Presence of the Actor* (1972), he claims:

The basic starting point for the actor is that his body is sensitive to the immediate landscape where he is performing. The full attention of the mind and body should be awake in that very space and in that very time (not an idea of time) and with the very people who are also in that space and time (65).

I was always so inwardly focused when I was performing that I was unconsciously

resisting “being” by not allowing myself to be affected by those with whom I was acting. This was my greatest weakness when I arrived at graduate school and it remains one of my greatest struggles today. In *The Presence of the Actor*, Chaikin goes on to say, “First, the actor must be present in his body, present in his voice. Second, the body must be awake—all of it, the parts and the whole--and it must be sensitive to reaction through imaginary and immediate stimuli” (66). Simply stated, the actor’s instrument is comprised of three tools: the mind, the body, and the voice. Therefore, the actor’s instrument is herself.

While each of my tools was individually in workable shape, together they made for an exceptionally weak instrument. This weakness was due to my inability to simultaneously apply each tool in performance on a professional level. The weakness of my untrained voice and body stemmed from inflexibility. I had problems with being monotonous and stiff. I was also extremely self-conscious about my lack of vocal and dance lessons. Another weakness was my tendency to go too far in one direction with my acting instead of letting everything gel together. For example, I have often put great amounts of energy in my characters’ voices while paying hardly any attention to their walks or movements. I have also concentrated on their emotional lives to such a great extent that my characters, specifically in realistic plays, appeared to be only collections of emotions and not whole human beings.

Classroom Training

Most of my weaknesses have been brutally attacked and conquered in my graduate classes. I have learned much in each of my courses, but there are two that have had the greatest impact on my growth. First, one of the most beneficial classes was Dr.

Albert Harris's Theatre Games course because it stimulated my mind. An actor's mind is the most important tool possessed, and until it is freed, the entire instrument can be defective. My voice and body might be capable of capturing unimaginable ranges and positions, but without focus, I cannot justly execute those actions. Focus is conventionally perceived to be a prison cell for the mind in which a specific thought or action is contained until that thought or action is complete. However, focus of the mind, ironically, is freedom of the mind for the actor. Thankfully, in acting, focus is not a prison cell at all but an open meadow where the actor can play as uninhibitedly as is wished within the context of a given script.

In *Zen in the Art of Archery* (1953), a book required for Harris's class, Professor of Philosophy Eugen Herrigel states, "The effortlessness of a performance for which great strength is needed is a spectacle" (27). He is acknowledging the beauty of witnessing a flawless performance, for which much energy must be exerted, which appears to have been easily presented. Dr. Harris led us on the path of obtaining that effortlessness by making us sensitive to our impulses, sensitive to what naturally happens in us or to us in response to a stimulus. In order to respond truthfully, I had to drop my tendency to anticipate my actions and honestly be in the moment. I am constantly practicing this technique in my acting and I am now much more alive on stage.

Second, James Tompkins's Acting course was beneficial because I learned the importance of subtlety and simplicity in performance. After reaching so far to free my mind, it was important to tone my performances down. I have heard Dr. Russell Vandembroucke, director of my thesis show, say, "It's very hard to be simple as an actor" (Lecture). I would eventually discover, in Tompkins's class, that this was an

understatement. It is quite difficult to find the balance between being “alive and theatrical” and being “simply truthful.” I learned in acting class that the answer to this enigma is the specific honest pursuit of a character’s goal.

In *Respect for Acting* (1973), the legendary actress Uta Hagen addresses the fact that an audience is more attracted to a cat following a piece of lint with its eyes than an actor in action. She theorizes:

the cat...is more single-minded in its purpose, with no mental distractions to blur its instincts. The cat really exists with strong, spontaneous, forward-moving attention, and so it can surpass the actor, who is *predictably* busy with his stage life (27).

Professor Tompkins supports her theory with his teaching methods that break down each moment of the character’s actions in pursuit of a goal. This process is exceedingly tedious yet absolutely necessary. I now know that attention to detail is essential in being a simplistic actress with great presence.

On the Job Training

Aside from class work, I have been greatly strengthened as an actress during the rehearsal and performance process of the wonderful plays in which I have had the opportunity to act. I was not cast in a mainstage production my first semester, but thanks to the gracious effort of Kamie McCant, I was able to perform in a studio show, *Brown Silk and Magenta Sunsets* by P.J. Gibson. I felt a great amount of pressure during the rehearsal process because I knew I would be graded for the performance. I also acknowledged that my worth as an actress in this program would be tested. The rehearsals were intense due to a three-week time period, under which I had never worked. Six weeks had been my standard length of rehearsal time and this made three seem equivalent to a couple of days. Nevertheless, I used the period of time wisely by

immediately working on the development of my character. Lena Larsen Salvinoni is a forty-seven year old recluse who is continuously fighting to free herself from a haunting past. During most of the play, she is battling her history by drowning her sorrows with alcohol. I could not identify with her age or drinking habits, then being a twenty-two year old woman who had never been drunk, but I put forth my best effort. In hindsight, there are many aspects of the character that I wish I could have embraced better. I neglected to capture the essence of her maturity and the confidence she possesses in her womanhood. For example, in seducing the young painter, Able, I made the mistake of throwing myself at him instead of enticing him with the wiles an experienced woman would skillfully use at her disposal. All in all, it was an important experience that challenged me to portray a character convincingly with whom I could not closely identify, in a short period of time. My previous feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty were dissolved by the end of the show because I had proven to myself that I was worthy of being in this training program.

The next semester was a complete one hundred and eighty-degree turn. Not only was I immediately cast in one mainstage production, *Middle Passage: A Ritual of Healing* by Fatima Dike, I was also cast in a second, Euripides's *The Trojan Women*, and one amazing studio production, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* by Ntozake Shange. First, performing in *Middle Passage*, which was co-directed by Nefertiti Burton and Dumile Magodla, presented me with my first challenges of learning a South African dialect and playing multiple characters.

My first character was Eke, a Cameroonian queen who was sold into slavery. She is an extremely strong, dramatic character who escapes slavery by ending her life.

Dadabawo, my second character, is a strong, comedic character who seeks the direction of her family by heeding her ancestors. Even though I had heard it said that comedy is more difficult to perform than drama, I found the opposite to be true. I felt comfortable with my comedic timing while I was uneasy when it came to performing the “heavy” scenes. I was always strongly present as the character for some performances but during others I was greatly disconnected. During one scene, for example, Eke confronts her rapist, a white slave trader aboard the ship, before she leaps into the ocean. In my opinion, I really “lived” that scene about twice out of the six times I performed it. I have often asked myself “Why can’t I live it every time?” I know the answer is “I can,” but I was and am constantly battling with my mind to make it think more as the character instead of as the actor.

Acting in *Trojan Women* was my first performance in a classical play. I was cast as one of the women of Troy and I found the experience to be quite strange because it was the first time that I was directed to restrain my emotions. Russell Vandenbroucke was my director and I learned an interesting concept of acting from him. His style of directing reminded me of Bertolt Brecht’s performing techniques because instead of focusing on the actor’s feelings, the cast was instructed to focus on what the audience should be feeling as a result of our actions on stage. Aside from putting less energy into my own emotions, I was directed to put more energy into articulating my words. This was a direction that would later come to haunt me in my thesis performance, also directed by Vandenbroucke. Performing in *Trojan Women* sparked my enthusiasm to perform in more classical plays because I had grown accustomed to only performing in realistic plays and I know that I must continuously expand my knowledge of performance styles in order to

be more versatile.

The Lady in Red in *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* was the most challenging character I had to portray to date. Her final monologue was the longest I ever had to perform and I found myself overwhelmed with fright because I was not sure that I could handle such an awesome task. I was additionally stressed because the director, Brian Martin, would not coach me privately on this monologue more than three times. He simply instructed me to be grounded, which is to stand firm in my acting choices by being connected from the soles of my feet to the top of my head, and to use my entire instrument while acting. He urged me to trust myself and not fear the capabilities of my voice and body. Since he did not comply to conventionally rehearse the monologue with me, I had no choice but to trust myself and I was pleasantly surprised with the end result because trust yielded freedom.

I was pleased and excited by the end of my first year in this program. The Theatre Arts Department had begun to feel like a home because I was so invested in each performance as it related to my personal artistic advancement. I also believed that those who presided over me as professors and directors were selflessly sharing acting principles and insights with me that they knew would further my growth. I was anticipating my second year in the program and the vital information and experiences that awaited me.

During summer break, I was cast with the Pleiades Theatre Company in Margaret Edson's *Wit* as Susie Monahan. This was my first professional acting job on stage. The rehearsal process was only two and a half weeks and I was concerned that I would not be prepared to perform in time. The first note I got from the director, Be Boyd, was that I sounded "too stagy." I immediately knew the answer for this. I put too much emphasis

on pronouncing the words correctly and not enough emphasis on making the character real. Again, I went too far in one direction with my acting. Once I relaxed and stopped worrying about having a beautiful stage voice, a real human emerged and my performance was well received by my director and our audience.

About two weeks after *Wit* was over, I began filming an independent film, *How You Look to Me* by Bruce Romans, playing the character of Kris. This was my second film job as an actress, the first being my portrayal of the character Fannie in *The Rosa Parks Story* by Paris Qualles acting opposite Angela Bassett. As I think on it, it appears that auditioning for films is easier than stage auditions for me. I think the reason is that I put too much energy into showing the play director that I know how to present myself on stage. I take on a technical “stage walk” and “stage talk” which drains the life from my characters. In film auditions, however, I am relaxed and natural. This state of being more openly allows the characters to shine through. I am now attempting to bring these qualities to every audition.

In the fall of 2004, the beginning of my second year in the M.F.A. program, I was cast in *Steal Away*, written by Ramona King, as the 62-year old grandmother, Stella Margaret Kyzer. This was an unbelievably challenging character to marry, become one with, because I had such a difficult time trying to capture her age and understand her journey throughout the play. Dr. Lundeana Thomas directed this show and she was the most hands-on director I had ever worked under. She constantly challenged me to reach further in developing my character and this made me feel incapable of doing anything right. I was never able to gain a sense of security in the role; I never owned the character.

In the spring of 2005, I was cast in *Home*, once again working under the direction

of Nefertiti Burton. This was the most enjoyable show I had ever acted in because I had the opportunity to portray twenty-one characters and many of them were bold and unruly. Having a reserved personality invites me to resist my quietness and play with more lively expressions in my characters. I was challenged with capturing the essences of characters ranging from an eleven year-old boy to a seventy year-old woman. I also had to sing acapella and do stylized dancing, tasks that would have greatly intimidated me when I first arrived here at UofL. I was prepared, however, to perform confidently thanks to voice and dance classes I ventured out the department to take. Enrolling in those classes has made me feel more confident as a performer and although I still have a long way to go in these areas, I can see and hear my potential progressively coming to fruition.

In the summer of 2005, I had the wonderful opportunity of performing at the National Black Theatre Festival in *Steal Away*, again portraying Stella. It was odd to perform and not be graded for our performance as we are in university located productions. The standard still felt high but not because I wanted a satisfactory grade. I wanted a pleased audience, especially considering that the playwright was present. While I thought that I would be more comfortable performing as the character for the second time, I was shockingly more insecure and my portrayal was even weaker in some aspects. I physically captured her age better but I declined to make her a complete human being; possessing a unique personality and full being. This was extremely frustrating because I could never quite figure out what was holding me back. My assumption is I let my mind believe that I was never going to “be” her so I had defeated myself before I began.

Working with a variety of directors has shaped and molded my acting. McCant

encouraged me to embrace the capabilities of human expression while Burton allowed me to make many self-discoveries. Magodla urged me to produce truth every performance and Vandembroucke cautioned me to present emotions in a more restrained manner. Martin forced me to trust myself and Boyd helped me to relax in my character. Last, but certainly not least, Thomas pushed me to always reach forward and never be complacent when I have the opportunity to discover more. I now value the relationship between actor and director more and I acknowledge the significance of having trust in that relationship.

When I was not cast in a mainstage show my first semester, it was a troubling experience. I began to doubt my potential and question the choice I had made to further my education. I remember crying and feeling so insecure about my God-given talent. However, my insecurity began to diminish after I discussed the matter with God in prayer and He reminded me through His word that He was and always would be in control. In Jeremiah 29:11, God says “For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (*Womens Devotional Bible*, 860). He reminded me that I did arrive here with strengths and that my potential was enormous.

As mentioned previously, knowing that my goal as an actor was to always “be present” was one of my strengths because at least I was aware of that essential. I also had a great command for the stage, partly because of my stature of nearly six feet, and partly because of the confidence I exuded while performing. Furthermore, I knew that I possessed openness as an actor and this allowed me to be emotionally accessible. Crying, specifically, was never a great challenge for me because I did not find it difficult to identify with the pain of a character. Lastly, one of my strengths was having an open mind to new ideas and a willingness to experiment on stage. Being in graduate school

has whetted my appetite for learning different techniques and theories of performing and I have enjoyed testing many concepts in an effort to develop a collection of tools that would work to my advantage.

When I was first attracted to acting, I simply thought it would be a fun occupation because all I would be doing was lying to and deceiving groups of people who wanted to be lied to and deceived. I was right about one thing. Lying is fun because it is easy. However, I would quickly discover that the essence of acting is about revealing the truth, and this is not easy at all. Truth cannot be present without its counterpart, vulnerability. Dennis Krausnick, our guest faculty member, believes “When you speak from vulnerability, it’s the most powerful voice in the room” (Lecture). I know that I cannot just sympathize for my character. Instead, I must empathize with my character and actually experience a part of that life. Hagen claims, “You ought to be ready to test the selection of actions belonging to a character in a specific play; to test how you can make a lie into truth, fiction into reality, by using your own being” (139). The actual experience may not be literally in action, but the truth of that experience must be. The audience wants the truth and they do not care how it is delivered. I, on the other hand, must care about the delivery as the messenger. I am continuously seeking to make my deliveries more truthful.

When my thesis role had been chosen by the end of my second year, I was extremely pleased with my growth to that point. I was also ecstatic about incorporating the truths I had learned about acting into a performance that would feature my level of ripeness as an actress. My projected goal in my thesis role was to sustain believability and truth from the moment I walked on stage until the second I took my bow.

This monograph is a testimony of my journey on the road to becoming a professional actress. In order to achieve true professionalism, I knew that I had to be dedicated to each phase of the acting process; thus nourishing my relationship with the craft of acting. In this monograph, I will analyze my approach to performing in Susan Yankowitz's *Night Sky* (1991) and the actual execution of my portrayal of the character Anna. This analysis is divided into the following five chapters in which I discuss approaching the character, researching the script, experiencing the process from audition to performance, and reflecting on the role. Finally, my conclusion highlights my present explorations and future aspirations as an actress. The study of this monograph should yield a clear image of a season in my ongoing metamorphosis as an artist.

CHAPTER I
APPROACHING THE CHARACTER:
CHALLENGES AND FINDINGS

My thesis role was to be the culmination of all the wonderful lessons I have learned about acting since my arrival at graduate school. My main objectives in performance were to help present my director's vision and do work that satisfied me, as opposed to playing for the applause or approval of my audience or faculty members. Entertainer Iman instructs, "First you have to approve of yourself before anyone else can approve of you" (Interview). I wanted to strive for self-approval of my work because the actor's relationship with her craft is personal and intimate.

To be truly dedicated to growing in my craft, I must constantly challenge myself by choosing "meaty" characters and knowing as much as possible about each one I portray. Anna would indeed be a challenge because she is already three-dimensional and complex before acquiring aphasia. So, by adding her interactions with this health condition to her character, I would be compelled to grow because I had a great deal of discoveries to make, understand and execute through this role.

Inviting Challenges

Anna is a thirty-five year old astronomer who acquires aphasia after being in a car accident that leaves her with a head injury. I had never even heard of aphasia before reading *Night Sky* so I had no idea of what laid ahead of me. Additionally, I had not ever gazed through a telescope either. Hence, my first book for research "Astronomy for

Dummies.” So, Anna presented the greatest challenge I ever had to face as an actress, overcoming complete ignorance. With other characters, I could at least assume that I knew what they were thinking. However, knowing so little about aphasia forced me to delve deep into Anna’s mind. For the first time, I found myself completely unsure about what a character could be thinking. I realized that only assuming to know my character would be much more of a hindrance to my growth than an aid. Therefore, I could not quickly make definite, accurate decisions. Making hasty assumptions after only the first couple of readings without any in-depth research would eventually water my performances down and deprive me and my audience of having as rich of an experience as possible. So, the role of Anna struck me because while I did not mentally understand her plight, I had strong feelings of sympathy for her situation and I knew I would have a great deal of discovery to make in order to truthfully portray her. I was interested and eager to understand exactly what was happening in her head.

Susan Yankowitz is nationally and internationally known for her numerous works. She has received many awards for her artistic creativity and her talent can easily be regarded by reading her script of *Night Sky*. Yankowitz wrote this play for actor Joseph Chaikin who requested the work because he procured aphasia after suffering a stroke. In her dedication of *Night Sky* Yankowitz writes, “*Night Sky* is about listening and language, about inner and outer space, about a medical condition, a family’s ordeal, an individual triumph—but most of all, it is about communication” (n.p.).

Communication is primary to human life and, consequently, is primary to actors who portray human life. By taking on this role, I would learn about an affliction that affects millions of people in the world and then have the responsibility of presenting the truth

about that affliction through the character of Anna.

After learning more about aphasia, I realized that the dilemma of not being able to communicate in a conventional or traditional way would surely challenge me as an actress. When portraying characters, actors usually have the luxury of expressing themselves to the level of being understood and they usually have the activity of all of their limbs. If nothing else, their thought processes are at least coherent. Portraying Anna would compel me to find new ways to think and then express those thoughts. While I must be able to multitask as an actress, generally that includes tasks such as walking and talking at the same time and thinking as an actor and a character at the same time. This is difficult enough when it comes to characters that have “normal” thought patterns. However, Anna’s thought patterns are anything but “normal” and I did not know how to even approach thinking as she thinks while she has aphasia. I was, therefore, forced to search many truths on aphasia.

Another benefit that attracted me to portray Anna is the fact she is not written to be a black woman. Most of the characters I have played are specifically black and though they were great to play, I do not wish to be limited to only one race of character. I am by no means trying to escape my heritage. In fact, I know I must first fully accept every part of myself before I can accept every part of a character. In the article *Acting and the Black Imagination*, theatre veteran Douglas Turner Ward proclaims:

If you want to be an actor you’re going to have to deal with self. You’re going to have to deal with that particular history of self. There’s no way that one can represent, interpret, any experience except from the nature of one’s consciousness. And one’s consciousness is not a black slate (Edwards, 39).

I can only fully know a character when I truly know myself because my experiences will always be apart of my character’s experiences. Theatre is so magical because of its

transformative capabilities. I aspire to be versatile and continuously crossing gender and racial barriers. Portraying Anna, who does not have a specified race, would allow me to “spread my wings” as I began to make the transition to being a professional actress.

Character Analysis

In the beginning stage of examining the script, I was a bit worried and frustrated that both me and the audience would only experience Anna for a portion of the first scene before her life-changing accident. I assumed this was not enough time to understand and present her full personality. When reading her words, she initially sounded selfish, cold, and negatively ambitious. She also seemed to be obnoxiously confident and too organized, almost stiff and non-human. However, I would soon discover that like most characters, she is three-dimensional and a caring person who is just in an extreme circumstance. Although Anna is called a “bitch” by Daniel, her live-in boyfriend, for dismissing him and definitely has the tendency to be controlling, I knew that, as most people’s are, her intentions are good and pure while her tactics are sometimes questionable. She is not evil or heartless but, like most mothers and women in romantic relationships, Anna is used to putting her daughter and her lover before herself and sometimes this is tiring for her. She has to daily attend to her family needs by cooking, cleaning, and supervising Jennifer’s progression in school and Daniel’s development as an opera singer. She indeed loves her child and her significant other, but she is feeling the pressure to concentrate on her own need, finishing her paper, on this particular day, the day of her horrifying accident. As I recently learned in Tompkins’s Acting class, this concept of focusing on the good or constructive reasons a character makes certain dubious choices is called “playing the positive.” By using this concept I could avoid

playing a quality or simplifying Anna by labeling her “a bitch.” Some of the many adjectives to describe Anna are:

Direct	Encouraging	Prideful	Ambitious
Serious	Vengeful	Resourceful	Religious
Perfectionist	Confident	Selfish	Strong
Forgiving	Sarcastic	Loving	Secure

This list confirms Anna as a complex and complete character. However, I knew that she would not be complete in my imagination until I developed a life history for her that eventually placed her in her position at the opening scene of the play.

According to my actor’s imagination, Dr. Anna Marie Washington was born in 1970 in Savannah, Georgia to a strong mother who ran a single-parent household while working as a janitor and a housekeeper. Anna’s mother did not receive a high school education so her opportunity for jobs was limited. Anna grew up wearing second-hand clothes and watching her mother struggle to make ends meet. She never knew her father because he died two months before she was born so she would later be unprepared for relationships with men. She was raised in a catholic home and she held true to her belief in God until the life-altering encounter with aphasia.

Anna is an only child who loved to play outside at night and fantasize while gazing at the stars. When she was a little girl, her auntie Betty would always sit outside with Anna on the porch and tell her mythical stories about the universe. Anna began to view the sky as a haven of possibilities. She was passionate about discovering more about that distant world and she decided at the age of six that she wanted to be an astronaut and actually travel to outer space. It was not until she reached high school that she decided she would be content with studying the outside universe from the planet earth through astronomy.

Anna decided at the young age of eight that she would not live in poverty as an adult. She saw education as a means of escape from her limited means so she was studious throughout high school and was offered a full scholarship to attend Boston University where she met and fell in love with Kenneth Branson, a senior student of Biology. She got pregnant in her senior year but her tenacity kept her on track and she graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Science Degree with a concentration in Astronomy and Physics. Two months after graduation, she gave birth to Jennifer Carol Branson and then married Kenneth. After a year of caring for her daughter and supporting her husband's dreams, she decided that it was time for him to keep the baby and for her to go to graduate school. When he refused, she divorced him and sent Jennifer to live with her grandmother while she pursued her Master of Science Degree in Astronomy and Physics from the University of Toledo. Finally, Anna reached the pinnacle of her education when she received her Doctorate of Philosophy in Astronomy from Ball State University.

Anna was offered a teaching position at Hunter College in 1998, shortly after completing her Ph.D. She and her daughter Jennifer, then eight-years old, moved to New York where Anna met and fell in love with Daniel Adams, a promising opera singer. Daniel is white and Anna's relationship with him is her first interracial one. All of the black men from Anna's past affairs had complained that she was too controlling. Daniel, however, was initially attracted to Anna's haughty spirit. He proposed to her after two years of dating but she refused to ever get married again. They moved in together and remained in their relationship for seven years before the day they had a terrible argument which led to Anna storming out of the house and getting hit by a car.

According to Professor Bill Houston, the fields of Astronomy and Physics are male dominated. Women, in general, are a small minority and black women, in particular, are nearly non-existent (Houston, Interview). Anna is thirty-five years old and a nationally-renowned scholar in her field. She is a professor at Hunter College in Manhattan and this year she is up for tenure. In order for her to get to the level of accomplishment she has reached, she had to face racism, sexism, and social class discrimination being a black female from a poor home. She eagerly joined the National Society of Black Physicists in seeking a comfortable and supportive environment where she could relate to others. Since she has faced a life of discriminatory acts, her “skin is thick” and she is always assertive which can easily be triggered to aggression if threatened.

Anna, the protagonist of *Night Sky*, is passionate about her work and she loves to bask in her own glory because she is proud of how far she has come in life. Presenting her paper on dark matter, invisible material that makes up ninety percent of the mass in the universe, at the international conference is her perfect opportunity to gain even more respect in her field (Maran, 243). Also, since Anna is pursuing a tenure position at Hunter College, the international attention would give her the extra insurance needed to secure that position. Therefore, Anna’s superobjective, main goal, is to successfully finish and present her paper at the International Astronomy Conference in France. Her major obstacle is aphasia and other minor obstacles are the demands of motherhood and a romantic relationship. Anna uses many tactics to achieve her objective. She degrades, manipulates, ignores, flatters, and denounces. Actually, Anna’s work has become an idol in her life and aphasia is her “wake-up call” because as she battles and eventually learns

to accept aphasia, she discovers the true blessings of life outside of worldly success.

Acknowledging and welcoming the challenges present in portraying Anna made me both excited and a bit apprehensive about taking on such an awesome task. However, by examining her personality and history, which allowed me to better understand her, I began to feel much more capable and prepared to begin the rehearsal process. Achieving this level of comfort with such a complex character as Anna has urged me to know all my characters as intimately as possible. For, my craft would deeply suffer without the nourishment of challenges and discoveries.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCHING THE SCRIPT

Research plays a vital role in the actor's process of maturing in her craft. It is often tempting to skip this step of character development because it takes a large amount of discipline and time. I dared not skip this step, though, primarily because I was so ignorant on the subjects of Aphasia and Astronomy and it was impossible to do the character and the script justice without a satisfactory understanding of each.

Night Sky is a play divided into nine scenes and each scene contains two or more sub-scenes. The first ten pages of the sixty-seven paged script is dedicated to exposing the daily actions and relationships of Anna's pre-aphasic life. For "Accidents divide things into the great Before and After" (Crimmins, n.p.) The remaining pages, therefore, reveal the mutation that Anna's actions and relationships take during her post-aphasic existence.

Aphasia

My research on aphasia began by seeking general information about the condition on the internet and reading various books on the subject matter. According to David

Knox's *Portrait of Aphasia*:

Aphasia is one of medicine's most dramatic phenomena. In simple terms it means the impairment or loss of the ability to use or understand written or spoken language. It is due in most cases to acquired damage of the so-called 'language area' located on the left side of the brain (22).

Anna acquires aphasia when she is walking and suddenly hit by a car. She bumps her

head, primarily injuring the frontal left region, on the pavement but her skull does not open. The author of *Where is the Mango Princess?* (2000) claims that all serious infliction to the brain is known as traumatic brain injury (TBI) and anyone who lives through this is known as a TBI survivor (Crimmins, 31).

One of the most relevant questions that came to mind while researching this role was “Can a person think without words?” There have been many debates on this subject matter and there are two prevalent opposite attitudes. In *Intelligence and Aphasia*, the monistic theory claims “thought and speech are one and indivisible. [On the other hand, some philosophers claim that] thought and speech are independent functions” (Lebrun, 21). Understanding the answer to this question was essential because I knew I had to grasp Anna’s thought process in order to speak her words truthfully. Since there are opposing views on the matter, I made the conscious decision to agree with the latter and make Anna’s thoughts more clear than her actual speech.

Researching Aphasia has shown me that enduring this condition is constant, diligent work. “Probably no other human problem has generated any more confusion, prompted more heated controversy among professional workers, or caused more human suffering than has Aphasia” (Schuell, 1). As explained in *Night Sky* by the speech therapist, trying to communicate with aphasia is tedious and meticulous because it is equivalent to pronouncing “every word backwards” (43). She also explains:

She knows what she wants to say but she can’t get it out....she’s lost the words, they’re scattered over the terrain of her mind, and without cues, she can’t retrieve the ones she needs.... She struggles; she finds one word here, another there, but then she can’t string them together to express herself. What’s happened to her is earth shattering. It’s more than a problem with communication. Her entire world has come apart (Yankowitz, 33-34).

This description highlights the difficulty of choosing the right word to express oneself.

Later in the script, the therapist goes into greater detail on the struggles Anna must endure to actually speak the word once the correct one is found. She claims:

She's like Sisyphus, rolling language up a hill. She has to search for every word and once she finds it she has to struggle to hold it in her mind so it won't run away from her and then she has to move it very carefully from her mind into her mouth, and from her mouth into sounds that can be understood....It's not automatic anymore. You have to work at every syllable (Yankowitz, 42-43).

This illustration of aphasia was extremely useful in my development of the character because it prompted me to add a great level of intensity to Anna's battle with aphasia by gruelingly attempting to speak during various scenes.

I interviewed three practicing speech therapists and one doctor about the condition of aphasia. In an interview with speech therapist Molly Thurman, I gained more understanding of Anna's specific injury. She has a closed head injury (CHI) and Thurman claims that this type is more severe than an open head injury. Although most of the impact takes place on her left frontal lobe, the entire brain is bruised, swollen, and covered in fluid as a result of being knocked back and forth around in the cranium. The brain is incredibly complex because it houses our memory, perception, comprehension, language skills, social skills, reasoning, attention span, and more (Thurman, Interview).

It was amazing to learn that aphasia is so severe and affects such a large group of people. There are an estimated one million people suffering with aphasia in the United States and "an estimated 1.5 to 2 million [people in the world] incur TBI each year, principally as a result to vehicular incidents, falls, acts of violence, and sports accidents" (Crimmins, 1). Thurman says CHI is a traumatic experience for patients and they all go through Kubler-Ross's five stages of grieving in response to trauma. These stages are:

1) Denial and Isolation 2) Anger 3) Bargaining 4) Depression 5) Acceptance

Yankowitz perfectly incorporated these stages in Anna's journey throughout *Night Sky* and since they were easily recognizable, I could understand Anna's progression.

When I interviewed speech therapist Lorenth Samuda at Christopher East Health Care Facility, she gave clarity to Anna's specific aphasia type. Although aphasia is generally any interruption in language communication, there are many classifications of this condition. Those who have Receptive Aphasia, for example, cannot clearly understand what is being said to them. Samuda confirms that Anna has Expressive Aphasia. With this condition, the patient thinks correctly, receptive abilities being intact, but the verbal responses are sometimes meaningless (Samuda, Interview).

While this is not proven, it has been theorized that the higher learned a patient is the lower the deficits will be because more of the brain waves have been used (Samuda, Interview). In short, a person with a high level of education will recover quicker and progress to a superior level in comparison to a patient with less education. This theory was at least helpful in gaining more understanding of the quick progression of Anna, who obtained a Ph.D. On day one after her accident she slurs "Gee kidge syzzz dibble dibble dibble ih" (Yankowitz, 20). However, by the end of the third month she proclaims "Will!? Youpower. You! You talk meaning clear. I am aphasia! Anna aphasia!" (Yankowitz, 37). These initial three months of rapid improvement is a period referred to as "spontaneous recovery" by therapist Samuda. Anna's speedy progress could be due to her brains familiarity with holding new information in relation to her educational background.

Anna has depended on her intellect and self-sufficiency most of her life and to have that snatched away shakes her world to the core. She was accustomed to being

highly regarded because she had gained a tremendous amount of respect from her peers and she demands respect from anyone she meets. This astronomer must endure the fall from being totally independent and admired for her mind to being regarded as if she is a child.

In *Aphasia and Brain Organization* (1985), Ivar Reinvang confirms that aphasia is only one symptom of a brain injury by stating “aphasia is an aspect of a multidimensional disturbance of brain function” (v). Other effects include:

- Paraphasias—a complete omission of the intended item or a substitution by an incorrect and unintended word.
- Progression from nonfluent to fluent aphasic speech measured by the longest continuous string of words produced in conversation.
- Anomia—Failure to name objects.
- Alexia—Disturbance of reading
- Agraphia—Disturbance of writing
- Aphemia—Disturbance of speech
- Memory Loss
- Disorientation
- Agnosia—Loss of ability to recognize objects, people, sounds, shapes, or smells.
- Apraxia—Disturbance of Motor planning
- The ability to focus attention is lost
- Poor impulse control
- Poor control of body in space
- Uncontrollable emotions
- Loss of Reasoning
- Fatigue (59)

Dr. Brad Burton informed me that all of these symptoms are present from day one of the accident instead of gradually presenting themselves (Interview). In her introduction to

Night Sky, Yankowitz writes:

As a writer, I am almost always drawn to the drama of people in extreme situations, people pushed by fate or accident or character to the edge of some abyss, either personal or political. When Joseph Chaikin asked me to write a play about his own extreme condition—aphasia, or speechlessness—it coincided with a nightmare of my own and one which I believe I share with many others (n.p).

When I initially tried to imagine all of these symptoms affecting me personally, using

Stanislavsky's "magic if," the circumstance seemed unbearable. As I considered the matter further, I realized that if a tragedy does not actually kill a person, there is no alternative but to bear it as Anna must also do.

Aside from the change in her mind, Anna's body is also altered. According to Dr. Brad Burton, when a patient has been injured on the left or right hemisphere of the brain, the opposite side of his or her body will be either weak or paralyzed (Interview). Whereas Anna used to dress herself, exercise, and handle whatever business was needed, she now cannot even use the restroom alone. She is despondent because she is destined to urinate and defecate on herself if she does not have assistance from others to travel to the bathroom. Even when she does regain the use of her limbs after months of physical therapy, she must initially have twenty-four hour supervision when she is released from the hospital. Her frustrations are fueled by her inability and this is why depression results.

On August 19, 2005, I visited Frasier Rehabilitation Center to observe an aphasic patient during one of her thirty-minute speech therapy sessions. She was a white female, who seemed to be in her seventies, who had suffered a stroke about two months before my visit. For the purpose of this monograph, I will call her "Norma." As she was rolled into the room in her wheelchair, she looked like a "normal" elderly lady except she had a lot of bruises on her face. I would later learn that she had fallen a few days after having her stroke because of the weakness of her limbs; a symptom also experienced by Anna when she first attempts to walk after her accident. The session started out fine. The therapist began by asking her how she was doing and Norma habitually answered "fine" as if she did not have to think about it at all. This type of response is referred to

as an “automatic” by Norma’s therapist Courtney Brock.

Brock gave Norma three exercises to test her progress. The first exercise was counting to ten. Norma started out great and made it up to seven without stumbling at all. After seven, though, she began to repeat numbers she had already counted and then added in ninety-nine before ten. The next exercise was naming the days of the week. Again, Norma did fine until she got to Wednesday and went back to Tuesday. This tendency to repeat is termed perseveration and is listed previously with other symptoms of brain injury. Reinvang says “Aphasics have poor immediate memory as assessed by their ability to repeat digits or letters, pointing to digits or letters spoken or shown, pointing to pictures corresponding to spoken words, or recognizing words previously heard” (74). The third exercise was identifying the object. The first object was a hairbrush. The therapist asked Norma to tell her what the object was and Norma seemed to reply “I don’t know” by shrugging her shoulders. It was amazing watching how she interacted with the hairbrush. She fumbled with it in her hands and in her eyes there were so many questions concerning this “foreign” object. As the therapist began to firmly encourage her to try to name the object, I could see Norma getting frustrated and embarrassed. Finally, the tears began to flow from her eyes as she silently wept. The therapist paused and asked her if she was tired. Norma replied, “Yes.” The therapist then asked her if she wanted some water and again she said, “Yes.”

The brief moment I was left alone in the room with Norma while the therapist was gone to get water, felt like an eternity because our interaction was awkward. I watched her intensely and she seemed to not even acknowledge me. I could see her mind working but I could not tell what it was working towards and I am not sure if she knew herself.

That was when I realized that aphasia has to be one of the most frightening experiences a human being can encounter. It is quite lonely. Additionally, there is nothing more frustrating than having the need to express one's self and not being able to find the right words to do so.

When the therapist returned with a cup of water and a tissue, Norma instinctively knew exactly what to do with both. I wondered, "How can this be? What is the difference between knowing what to do with a brush and knowing what to do with a tissue or a cup of water?" Then it hit me and I felt dense for even questioning this. It became obvious that she had a need for something and her body knew what to do just as most of our voices and bodies instinctively know what to do from infancy. After she finished her water, a turning point in the session occurred when Norma began to laugh at the therapist when she did not understand what Norma was saying. It appeared to be a moment in which the tables were turned in Norma's mind and she perceived the speech therapist as being the "slow" one.

Witnessing this therapy session was highly enlightening for me. Seeing the array of Norma's emotions and feeling an array of my own emotions in response to hers gave immense clarity to the entire script of *Night Sky* and specifically to the character of Anna. After beholding Norma's dilemma, I knew that it would be absolutely necessary to incorporate her emotions of fear and frustration into the character of Anna in order to be truthful to the presentation of aphasia.

Astronomy

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man, that you care for him? Psalms 8:3-4

I gained a great deal of insight about Anna's battle with aphasia from the script of *Night Sky* as it effortlessly parallels the world of aphasia to the world of astronomy. For example, just as there are hemispheres of the sky there are also hemispheres of the brain. Also, there are great uncertainties about the universe and the human brain. Both are extremely complex and beyond mankind's limited understanding. Having aphasia is as if the patient's thoughts in his or her mind are wandering through the infinite vastness of outer space.

The comparison of a person having aphasia to a person being sucked into a black hole was a vivid picture that aided my development of this character. According to *Astronomy for Dummies*, "A black hole is an object in space whose gravity is so powerful that not even light itself can escape from within" (Maran, 217). Professor Tompkins told our acting class that we should always have an active verb to exemplify what our character is doing for the entire play. My verb for Anna is "climbing." She has fallen into a black hole and it is her goal to climb out of it. Maran goes on to point out, "You can fall in a black hole, but you can't fall out – you can't even get out if you want to (and you would want to)" (217). Aphasia has trapped Anna and she feels as if she does not have the room to breathe anymore. Maran claims that:

Ultimately, anyone who falls into a black hole is pulled apart by tidal force, an effect of the black hole's immense gravity. At least, along one dimension, you are pulled apart. To make things worse, in the other two spatial dimensions, tidal force squeezes you together unmercifully (222).

This illustration demonstrates the intensity and chaos into which Anna has been thrown and I wanted to be certain to expose her turmoil through my portrayal.

If one were to try to look at a black hole through the natural eye, it would be invisible. This truth also resonates with observing a person who has aphasia. The facial

expressions may appear blank at times and at others the observer may be tempted to ignore the patient as if he or she were invisible because it is too difficult to deal with the inability to conventionally communicate. While demonstrating black holes to his class, the character Bill says:

Lights out. Total darkness. Can you see me? No—but I’m here—I exist—like a black hole, a mass of matter so dense, so compressed, that no light can escape from it. But inside the hole, where your eyes, where even the most powerful telescope cannot penetrate, the light is shining, we believe, the light is simply trapped inside, unable to reveal itself (Yankowitz, 39).

The aphasic has a vibrant life inside, as vibrant as it was before the accident, but it is sometimes difficult for the “normal” person to see it through the patient’s outside appearance.

Besides comparing aphasia to being trapped in a black hole, it can also be similar to having an eclipse take place in one’s head. When Anna is begging Daniel to help her in scene three, she pleads, “Take shovel! Fill holes in head. Stupid. Dummy. Brain brain brain eclipse!” (Yankowitz, 37). During a solar eclipse, the moon gets in the way of the sun and blocks its rays. This relates to aphasia because the language deficit blocks the patient’s normal speech ability. Bill points out that while Anna’s brain power is altered, it is by no means lost. He questions and instructs his class:

Is she going to be “all there?” I don’t know. But during a solar eclipse, the sun is still there, isn’t it?... We have to make the connections; it’s all hooked up, the macrocosm and the microcosm, the inter-stellar dust and the dust our bodies will become, the dark matter of the universe and the dark matter of the brain (Yankowitz, 34).

So, Anna is still the same person, possessing many of the same thoughts and mannerisms, but her true mentality has been covered by aphasia, symbolizing an eclipse in the brain.

In researching astronomy, I spent a lot of time observing the sky through my

natural eyes and I got a closer look by visiting Gheens Planetarium and viewing various shows. There is a certain feeling I get when I gaze into the “night sky.” I feel so small and insignificant when I try to fathom the enormity of God’s creation. David, a biblical figure, best describes witnessing the universe by saying, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man, that you care for him?” (*Women’s Devotional Bible*, 580). Viewing God’s miracle of creation is extremely humbling and I feel somewhat insignificant while doing so. I am only one person on the earth, which is one sphere in this galaxy, which is one galaxy in this universe, which may only be one universe in a “multiverse” (Maran, 253). Bill expounds on the majesty of space by lecturing:

We used to think those stars were all that existed, and that our earth was at the center of everything. Now we know that we’re just one infinitesimal planet drifting through an eternity flecked with a hundred billion galaxies and a billion trillion stars. And perhaps, as we gaze at the night sky, near one of those faint glimmers of light, someone quite different from us, in one of those other universes, is contemplating a star we call the Sun, and wondering, wondering (Yankowitz, 52).

I know from personally observing the universe that there is nothing a person can do but watch and wonder. That is what astronomy is, observation of space. Maran defines astronomy as “observing the universe that surrounds you and trying to make sense of what you see” (9). There are so many unknowns and almost a sense of stillness even though intellectually I know that space is full of activity. I have heard it said that it would take 15,000 years to reach the end of the universe in our fastest technology. Aphasia for me became equivalent to one’s words having to travel many light years through the “space” in the head to reach the destination of the mouth.

Once I completed my research, I was ecstatic about how many details of aphasia and astronomy I had to incorporate into the character's journey. Also, since aphasia is such an unstable condition because patients vary greatly in the way they respond to having it, I was pleased to have so much to utilize in rehearsals (Burton, Interview). The similarities I discovered between astronomy and aphasia helped me to better understand Anna's new life. The more I learned about these subjects, the more I appreciated the script. The playwright did a beautiful job of merging these two worlds into one outstanding journey. Research, in general, makes me feel more comfortable and secure with my craft because I know the truth about my character as opposed to guessing the truth.

CHAPTER III

FROM AUDITIONS TO PERFORMANCE

Auditioning, rehearsing and performing are, for me, the most attractive parts of the craft of acting. It is thrilling to actually begin to put the words, which I have previously only studied alone, into action with others. My experiences from auditions to performance of *Night Sky* were comfortable, scary, and frustrating at various stages in the overall process.

Auditions

I thoroughly enjoyed the auditioning process. It felt great to be on the other side of the audition table and not concerned with landing a role. Since Anna was my thesis role, I was pre-cast and I did not feel that I had anything to lose. Therefore, I started trying whatever actions came to my mind while reading opposite those who auditioned. I did not know how words would flow out of my mouth or what physical actions my body would produce, but I simply trusted the art and the readings felt fresh and alive. These moments reminded me that I have to be brave enough not to fear in future auditions by having the same abandonment of inhibitions.

I learned a great deal about acting from observing those who auditioned. Fear, nervousness, and self-indulgence are all enemies because they pull the actor's attention to an unnecessary place. The actor must trust completely in the moment. As for those actors who did trust, quite a few were right for a role but only one was chosen. In all

cases, there was one particular asset each actor possessed that made him or her prevail to be cast. For example, one person might have been cast because he had the most confidence and another might have been cast because she had the right look or sound the director was seeking for a certain role. This truth encourages me to be as prepared as possible to do whatever it takes, ethically, to get the role I want.

Rehearsals

Before beginning this rehearsal process, I knew how significant it was to build an ensemble with my cast members. In an ensemble, everyone owns the whole play and each person is fully invested in its success. I tend to be more pessimistic and judgmental of my choices when I am concentrated solely on myself. Therefore, I decided to use my energy more positively by reaching outside of myself and learning from and encouraging others. Then, I gained more optimistic insights about the play and was encouraged also.

One of the great ways to build an ensemble is through company warm-ups. During our warm-ups for *Night Sky*, we played various games that guided us in preparing our instruments for rehearsing the show by tuning our voices and loosening our bodies. We also took the warm-up time to publicly address the specific goals set and struggles encountered in our collaboration on the project. The environment in which we rehearsed was made comfortable and secure by our willingness and openness to communicate our concerns.

During the first read-through of *Night Sky*, I kept wondering if I should relax and wait for Anna to naturally develop in voice and body or if I should just try something and see where that would guide me. I leaned more toward Bertolt Brecht's approach to acting, in the earlier stages of rehearsal, by observing my character from a distance first.

In his article *Short Description of a New Technique of Acting Which Produces an*

Alienation Effect he writes:

The actor should refrain from living himself into the part prematurely in any way, and should go on functioning as long as possible as a reader...An important step is memorizing one's first impressions. When reading his part the actor's attitude should be one of a man who is astounded and contradicts. Not only the occurrence of the incidents, as he reads about them, but the conduct of the man he is playing, as he experiences it, must be weighed up by him and their peculiarities understood...Before memorizing the words he must memorize what he felt astounded at and where he felt impelled to contradict. For these are dynamic forces that he must preserve in creating his performance (*The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, 100).

Although I had a lot of time to study the script because I had it in my possession for at least five months prior to rehearsal, I wanted to give special attention to reading it with my fellow cast members and hearing their interpretations. Consequently, I attempted to view Anna through the eyes of my cast members, recognizing how others perceived her, in an effort to gain more understanding about her outward demeanor. Sometimes, the impression we give to others is quite different from the way we view ourselves. My cast mates taught me that Anna was a challenging person to approach through the passivity in which they interacted with her.

Early in the rehearsal process, the director, Russell Vandembroucke, continuously told the cast "Don't be afraid to go further" but I was apprehensive about pushing too far too fast. The director also said that he was giving us "enough rope to hang ourselves" and he often asked and challenged, "How do you know how far is too far until you go there?" (Lecture). I decided to take that challenge and go as far as my imagination would take me within the context of the script. I completely trusted my director and I had gained a great amount of respect for the script through my research so I also trusted that the playwright knew exactly what she was doing.

We worked on the script, sequentially, from beginning to end. First, I rehearsed the opening of the show during which I am on stage alone addressing the audience as members of my ASTRO 100 Basic Concepts in Astronomy course. Vandenbroucke kept emphasizing “Diction, diction, diction!” (Lecture). I agreed that Anna, being a professional woman in New York, would speak clearly and crisply. Showing her clarity of diction before the accident would also sharpen the dynamic of how much traumatic brain injury diminished her level of speech, thus breaking her pride. Being born and raised in a rural town in Alabama, I do not usually pronounce my words according to American Standard English. I knew that I had to give special attention to this area of my performance and I did by slowing my speech down and articulating as much as possible. Once I got used to enunciating the words, I sped her language back up to recapture her natural speech.

When we got to scene two, the scene that introduces Anna’s family, I learned a great deal about my character by observing how my daughter and boyfriend related to me. I have often heard it said throughout my training as an actor that a good actor is a good listener. I now know for myself that a good actor is a good listener and a good watcher. It is so easy to get trapped into one narrow-minded perception of a character as an actor. We often decide that our character is going to behave in a certain manner and stubbornly present that character according to our planned view instead of honestly reacting to our scene partners. I made up my mind in the earliest stage of rehearsal that I would actually pay close attention to the actors on stage with me. Doing this helped me tremendously in two ways. First, I could play each scene more truthfully and stay in the moment, which has always been a great challenge. Second, in my research on aphasia I

discovered that the patients' senses are heightened in order to understand those they are communicating with as clearly as possible. In *Aphasia, My World Alone* (1973), Helen Wulf writes:

Aphasia became for me an interlude when faculties, not consciously thought of for years, were honed to meet my needs: my ears to note inflections and the quality of voices, exasperated, friendly, patronizing, interested, anxious, loving; my eyes to watch expressions on the faces of those around me, compassionate, disinterested, annoyed; eyes for seeing covert glances of one to another; eyes to look for gestures which can be wonderfully expressive; eyes to search other eyes; eyes to see smiles with their sunshine and healing (31).

So, by using my eyes and ears more keenly to closely observe my scene partners, I was able to stay in each moment and present aphasia more accurately.

Due to the damage to the left hemisphere of her brain, Anna has weak limbs on the right side of her body. This would affect her walking, gestures, and the way she communicates overall. Her limbs are relatively weak for at least the first six scenes in the play and my actor's instincts immediately warned me about trying to play this ailment accurately. I predicted that if I were to play these scenes in the actual time it would take a person with weak limbs, the audience would have fallen to sleep. My instincts were confirmed and rewarded at one of our final rehearsals attended by the playwright, Susan Yankowitz. This was my first experience rehearsing in front of the writer of a script and it was intimidating because I was not sure if some of the choices I made would meet her liking. It was a relief though when she testified that some other productions of *Night Sky* focused too much on Anna's bodily weakness and it caused those shows to drag. Her approval meant a lot and gave me a greater sense of security in the role.

A lot of what I discovered about Anna in the auditions resurfaced in the rehearsal process. While participating in the auditions, I only went with my instincts and my

original impulses turned out to be truthful to Anna, especially in particular scenes. For example, when Anna is released from the hospital and Daniel is welcoming her home with a candlelight dinner in scene three, she desperately wants to make love to him and express herself without the burden of words. In the auditions, I took such actions as briskly unbuckling Daniel's belt and repeatedly jumping on top of him whenever he tried to resist. In rehearsing that scene, those same actions kept happening instinctively without any amount of untruthful, habitual forcing on my part. Dave Chapelle, a comic genius, says "Truth is permanent and everything else falls by the wayside" (Interview). The reappearance of specific impulses was more than enough evidence for me that my actions were authentic to my character.

Anna's way of communicating is complex and tedious and her language produced natural physical acts in my portrayal of her. In her introduction to *The America Play and Other Works*, theatre theorist and author Suzan-Lori Parks states:

Language is a physical act. It's something which involves your entire body—not just your head. Words are spells which an actor consumes and digests—and through digesting creates a performance on stage. Each word is configured to give the actor a clue to their physical life (11).

For instance, when I was struggling with the language, as I often did as Anna, I could not help but move my arms around in an effort to illustrate what I was attempting to communicate. It was similar to playing a game of Charades, especially in scene three during which Anna is telling Daniel that she wants to present her paper at the conference.

While obstacles are usually given by other characters or outside forces, I, in a sense, had to first create my own obstacles of the mind and then fight against them. I found it weird to artificially set up mental blocks for my character and stay aware of those blocks while thinking clearly and freely as the actress. This is just as confusing to

actually do, as it is to explain. This action became more feasible, though, when I involved my entire body, mostly out of frustration, to get my point across. When I understand, feel, and believe every word as it is entering my mind and leaving my mouth, my body cannot resist its natural responses.

Presenting Anna's personality was an area of my performance to which I gave great attention during the rehearsal process. A patient's personality traits do not totally change but are multiplied in intensity due to the stress encountered from an accident (Thurman, Interview). So Anna, who was already completely strong-willed and proud before the accident, becomes extremely egotistical and haughty following the accident as a defense mechanism to conceal her insecurities. Learning that the personality is multiplied after brain injury cautioned me to show more restraint as Anna before the accident to leave myself room to experience Anna's dramatic change. This would be particularly helpful in performing the highest point of the play.

In my opinion, the climax of the show occurs in scene seven during Anna's and Daniel's heart-wrenching argument in reference to her dependence on him. Their relationship appears to "hit rock bottom" because of Anna's pride and Daniel's insecurity. This argument mirrors the spat they had in scene one that resulted in Anna storming out of the apartment and getting into an accident, rendering her aphasic. I knew that this scene was critical because it was a major turning point in Anna's self-awareness. Once she truly witnesses the ugliest part of her character, Anna makes a positive decision to try to alter her attitude. For the first time in the course of the play, she eventually sincerely apologizes to Daniel and admits that she needs him in her life. This scene was not an easy one to play because I had to be totally vulnerable and expose my own self-

doubts through those of Anna's.

As an actress, I find myself struggling with many of the same issues as Anna. I have so many doubts and fears, yet I know that I must not stop on my journey of discovery. I often feel that I am regressing as an actress as Anna feels she is regressing in intelligence and her amount of control over her life. I know that it is pertinent to stunt the growth of this negative thought by continuing to take each necessary step knowing that each level of progression bears a new challenge and opportunity for growth.

I began to feel as if I had reached a plateau in my progression of this character around week four of the six week rehearsal process. During the first three weeks, I gained too much confidence in the role because I had been consistently making so many discoveries about Anna's journey. I started to feel too comfortable. I knew I had to find the need to discover more. When we changed spaces and moved to the Thrust Theatre, our actual performance space, my performance felt flat and low in energy. All of my objectives and actions began to feel murky and undefined. This disappointment knocked me right out of my comfort zone and gave me the boost I needed to uncover more, go further, and make this character continue to live. My passion for acting was rekindled and I wanted to cuddle with my script every night and revisit the focus I had in undergraduate school when I became completely infatuated with acting and literally spent the night in the theater. The stage and I seemed almost inseparable then because I had to go over my lines, blocking and interpretation until I felt comfortable with my performance.

The greatest challenge I faced in developing the character of Anna was resisting the urge to play qualities. This urge was so strong because most of her emotions were

heightened and general in that all victims of brain injuries normally experience them. For example, anger is the primary emotion of those with aphasia, resulting from built-up frustration. I knew that if I focused on her anger too much I would make the character's emotional life monotone and drain all of the energy from the various layers of the play. In acting class, Professor Tompkins warned us against always "playing the obvious" and I resisted doing this as much as possible by trying actions that might not be expected but were still truthful to each moment.

As we approached opening night, I began to get nervous about the show because I was wondering about the audience's reaction. Since this was my thesis role, I felt that the weight of the entire performance rested on my shoulders and I was solely responsible for sustaining the energy from beginning to end, in spite of the confidence I had in my cast members. I also began to second-guess the character choices I had made during rehearsal. I questioned the sound of Anna's voice, the believability of my relationships with Daniel and Jennifer, and my comedic timing. Even though I trusted my director to tell me if there were any major changes I needed to make, I did not trust myself to attend to every intrinsic detail of my character. Tompkins proclaimed in our Acting class that "Generality is the enemy of all art" (Lecture). I was unsure that I had been diligent enough in getting to know my character as intimately as possible. I was also afraid that I would confuse my audience because of the nature of Anna's condition.

There are so many uncertainties and variables in the behavior of brain injury victims. These patients may either seem to be progressing or regressing depending on how relaxed they are in their environment. Whenever Anna becomes nervous, for instance, her speech becomes more jumbled. I was perplexed with the dilemma of being

true to the health condition and clearly telling a story. Vandembroucke put me at ease, though, when he quoted the character Baal in one of Brecht's works by saying "Tales easily understood, are not well told" (Vandembroucke,188). I rested on the facts that the experience of the play would be different for each audience member and I was only obligated to tell my character's truth.

Performance

When opening night finally arrived, I was relieved because I knew I did not have the choice to change anything and this was comforting. I knew that I had done my best in developing Anna and I had total confidence in my fellow cast members. I had also regained trust in myself and in my art of acting. When "places" was called for the top of the show, I had the familiar responses of concentration and relaxation and I was purely pleased to be doing what I love to do.

The Wednesday night audience was attentive and they seemed to be enjoying the journey of the play. This audience laughed, cried and talked with us during the performance and their energy was a sustaining fuel for our production. Although I do not agree with relying on the audience's interest to validate a performance, I cannot deny that their enthusiastic involvement helps. Also, the playwright spoke with me after witnessing this performance and she expressed her elation over the outcome. This performance ran very smoothly and I experienced a high from acting that was the most fulfilling to date.

On Thursday, the show was strong but there was a problem with one of the light cues and a vital scene of the play was disrupted. In scene five, Bill, Anna's colleague and friend, comes to visit her for the first time since the accident. Moments before Anna

renounces her belief in God because of her disappointment with the current circumstance, the lights failed on our playing area of the stage. Ken Moore, who did a great job but was a rookie to acting, played Bill. He did the right thing by continuing with his lines but he did not know that he should have found another source of light on stage even if it was in another playing area. So, it was quite awkward trying to guide him to the light and still highlight the importance of Anna's line "No God. Stars" (Yankowitz, 46). The next day, I asked one of my colleagues, who was in the audience for that performance, if he heard that particular line. When he said "No," I was extremely disappointed but he kept telling me how much he enjoyed and was inspired by the show. I then realized that it was egotistical of me to harp on the loss of one of my lines when we all worked so diligently to produce a quality performance with one mishap which was beyond anyone's control.

I was least satisfied with Friday night's performance because I allowed myself to be distracted by one of my professors and two of my colleagues, who were members of the audience, whose opinions I greatly respect. Having these people in the audience caused me to give each mistake or moment of falsity too much attention and consequently exhausted the life out of my performance. I have heard it said that a great actor recognizes his shortcomings while performing but lets them go instantly, continuing to focus on the stage life. The recognition of mistakes is the simple part but trying to forget them is much easier said than done. I am better at bringing myself back into the moment now than I was a couple of years ago but I still have far to go in this area of my acting.

In comparison to my unsatisfactory performance on Friday evening, the three remaining shows were "a breeze." By Saturday, I felt that my acting could not possibly get any worse than it was the night before and there was freedom in knowing I could only

get better. Our performances on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon and evening were as smooth and solid as Wednesday's production. Even though I have been relieved in the past when the run of a show was completed, I was sad when our run of *Night Sky* was done. I know the reason for this was that I had invested more time and energy in that play than any other and when we closed I felt as if my "baby" had disappeared.

The most challenging scenes to perform were the first scene in which Anna is alone on stage and the final scene in which Anna is alone on stage, both times addressing the audience. In rehearsal, however, these were the two easiest scenes for me because the audience was my fellow cast members and they gave me their full attention. I got used to seeing interest on peoples' faces as I talked to them and I imagined that the real audience members would also hang on my every word. These scenes were difficult in performance, though, because connecting with the audience and connecting with cast members is vastly different. The audience has no obligation to respond to me or even give me their attention. They are brutally honest and they kept reminding me that I was acting on a stage and not actually speaking to my class or conference attendees.

My greatest reward was the powerful message I was helping to deliver. Like Anna, we all go through something that makes us want to forsake life. Because the situation is so intense, if we do not die physically, something in us must die so we can be transformed. Anna unknowingly speaks this truth, in her own way, by saying "No Kill. Transform" when she is having a casual conversation with Jennifer about the child's hair (Yankowitz, 51). It is so easy to think that life is unfair and blame God or other people for our misfortunes. However, if we would be patient and remain hopeful, we will usually discover that those "misfortunes" turn out to be blessings and we are stronger

because of our labors. Dr. Lundeana Thomas claims, “Life is not so much the good fortunes but the power gained from going through struggles” (Interview).

Anna’s life actually comes to order after her accident. As with Sir Isaac Newton, the famous astronomer, Anna’s accident leads to enlightenment. The original impact seemed hopeless but her restricted speech causes her to view herself and her life in a different light. Before her accident, Anna appears to be frigid, self-absorbed, and heartless. However, after she is refined by a trauma in her life, she discovers the importance of laughter and compassion; she becomes a much more approachable human being. Her relationships with her daughter and her boyfriend become much richer in love and commiseration. In fact, when Anna takes the time to listen to her daughter during their quality time after the accident, Jennifer teaches her a lot about dealing with her illness. In scene eight, Anna is nervous about reading her paper at the conference and she is doubting her ability. Jennifer encourages her by saying, “Oh there you go, getting down on yourself! I mean, give yourself a break, mom! You’re starting over. How many people get a second chance in life? But you, you’re like a new person! That’s really cosmic, don’t you think?” (Yankowitz, 63). It is fulfilling as a performer to know that the audience was entertained, informed, and encouraged.

After Wednesday night’s performance, a middle-aged woman with a slurred speech, which was the result of some health issue, came up to me and thanked me for my part in our performance. She was grateful to the cast and crew for showing how the handicapped are treated in our society. She testified that many people treat her rudely and disregard her as a drunkard when she is in public. There was also an astronomer who approached me after one of the performances and said that I was “very believable.”

Lastly, one of the patrons told me that I could have easily made Anna a victim but I had done a beautiful job of making her a victor. All of these comments meant a great deal to me and supplied validation of the audience's identification with the play.

This process of auditioning, rehearsing, and performing aided me to grow leaps and bounds in my craft. It is quite pleasing to observe myself from the moment auditions began to my bow at the final performance. I saw myself evolve in the character. This step of observation is a key ingredient in advancing my relationship with my craft.

CHAPTER IV

REFLECTING ON THE ROLE

In developing as an actress, I must always reflect on each role and be willing to admit that there are things I could have done better. This is a growing pain that accompanies becoming a better actress. So, I will voluntarily, but not proudly, confess that I should have developed a better connection with the audience and tested more symptoms of aphasia during rehearsals.

Connecting with the Audience

When I initially finished the run of *Night Sky*, I was immensely satisfied with my overall performance. I knew that I had done my best, according to what I knew about acting, in portraying Anna. However, as I reflect on my performance in *Night Sky* now, months later, I recognize various decisions about the character I could have altered and made better. I plan to do this with each role in an effort mature in my craft. While I am still happy with the development of all of my relationships with everyone on stage with me, I feel that my relationship with the audience as both class members and conference attendees was unsatisfactory and my experience with the effects of TBI and aphasia could have had more depth and been more truthful.

In scene one with Anna's students, I should have related to each person individually instead of making my lecture general. According to Dr. Rinda Frye, one of my professors, "The audience feels when they put themselves in [the actors'] position.

We must allow them to do that by presenting the material with openness” (Lecture).

During rehearsals, I could have made up stories about each student with whom I made eye contact in an effort to make each line more specific and my delivery more believable. For example, one of my students should have been a person who usually dozes off to sleep and another should have been the student most excited about learning astronomy. I could have added more levels to my monologue by using my imagination more vividly and addressing each person according to what I wanted to get from him or her.

In scene nine, the final scene of the show, Anna discovers the purpose of her trial as she triumphs in her final speech. While I still feel I was successful in presenting Anna’s personal victory, I now recognize my failure to challenge the audience to see the world through her eyes. Instead of being so inwardly focused and self-indulgent, I should have reached out more to the conference attendees to make sure that they not only heard Anna’s testimony, but were compelled to see their lives in a more positive light.

As with the students, I should have made my delivery to the conference attendees more specific by actually recognizing some of them. Many of them were my colleagues and people I even admired for their work in the field of Astronomy. If I would have created relationships and histories with people in certain seats, I could have made my speech more personal to the audience. The first half of Anna’s speech is her acceptance of her personal flaw. She declares:

Look at cosmos and you see.
Great spaces between stars.
Now for me, spaces between words,
holes in listening,
holes in talking.
I searching many truth
I feel but cannot express.
Ideas in head but pure—poor words.

I am aphasia,
Anna aphasia (Yankowitz, 67).

Here Anna is certainly more inwardly focused as she bravely exposes her ordeal.

However, she poignantly turns the attention from herself alone to share the beauty she has found in order to inspire those in the room with her. She inquires and proclaims:

You know story Alice in Wonderland
Fall down black hole,
not dying
but explore new world.
Now better my open heart.
Surprise in living, everyday.
I working.
To find shining light.
Night sky beautiful
And missing, and mystery.
Wonder—
Wonder full.
I. You.
All world.
Speechless (Yankowitz, 67).

In this section of the monologue, I, as Anna, should have acknowledged the specific struggles of others in the audience whom I knew personally. For instance, if I would have made one of the attendees Mr. Stephen Hawking, an astrophysicist whose mind Anna greatly respects, I could have added great depth to my monologue. Since Hawking is a scientist with a physical ailment, similar to Anna, I could have encouraged him to continue to enjoy the beauty of life as I was reminding myself to do so.

Embracing the Illness

Aside from my actor/audience relationship, I should have given more attention to the physicality of Anna's illness during the rehearsal process. In Chapter II, I listed the symptoms that accompany aphasia in TBI patients. I failed to incorporate fatigue, the loss of the ability to focus attention, poor impulse control, and uncontrollable emotions in

my character portrayal. I knew during the rehearsal process that I was not focusing on these symptoms, but I felt it was more important to highlight the language barrier of aphasia. I was too afraid of making the play about physical ailments. Even though the playwright approved my performance, I could have challenged myself further by experimenting with physical ailments more. I now know that including these symptoms is not equivalent to making the presence of aphasia suffer. Professor Tompkins taught me that as an actress “everything should be a risk and I must get myself into trouble” (Lecture). By this he meant, I should not be safe in my choices while developing a character. I did not take as many risks as I should have in developing Anna.

One of the adjustments I should have made was showing more fatigue in Anna’s physicality. I acknowledge that Anna did not look like a sick person. Her body was not depleted of energy and she did not have throbbing headaches, all of which might be expected with a TBI survivor. In fact, whenever I felt the impulse to touch or massage my head in rehearsal, I resisted the action because I thought it would look like I was indicating a headache. My weakness of going too far in one direction of my character came back to haunt me and I again fell into the same trap of “not letting everything gel together.”

Anna was not as easily distracted as she should have been. In *Where is the Mango Princess?* Crimmins writes:

Distractability....The injured brain loses its ability, either briefly or forever, to filter out distractions and concentrate on the task or conversations at hand. Sometimes such behavior is called “inattention.” In physical or occupational therapy for the brain-injured, the therapist must get the patient to pay close attention to the task at hand, whether it be learning to walk or creating a list of chores (80).

I had two scenes with the speech therapist and one scene with the physical therapist.

I could have at least made these scenes richer by adding distractions to my character.

Also, by letting Anna be distracted by the tiniest noise or movement, I would have challenged my scene partners to hold my attention as best they could. Again, my fear of playing qualities and producing “bad acting” overshadowed my urge to explore.

Poor impulse control would have been an interesting aspect of brain-injury to test in various scenes. For example, most brain-injury patients usually masturbate in public because their sense of societal rules is lost (Thurman, Interview). Crimmins informs:

The frontal lobes control our sense of propriety, and when they are damaged, disinhibition becomes a major symptom. Like a small child or a sloshy drunk, the severely brain-injured person just says or does whatever pops into his head especially in the early stages of recovery (85).

I did risk this in scene two on the fortieth day during a session with the speech therapist when I boldly rubbed my hand across her chest and then grabbed my own breasts to show that I am a woman. In the same scene, I also threw my stuffed cat and hit the therapist with it because she was irritating me. However, I could have gone much further with this symptom. I would have certainly put myself in a compromising position by touching myself in a surprising, sexual way in front of my daughter Jennifer, for example, and it would have been interesting and challenging to maneuver my way out of that predicament.

Finally, I wish I had done a better job in displaying Anna’s uncontrollable emotions. There were places in the script where she could have gone from crying to laughing and vice versa but I did not know how to produce these extremely alternate emotions without making her appear as a crazy person.. In *Acquired Aphasia*, Sarno points out that “the view of the world available to an aphasic is impoverished by lack of intact verbal processing but is NOT that of a confused, demented, or psychotic patient”

(31). So, I approached this symptom with great caution.

It is sometimes irritating to critique myself knowing that I am basing my opinions about acting on the opinions of others. Everyone has his or her own theory on what acting should be, as if it is an exact science, and I have often been frustrated when hearing the terms “good acting” and “bad acting.” I would not even know what “good” acting is if the definition was not imposed upon me by those critics who chose to voice their opinions on the subject. So “good” is really that which is expected in comparison to those who were considered “good” in the past. These illusive terms cause me to pose questions to myself about performance such as, “Do I act truthfully and trust that the audience will be affected by truth? Or, do I tailor my performance to the audience and guide them through what they should be feeling?” I have debated constantly with myself in the past over the superiority of presenting the accuracy of a particular concept of acting versus presenting my own standard of believability. In *Actors on Acting*, Joseph Chaikin confronts this debate by writing:

One can learn steps which have been taken by other people, but they apply to the other people, and the steps must be completely reexamined for each company and each actor. We can get clues from others, but our own culture and sensibility and aesthetic will lead us into a totally new kind of expression, unless we simply imitate both the process and the findings of another (667).

Surely, I have learned volumes of information about acting from studying various performance theorists and other actors and I am grateful for all I have been taught.

However, I know that I cannot limit my personal growth as an actress to the views of theorists, critics, or other actors.

On the one hand, I am tempted to feel that these views are a sort of prison that inhibits change. On the other hand, I would be hypocritical by totally disregarding these

views because there are those that I have often followed or mimicked while acting.

While I want to find a definite technique that works for me, I am apprehensive about relying on one way to bring about a result because I fear limiting myself by shutting out other options. Chaikin said it best when he proclaimed, “Acting is the expression using the personality in all its manifestations. If it doesn’t seem possible to develop one’s own system of related disciplines, an actor should study another only to the point where he can still depart from it” (*Actors on Acting*, 667). I have found great peace and freedom in discovering that everyone is both right and wrong because the art of acting is not an exact science and I can perform according to my own standards. So, I am not disappointed that the previously stated symptoms did not make it to the performance, but I am disappointed that I was not courageous enough to try them in rehearsal; I did not “push the envelope” far enough.

Honesty with self is always best. In owning my flaws, I am attempting to objectively monitor my level of sophistication with acting. Without question, I do not want to continue to make the same mistakes so by bringing these shortcomings to light, I will naturally begin to make the necessary changes to become a better actor.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts,, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

As I reminisce on my journey from the first semester here at the University of Louisville until now, my final semester, I am filled with pride and anticipation. I am proud because I know I have grown tremendously as an actress. I am eager because I know that as I apply all that I have learned to future roles, I will continue to grow tremendously because I will learn more through experience. Rev. Dr. Kevin Cosby, pastor of St. Stephens Church, says, “You are today because of a choice you made yesterday and you will be tomorrow because of a choice you make today” (Lecture). In the past, I have knowingly and unknowingly made some bad decisions about my personal acting process by trying to take the easy, untruthful path to performance. However, from the present on, I will make the best choices possible to hone my acting skills.

Present Explorations

I am presently in rehearsal for Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* in which I will be portraying Queen Hermione. So, I now have the opportunity to go further in my acting than I have ever gone before. Since I am quite inexperienced with acting in Shakespearean plays, it would be easy and safe to merely mimic other performers I have seen in various classical works. Thankfully, my director, Dennis Krausnick, has warned

the cast of presenting falsehood and he urges us to act from our personal truths. He says, “The soul of the artist gives the art its color so each portrayal will be different” (Lecture). I plan to bring more of myself to the forefront of this role instead of trying to hide behind my character. I have often tried to make my characters interesting by attempting to deny my natural being and create a totally new person. I am convinced that this is the reason why most of my characters never felt whole. I was afraid to embrace my true self as I identified with my characters. In *Acting and the Black Imagination*, Douglas Turner Ward voices:

What you start out with in acting is basic. Yourself. The only vehicle for acting is you-your body, your mind, you experiences in life. No agency other than yourself. And since you will start from there, you have to start from that which is most familiar to that self. What you know, what you experience, what you’ve heard (Edwards, 39).

I now know that the real me is more interesting than the fake somebody else. I must not conceal who I am with my characters and try to protect myself from public display. Krausnick teaches, “The stage is the place where you can’t protect yourself, where you mustn’t protect yourself.” When I reveal my personal truths, my characters will automatically be whole because I am whole and I will, thereby, create realities on stage.

As I am concentrating on trusting the truth, my acting is becoming more natural. I now believe that there is nothing I can not play truthfully when I bring myself and what my actor’s imagination has allowed me to believe to the role. Truth is primary and theatricality is secondary and truth does not have to be from a realistic standpoint. I must be true to whichever style of theatre I am producing. I have decided to refuse to settle for anything less than the truth in my acting.

Future Aspirations

I will soon be transitioning from the academic world of acting to the professional world. I believe that the final step in one race is the first step in the next. I feel prepared, confident, and eager to face all that God has in store for me in my career. It is my goal to please Him by giving glory to His name and by being a good steward of my talent. If there is one truism in life, it's that "a person cannot deny what is in her heart" and I know that God has given me the desire to act because He wants me to minister to others through this art. I trust that He has already ordered each step of my journey and that He has made provisions for me in my career. There is great freedom in knowing who I am and whose I am.

The artform of acting possesses beauty and meaning that goes far beyond words. I am dedicated to it because I love acting and I have faith that I will be able to do it for life. The Apostle Paul writes:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts,, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (*Women's Devotional Bible, 1293*)

I know that as long as I love acting, I will be able to endure whatever difficulties may present themselves. In my opinion, the opposite of love is fear and I know that I must not be afraid to pursue my dreams.

I want to act in film and television and on the stage. I would love to do projects that are important to me; projects similar to *Night Sky* that I feel will encourage people to cope with the struggles of daily life with optimism. In an interview with Susan Booth, Russell Vandenbroucke says, "true of any door that cracks open. Once you get your nose

in it, or your foot, whatever appendage you choose to stick in it—then it’s what you make of it” (Interview). I have always tried to approach each role as a professional, bearing my own standard of work ethics. Aside from being prompt to rehearsals and meetings, and polite to those with whom I am working, I believe that being prepared is a huge aspect of professionalism. Regina King, an actress I greatly respect, says, “Prior proper preparation prevents piss poor performance” (Interview). So, if for any reason I believe that I am not capable and ready to embrace a character, I could not, with conviction, portray that character. While I always want to challenge myself with the characters I choose to play, I also want to be realistic enough and professional enough to turn down a role if I truly do not believe I could do it justice.

Faculty member Dr. Lundeana Thomas told me that there are two things that make up acting. She says “Talent counts for 90% while technique counts for 10%” (Interview). I arrived at graduate school with raw talent and I am confident that I have gained the technique I need to cultivate that talent. I have experienced and will continue to experience my share of pleasures and pains in pursuing my dreams and nourishing my craft. Even though I have been disappointed at times, I always eventually become stronger because of each struggle and I will embrace this cycle of development as it comes. Even though my journey will not always be easy, I trust that it will always be blessed.

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APPENDIX

SYNOPSIS OF *NIGHT SKY*

Night Sky is a play about an ambitious and brilliant astronomer, Anna, and her battle with the health condition of aphasia. She acquires this mental ailment when she endures traumatic brain injury after being hit by car. Aphasia is a language deficit in which the ability to communicate clearly through verbal messages is lost. As Anna experiences the affects of her brain injury, her relationships with her family, friends, and God are tested and her character is eventually refined by the trials of her illness.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Pacey Lizette Walker

ADDRESS: 2889 Highway 51 South
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DOB: Tuskegee, Alabama – August 12, 1981

EDUCATION

& TRAINING: M.F.A. Theatre Arts (Performance)
Certificate in African American Theatre
University of Louisville
2003-2006

B.A., Theatre Arts
Alabama State University
1999-2003

ARTISTIC

EXPERIENCE: ACTING ON STAGE

Night Sky (Anna), *Home* (Woman Two), *Wit* (Susie) *Steal Away*
(Stella Kyzer) *Middle Passage: A Healing Ritual* (Eke,
Dadabawo), *The Trojan Women* (Woman of Troy), *Brown Silk and*
Magenta Sunsets, (Lena Salvinoni), *Six Characters in Search of*
an Author (Stepdaughter), *First Breeze of Summer* (Lucretia)
Drums of Sweetwater (Dr. Stephanie Smith)

ACTING ON FILM

The Rosa Parks Story (Fannie) CBS
How You Look to Me (Kris) Harts/Lunsford Pictures

DIRECTING

The Flattering Word by George Kelly, *The Fallen Angel* by Eloise
Beasley

TEACHING

EXPERIENCE: Graduate Teaching Assistant, 2003-2006

Theatre Arts 324 Acting for Non-Majors
Theatre Arts 207 Enjoyment of Theatre
University of Louisville

References upon Request