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RECREATING THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER: IAGO FOR MODERN AUDIENCES

By

Travis Stolp

B.A., University of California Irvine, 2008

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the

College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts

Department of Theatre Arts

University of Louisville

Louisville, Kentucky

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RECREATING THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER: IAGO FOR MODERN AUDIENCES

By
Travis Stolp
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A Thesis Approved on

April 3, 2015

By the following Thesis Committee

Dr. Amy Steiger (Thesis Advisor)

Dr. Baron Kelly

Dr. Julia Dietrich

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my friends and colleagues at the Costa Mesa Civic Playhouse. My seven year involvement with that theater has provided me with the knowledge and confidence to continue pursuing my craft and to create engaging art for all audiences. Mr. Mike Brown, Mrs. Barbara Brown, Mr. Steven Endicott, Mrs. Kathy Endicott, Mr. John McQuay, Mrs. Tiffany McQuay, Mr. David Blair, Mrs. Samantha Blair, Mrs. Montica Kirsch, Mrs. Elizabeth Summerer, Mr. Ed McBride, Mrs. Laura Lindahl, Mr. Ryan Hollihan, Mr. Jaycob Hunter, Mrs. Norma Jean, Mr. Ron Grigsby, Mr. Jason Holland, Mr. Marc Montminy

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ABSTRACT

RECREATING THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER: IAGO FOR MODERN AUDIENCES

Travis Stolp

April 3, 2015

This thesis is an examination of my approach to the role of Iago in William Shakespeare's *Othello*. The thesis explores my training as an actor and the struggles that have challenged me in the past. I then discuss my acting process for Iago in which specific imagery, sounds, and energies in Shakespeare's text influence my employment of Michael Chekhov's acting technique. By using this technique, I am able to make specific psychological and physical choices that authenticate my performance as a character who is not a racist villain, but a victim who suffers from multiple personality disorders. Through this approach, I hope to draw empathy for Iago and reflect modern society's view of mental illness and its role in violence. This approach also challenges me to overcome my struggle with the Michael Chekhov technique to continue enhancing my classical training. My use of these techniques has helped me blend psychological and physical choices on stage in order to create an engaging performance.

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"No great mind has ever existed without a touch of madness."

-Aristotle

INTRODUCTION

I have often asked myself or have been asked by others, "*What is acting?*" Over time there have been numerous answers to this question that have passed through my ears, such as *acting is reacting*, *acting is doing*, or *acting is playing a character other than you*. One of my professors once said that *acting is simply telling the truth*. Every time I think about that statement I cannot find any reason to disagree with it. But what defines the truth? For me, the truth is authenticity. I find the most authentic performances to be the ones in which I empathize with the characters, psychologically and physically. Therefore, I will continue to trust this statement and live by it while perfecting my craft.

I was a junior in high school when I took my first Drama class. I needed to fulfill an arts requirement and, since I had poor drawing skills, I thought the beginning level Drama class would be a good choice. However, I did not know that it would change my life forever. I loved that class so much. We studied the basics of theatre, performed scenes from contemporary and classical work, studied monologues, recreated film scenes and music videos, and played several theater games. But in order to be in any of the school productions, I had to try out for the next level in the Drama program. That is when I was dealt my first rejection after an audition. Since I wasn't allowed to perform in the main stage productions for my high school, my drama teacher suggested I enter into a

new, intermediate drama class that she was forming. So I did, and I learned even more about theatre and became even more inspired to pursue the craft.

I actually found a lot of joy in directing for the stage while taking this new class. The feeling of being creative and having control of my art was a new experience for me, and I loved it. I decided to continue to pursue theatre in college. My parents were uncertain about my decision to pursue and theater and acting as a career, but it's what I wanted to do. When registering for college classes my counselor appreciated my goals, but he suggested I take one or two acting classes to gain a better understanding of the craft in order to direct actors in the future. My first acting professor challenged all of us to go out into the community and audition as much as we could. Therefore, I set my directing aspirations aside and started auditioning and acting and I have not stopped since.

I love to act because of my deep fascination with the human condition. Not only am I interested in people's physical and vocal mannerisms, but I am very interested in their psychology. When I observe people in public I try to figure out what they are thinking. As an actor, I try to search for my character's thoughts within their words and actions, as well as portray their vocal and physical mannerisms in order to execute an authentic performance on stage. When approaching roles from classical works I tend to find my character's actions and then focus primarily on their physical characteristics. One methodology that I've studied in the past is the Michael Chekhov technique, and I decided to use it when approaching the role of Iago in *Othello*.

By combining my methods of analyzing the text and applying the Chekhov technique in rehearsals, I was able to create an authentic and socially relevant character with whom audiences would be able to empathize. According to Chekhov,

A compelling performance arises out of *reciprocal action* between the actor and the spectator. If the actors, director, author, set designer, and, often, the musicians have truly created the atmosphere for the performance, the spectator will not be able to remain aloof from it but will respond with inspiring waves of love and confidence. (Chekhov, 48)

The Chekhov technique has been physically challenging for me in the past. I have been psychologically disconnected from my body and sought to fix that connection. In order to overcome a technique that I had trouble connecting with physically, I decided to apply it to a character that can be difficult to understand mentally. The technique and the play are circular. Iago is an enigmatic individual whose personality can be very puzzling due to his unclear motivation. He feels betrayed and therefore manipulates in order to exact his revenge. The imagery component of the technique allows psychology to manipulate instrument of the actor in order to authenticate a character who psychopathically manipulates the other characters in the play. The relevance of this performance rested in the idea that Iago is an individual suffering from mental illnesses, specifically Psychopathy and Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), which influences the actions of his scheme as well as his moments of violence. By employing Chekhov's technique, I hoped to manipulate my audience into developing empathy for Iago, which is reflective of Iago's psychopathic manipulation of other characters to carry out his plot.

CHAPTER ONE
UNDERGRADUATE TRAINING
ORANGE COAST COLLEGE

I entered college wanting to be a stage director. I directed an original play in the form of a Greek tragedy in high school, and that's when I decided that a career in the theatre was where I was headed. My undergraduate training began at Orange Coast College (OCC) in Costa Mesa, California. The first acting course I took involved working on monologues and scene work. The methodology taught to us was a Stanislavsky approach as well as the use of Uta Hagen's "Six Steps" in analyzing a character. My professor, Phyllis Gitlin, emphasized orchestration in the voice and body as well as minding beats and transitions within the text. I ended up taking five classes with her, including a voice and articulation class. It was during these classes that I set my directing aspirations aside because I realized how much I enjoyed acting. I enjoyed exploring the humanity and authenticity of so many different characters, and I loved making them come to life on stage. This was what I believed acting was supposed to be: creating a character that had life and was real to the audience. My progress to creating authenticity on stage existed in my desire to keep performing and making physical and vocal connections to my characters. I decided to set my directing aspirations aside and focus solely on acting. However, I had some obstacles to face.

First and foremost, it has been very difficult becoming aware of my physical presence. I am considered a tall person, standing at six feet and four inches. I had been the shortest person in my family, but I hit a growth spurt in high school and grew six inches in less than two years. Before I knew it, I was one of the tallest students in my graduating class. Due to this sudden growth spurt, I have had a difficult time coming to terms with how tall I really am, and my awareness of this trouble keeps returning in my work on stage and in class. Professor Gitlin would constantly remind me that I was playing my physical choices safe by slouching or sitting. When instead I should use my height to my advantage and try standing and hold myself up. This has been one of my biggest challenges in my actor training. How can I create an authentic character on stage when I have trouble understanding who I am?

Another challenge I faced was the orchestration of my voice. During my monologue performances, one of the main notes that I received on a consistent basis was to work on my orchestration. I needed to find more variety in pitch, volume, and rhythm. This proved difficult as well because I find that my voice sounds extremely different when I hear it on a recording versus when I hear myself speak in present time. My professor suggested that I enroll in a singing class, and I decided to do so the next semester. Finding different vocal variety is important, because an actor must find the voice of the character. Once the voice of the character is found, the character becomes more authentic. I continued to focus on these challenges at OCC and then was accepted to the University of California Irvine (UCI) to complete my undergraduate degree.

UC IRVINE

My first two quarters at UCI included two intermediate acting courses. The first acting course involved two performance assignments: an open scene and a scripted scene. The focus of these scenes was to create two characters that make specific choices and have clear objectives. The class fell into the common trap of having unclear scenarios and safe choices, causing our scenes to come across as boring with very little activity. Our professor instructed us to continue working on these scenes and come up with stronger objectives, more specific actions, and bolder choices. Our next scenes were from scripted plays. My partner and I chose a scene from Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* in which one of the main characters, Joe, comes home to his wife, Harper (who's high on pills), and she asks him if he's a homosexual. I picked this scene because it contains a lot of strong subtext and the beats give it a good arc that defines a clear beginning, middle, and end. Once again we were challenged to make even stronger and more specific choices. The professor insisted that instead of getting angry, get furious. Instead of setting my jacket down, throw it down with frustration and despair. This class helped opened my eyes to finding the truth about a character's wants or needs from the other character in a scene. Looking back on that scene, I have come to realize that the power of an objective affects everything about a character. The more difficult an objective is to achieve, the stronger your choices and tactics are going to be in order to achieve that objective.

The next acting course introduced me to the Michael Chekhov technique. I had great difficulty trying to understand this new methodology. We worked on three different scenes from classic plays written by playwrights such as Anton Chekhov and Henrik

Ibsen. I was introduced to Chekhov's 'Psychological Gestures' and 'imaginary center', but I had a great amount of difficulty trying to understand this new technique. I tried and tried, but I just couldn't seem to grasp the concepts that were being taught. Later I would realize that this problem existed because I was not in touch with my body on stage. The Michael Chekhov technique involves an immense amount of physical awareness and experimentation with specific movement. I could not seem to get in touch with my body. I also did not understand the necessity of this technique after I had been using Stanislavsky's technique for many years. I completed the course, but I was still unsure of this new methodology.

During my last quarter at UCI, I retook the intermediate acting courses to fulfill more units and gain more experience. The first class was a scene study class and the other focused on Shakespearean monologues and scenes. The scene study course continued to focus on moment-to-moment action and response within scenes as well as a deeper focus on our character's given circumstances. I remember performing a scene from William Inge's *Come Back Little Sheba* as the character of Doc Delaney. In this play, Doc is a recovering alcoholic who avoids his past, but later relapses in the play and is sent into a fit of rage. My partner and I performed the first scene of the play in which we are introduced to Doc and the young girl who is staying in his house. After our first performance, my professor, Don Hill, gave me a slight adjustment. He told me to pick a part on my body to be in a small amount of pain. That pain would represent my character's troubled past. I chose my shoulder, and then he had us run the scene again with me signifying the pain in my shoulder at specific moments by a simple arm movement. It changed my movements, my voice, and I felt more authentic and present in

the scene. To this day, I remember the transformation I felt from such a small adjustment, and I even use that same technique in some of my work today. Looking back on that scene, I have realized that the adjustment given to me is very similar to Chekhov's method of incorporating imagery.

My Shakespeare class was challenging because I had little knowledge of how to perform in his particular style. In Shakespeare, the actor must be physically and vocally grand. If an actor holds back in his/her physicality as well as in the language, it is very easy to lose the audience. My very first course on performing Shakespeare helped me understand my level of commitment. One might say that I was not very committed at all. For many years I have been given the same note but in different forms. Usually that note means to "go bigger." I needed to make bigger choices. I came to this realization while performing the gravedigger's scene in *Hamlet*. At first my partner and I were simply having a conversation about a woman for whom we were digging a grave. When we worked on the scene, our professor emphasized to my partner and I that these two characters are often referred to as clowns and therefore needed to be "bigger." Their gestures needed to be exaggerated, their voices needed different ranges in volume and pitch, and the scene needed to move at different paces. We performed the scene again after applying the critique that was given to us, and it became clear how making exciting and specific choices improved the scene. I learned a valuable lesson in performing that I continue to tell myself as well as my students, and that is to "have fun with it." That's exactly what the gravediggers are doing in that scene: they are making the best of their job by having some fun and that is what makes them human. I wanted to continue exploring the human condition on stage and decided to pursue an MFA in acting. But

before attending graduate school, I continued to seek training through other acting programs.

SOUTH COAST REPERTORY'S PROFESSIONAL INTENSIVE ACTING PROGRAM

Due to my desire to continue my actor training, I auditioned for the Professional Acting Intensive Program at South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa, CA. This program was extremely helpful in making me more aware of my physical and vocal presence on stage. I was also given excellent guidance on the type of roles I should be auditioning for. For eight weeks we focused on audition techniques, rehearsal techniques, advanced techniques, Shakespeare, film acting, improvisation, dialect work, and script analysis. All of the courses were taught by working professionals with an array of knowledge about the business. In addition to these courses, we attended seminars about how to find auditions, how to get an agent, and other general areas of the professional industry. I was pushed as an actor in this eight-week, intensive program more than I ever was during my years as an undergraduate.

Our Rehearsal Techniques class was organized like a professional conservatory. We were given a copy of *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov and rehearsed it as if we were rehearsing it at a professional theater. I was constantly made aware of my habits and pushed to overcome them. My instructor, Karen Hensel, would keep telling us to "find the different colors of our characters." She encouraged us to get a pack of colored pencils and underline sections of our text in different colors to signify separate beats or changes in mood or subtext. I found this to be extremely useful because it prevented me from playing the same physical and vocal energy throughout a scene.

In the Advanced Techniques class I was reintroduced to the Michael Chekhov technique. This second time was easier for me to comprehend, but I still struggled because of my stiff physicality and habit of making simple choices. Once again, I kept getting the note to make things bigger. The lack of variation in my body and voice showed up in other classes. In my Shakespeare class I struggled with variation because of a lack of connection with the language. However, I improved and found ways to sharpen my weaknesses into strengths by learning to take bigger risks. I ended the program with a scene from Noah Haidle's *Mr. Marmalade*, directed by Art Manke. Art provided me with some insight that I had never been taught before. During the first read-through of my scene he said that acting is all about the other person in the scene. It made complete sense. Humans speak to each other to ignite a feeling or an action. Therefore, in order to be more authentic, the actor must ignite a feeling or action within the scene partner. My confidence had risen immensely by the time I graduated from that program. I also felt I had the tools necessary for a successful graduate school audition.

THE COSTA MESA CIVIC PLAYHOUSE

During my years as an undergraduate student and the four years after, I auditioned and performed at local community theaters. The primary theater in which I was involved was a seventy-three seat theater in Costa Mesa, California simply known as the Costa Mesa Civic Playhouse. It is a local, non-profit community playhouse that produces five shows every season, including two musicals. In addition, the playhouse holds an annual fundraiser every summer to benefit the theater. This small theater has been very special to me over the past ten years. Not only has it provided me with plenty of knowledge

about running a theater, but I have also used it as a base to continue advancing my ability to create authenticity.

One example was my performance in *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller. *The Crucible* is a play set during the Salem Witch Trials that occurred in Salem, Massachusetts in 1692. Miller wrote the play in 1953 as a reflection of numerous communist accusations by the United States government, otherwise known as McCarthyism. In the production, I played the role of Judge Hathorne, who assists Judge Danforth in seeking out the truth on whether or not certain townspeople have been involved in witchcraft and are conspiring with the Devil. During Act Three, the townspeople of Salem are at trial for several alleged accounts of witchcraft. Hathorne questions one of the women about seeing visions of spirits, who were possible agents of the Devil, hoping to expose her lies about whether she really saw them or not.

I referred back to the philosophy handed down to me by Art Manke back in 2009 about how acting is all about wanting the other person to feel a certain way. Hathorne's objective in this moment is to expose this woman as a liar. He needed her to feel intimidated, scared, and weak so that she would confess. I explored how I was going to get her to feel this way in rehearsals. The environment of the trial wouldn't permit me to impose any physical harm on her, so I wasn't able to incorporate very many physical choices. All I could do was hover over her while she sat in fear. But I did bring my voice to a deeper register, and attempted to frighten her with my eyes in order to make her feel intimidated. The director appreciated my choices and even mentioned getting chills down his body at that moment of the play. That note helped me realize that I was

creating a realistic character that could have an interesting effect on the audience. I was also praised by my friends who appreciated my sense of ease and naturalism in the role.

In addition to performing in several shows at the Costa Mesa Playhouse, I also served on the Board of Directors for three years. This allowed me to produce, design, stage manage, and perform various other duties for many productions. While I wasn't performing, I was able to watch the actors in the other shows, which allowed me to learn by comparing and critiquing their performances. I don't know that I will ever return to the Costa Mesa Civic Playhouse, but I will always appreciate my experience and involvement with them for seven years.

CHAPTER TWO GRADUATE TRAINING

ACTING

The acting classes at the University of Louisville's MFA Acting program are essential for the actor who desires to work professionally. Not only are the classes conducted in a manner that resembles a professional atmosphere, but a variety of styles are taught with which professional theaters build their seasons. This is important for the MFA Actor because he/she must be prepared to enter the world of professional theatre with the knowledge and confidence to audition for a variety of styles. The classes range from realism to audition techniques to Shakespeare to film acting, all of which are essential to the professional industry. These classes also pushed me to explore authenticity in my characters by making stronger and specific choices, physically and vocally, when suiting the actions to the text.

My first acting class was in realism, taught by Professor James Tompkins. The class consisted of an interview scene, a telephone scene, three open scenes, and a scene from either Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* or Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. In addition to the performance work, the class was also required to read and take quizzes from Robert Cohen's book, *Acting One*. This was the first acting class I had ever taken in which I was required to read a textbook and take quizzes. I did not see the necessity in this because Cohen's acting technique is a simple acting formula. According to Cohen, a character has a "Goal, Other, Tactics, and Expectation (GOTE)" (Cohen, 61).

The Goal is, simply, "what you--your character--wants" (Cohen, 23). The Other is the actor's scene partner, the Tactic is the method in which the actor achieves his/her goal, and the Expectation is what the actor expects to achieve. To avoid confusion, in the chapter about Expectations, Cohen states that the goal must be pursued with energy, excitement, electricity, enthusiasm (Cohen, 53), as if the actor expects to get what he/she wants or needs.

This all made sense to me, but the critiques from Professor Tompkins forced me to realize what he would emphasize in class and what Cohen emphasized in his book were two different ideas. Professor Tompkins emphasized that acting is all about what the actor wants the scene partner to feel/think/do, whereas Cohen's 'Goal' is simply stated as a character's want or need, thus making it a more general idea. I prefer Professor Tompkins' approach because it places more emphasis on details and specific choices, and I continue to use it in my work on stage and in other classes. One of the methods Tompkins stressed to the class about getting what you need through a specific choice involved how an actor uses his/her vocal inflections. If an actor goes down on an inflection at certain lines, it can cause a decline in energy and the scene may suffer. If the inflection rises, it can create and push energy in the scene, making it more exciting with continual investment from the audience. The inflection also indicates which tactic is being used in order to achieve what the actor wants the scene partner to feel/think/do.

Specificity was also emphasized in the given circumstances of our open scenes. These scenes contained very small and general lines that gave no suggestion to any given circumstances. Therefore, we were required to come up with our own settings, relationships, and situations. Every time we performed our scenes he would ask us

questions that pertained to the moments before the scene began, where and when the scene took place, how we wanted our other to feel on a certain line, or why we did not make a bigger choice. All of the lessons and notes I received from Professor Tompkins' class have enhanced my ability to make bigger and more specific choices-physically and vocally. One example in which I applied Professor Tompkins' technique of changing vocal inflections was during my performance as Earl Delacroix in *Dead Man Walking* by Tim Robbins. At one point in the play, Earl Delacroix, whose son was murdered, is welcoming Sister Helen Prejean in her home and starting a friendship with her. During the scene, he tells her how the memories of a lost child become "sealed like a shrine." I experimented with the inflection of that line in rehearsals. By ending the line with a downward inflection, it felt as if I was pushing her away. By giving the line an upward inflection, I was inviting her into my life and making her feel welcome in a community of parents who have lost their children.

My second acting class was taught by Professor Zan Sawyer-Dailey, who is the casting director at Actor's Theatre of Louisville (ATL). The main focus for this class was to enhance our audition techniques by creating a menu of monologues suitable for a professional audition. In addition to finding and performing these monologues that ranged from classical to contemporary work, we were also taught about the business aspects of the acting industry and the steps that must be taken when developing a career on stage or in film.

Not only was this class useful for the information that Professor Sawyer-Dailey provided about the professional industry, but I was also reminded of my habits and learned how to avoid them. Many actors struggle when trying to make physical choices

during monologues. Trying to figure out what to do with the arms and hands becomes very difficult, and one may become too stiff or move too much. My habit tends to be that I am too subtle on stage. Like Professor Tompkins, she challenged me to make more specific choices (physically and vocally) by performing my monologues with different emotions and intensifying the actions of the characters. Doing this helped determine which approach worked best for the character's pursuit of their want or need. When this class was over I was much more confident with my audition skills and had a new menu of audition pieces.

Professor Daniel Hill was my third acting professor. His conservatory-style classes were focused on Shakespeare, Chekhov, and classic contemporary works. The first class focused solely on Shakespeare. Not only did we learn how to analyze, scan, speak, and physicalize Shakespeare's text, but the class operated in the fashion of a professional Shakespeare company. Professor Hill constantly reminded us of what a professional company expects from actors. We were required to memorize scenes in a certain amount of time and told to come in prepared to make bold and specific choices as if to help a director fulfill his/her vision. I found this class extremely helpful for my desire to enhance my classical training. I came to graduate school with some knowledge of how to scan Shakespeare's text, but Professor Hill provided even more insight into the techniques of identifying operative words, trochees, feminine endings, and at which points to take breaths during the speech. This training in deciphering Shakespeare's language helped find ways to emphasize character actions and even furthered my progress in my classical training. I was also challenged, once again, to expand my

physical choices in our condensed version of *Macbeth*, as well monologues from *Henry V* and *The Tempest*.

Professor Hill's class in the following semester focused on the style of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* and the contemporary classic *Crimes of the Heart* by Beth Henley. Once again, we were required to memorize our scenes by a specific deadline and to come in prepared to make specific choices. In addition to practicing different genres of performance, Professor Hill cast us in roles that would be suitable for us if we were to audition for these plays at a professional venue. I appreciated this tremendously because I was constantly getting type-cast as "the father" in main stage productions. As a twenty-seven year old male, I found this frustrating because I knew I was too young to provide these roles with a level of desired authenticity because they contradicted my age and appearance. My other frustration lay in the fact that an MFA acting program is designed to prepare actors for the professional industry. A professional theater company would not cast a twenty-seven year old male as a fifty or sixty year old father. Instead, they would cast an older actor to make it more believable to the audience. I believe the reason for this was a lack of consideration for the present student body and too much focus on the faculty member's desire to direct a specific production.

The last acting class with Professor Hill involved acting for the camera and focusing on deeper character analysis in theatrical performance. Professor Hill also lectured us on the advantages of developing an acting career in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, or Atlanta. Learning how to act on film is crucial for me because I intend on relocating back to Southern California in the near future. I will continue to audition for professional theaters, but I also seek to make an income through television and

commercial work. I don't have any film experience on my resume, so this class was extremely helpful in teaching how to reduce a theatrical performance to a camera lens. Watching myself on camera can be irritating, due to my tendency of being too self-critical, but it helps to explore the challenges that must be made to transition from stage to film. The main challenge is to adjust the face and body so as not to over emphasize your movement but still maintain a sense of physical freedom and vocal variety. One example is to draw attention to the eyes while keeping the eyebrows relaxed. If the face keeps moving it can become distracting and melodramatic, causing the performance to seem unrealistic. Our voice can also influence our movement, so our speech must be less theatrical on screen, but still have variety in pitch and rhythm. If not, the performance is dull and boring, resulting in a disengaged audience.

Professor Baron Kelly was our newest acting teacher. In addition to offering a lot of insight into the professional industry, he treated our class as a laboratory where we were free to explore different styles of acting. While visiting certain methodologies from notable teachers such as Uta Hagen, Sanford Meisner, and even Michael Chekhov, the class was able to find new and advanced ways to bring characters to life on stage. Once again, I was thrown back into the methodology of Michael Chekhov--a technique that I had struggled with in the past. However, Professor Kelly's way of teaching Chekhov made it much easier for me to comprehend, and I found that I enjoyed this method a lot.

The primary aspect of Chekhov's methodology that Professor Kelly emphasized was the use of imagery. In class, we applied our use of imagery to Chekhov's tools that included psychological gestures, atmospheres, and imaginary centers. We imagined certain types of characters, like a witch or a lover, and created signature poses for them

when exploring psychological gestures. For atmospheres we imagined the classroom smelling like urine or being filled with dust and then had conversations with each other about anything not related to the urine smell or dust in the room. Finally, for imaginary centers, we explored the room while imagining our bodies being sticks or our eyes becoming razor blades. Then we would interact with our partners without any verbal communication.

I employed certain Chekhov techniques to a scene from Donald Margulies' *Dinner with Friends*, which included each of the three tools we experimented with in class, and was amazed by how simple adjustments brought so much specificity to my character choices. One example is when I imagined several pieces of thin broken glass on the floor as I made a slow, hesitant cross from stage left to stage right. I mentioned to my professor the atmosphere that I was imagining after we performed the scene and he said he saw it as well. It was during this point in class that I felt a great sense of accomplishment with this technique. I ultimately decided to employ the Chekhov method to my performance as Iago in *Othello* in order to fully overcome my past struggles with the methodology.

All of my acting professors provided me with a wealth of knowledge and insight that has reignited my confidence as a performer. There were times in which I felt inclined to disagree with some of their methods, but I ultimately came out of each class a better actor than before. Why else does one pursue an MFA in Acting if not to improve his/her craft?

VOICE

My voice classes at the University of Louisville have improved my abilities in creating authenticity on stage through emotional connection, physical awareness and intense dialogue training. Three of my semesters focused on studying the Linklater technique, mastering the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), some Alexander Technique, and learning several different dialects with Professor Rinda Frye. Professor Daniel Hill taught us different Suzuki techniques and trained us in Standard Received Pronunciation and Cockney. Similar to my acting training, I am grateful that I have been taught different techniques to approach a character's voice.

My first year of voice consisted of mastering the Linklater Progression and the IPA. The Progression is a vocal warm up consisting of several points of awareness that include relaxation and spinal awareness, awareness of breath, touch of sound, exploring vibrations, neck and jaw relaxation, soft-palate and tongue exercises, exploring resonators, and engaging the articulators. The importance of Linklater's Progression and its exploration of awareness lies in the fact that in order for an actor to be aware of a character's voice, the actor must be aware of his/her own voice. If an actor is not aware of how a character speaks, then the authenticity of the character is false, causing the audience to be disengaged from the action of the play. One of the easiest ways to master a character's dialect is to apply the IPA by substituting specific phonetic sounds in the text that are relative to the character's social and regional background.

Learning the IPA has been crucial to my performance of different dialects. During my second semester of voice training I had to complete a Voice Donor project, in which I was required to master the voice of one of my classmates, Richard Ribuffo. I focused on three different sets of speech that included one of his monologues from class,

a moment in which he was speaking in a state of stress, and speaking in a state of relaxation. In order for me to find the authenticity of Richard's speech, I recorded a couple interviews and then used the IPA to mark specific areas that are attributed to his voice. My performance of Richard's voice turned out to be a success in class. Without my knowledge of the IPA, I would not have been able to capture Richard's speech to a point of vocal and physical believability from Professor Frye and my classmates.

I continued my use of the IPA in mastering dialects up until my last semester with Professor Frye. During our dialect work I was given the challenge to learn an Arabic dialect. I am not positive whether or not I will ever play an Arabic character on stage or screen, but I took on the challenge. I listened to several individuals who spoke with an Arabic accent and tried to mimic their speech. It turned out to be very difficult due to the rhythm and tempo of the dialect. I tend to speak rather quickly, but the Arabic dialect is much slower. In order to convey a realistic performance in class while speaking in this dialect, I decided to piece together a monologue from the play *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* by Rajiv Joseph in which an Iraqi interpreter is trying to learn an American joke. I used this piece because of the parallels in which this character is trying to learn the ways of American speech and I was trying to learn Arabic speech. I applied the IPA to the speech and emotionally connected to the struggle of the character by my own struggle. After my second performance of the monologue, it was very successful and received much praise from Professor Frye. The IPA is an extremely useful tool, and I will continue to use it while learning and coaching other dialects in professional and academic settings.

Daniel Hill's training with the Suzuki method improved the projection of my voice and finding the inner struggle with certain characters. Core tension and engagement are crucial in Suzuki voice training. By struggling to engage the core muscles, the voice can come from a deeper place within the body and, when released, fill a large space. I applied the Suzuki method to one of my monologues from Shakespeare's *Henry V*. In this monologue, King Henry is challenging and intimidating Montjoy to be ready for his attack on Calais, France. The struggle of trying to maintain engagement in my core, and the struggle to intimidate Montjoy, caused my voice to be stronger than ever before. It was if a fire had erupted within me while I was challenging a French attendant to battle, and thus it created a more honest and engaging performance. To this day, I still use the Suzuki method in my classical work.

MOVEMENT

My first semester of movement training was taught by Professor James Tompkins. In his class we were trained in Jaques Lecoq's art of miming. The mime sequences we studied in Professor Tompkins' class included fixed points, apple picking, walls, corners, and mime walking. At first, I did not understand the importance of learning these specific mime techniques, because I knew that I was not training to become a professional mime. However, I later realized the importance of specificity in the mime work and how that specificity creates a sense of truth in performance. For example, mime walking requires very specific timing and coordination with the hands and feet. During the sequence, if the right leg and foot are extended (as if to take a step) the left arm must extend at the same time in order to maintain balance from a shift in weight.

Then, as the right heel begins to travel back, the left knee bends to signify that the left leg is ready to move forward. As the right leg comes to a stop, the left leg moves forward, and the sequence is then repeated to convey an authentic performance of walking in place. I have been curious to learn what other mime sequences I would have to master if Professor Tompkins had not retired.

The rest of my movement training has been taught by Professor Erin Crites. Professor Crites' classes have involved ensemble building techniques, various acrobatics, Viewpoints, elements, Laban movement, improvisation, stage combat, Michael Chekhov techniques, and Commedia d'ell Arte. The elements work that we did consisted of turning our bodies into the four elements of air, water, fire, and earth at different levels, ranging from subtle to extreme. I would later use this work in my role of Stephano in *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. Stephano is a drunken butler who tries to establish himself as the king of the island to which he and others have been shipwrecked. The challenge in playing this role was to pursue my objective while being drunk from an excessive amount of wine instead of just saying these lines and acting as if I were drunk. In order to execute this, I referred back to the elements work we did in class and focused on turning my body into wine. I tried to turn my feet, knees, arms, fingers, torso, and head into wine, which was similar to water, but at a different consistency. I even imagined my speech as being delivered in the consistency of wine. By adding this to my performance, I created a much more believable and humorous character than if I were to simply pretend to be drunk while pursuing my objective.

Professor Crites also reintroduced me to the Michael Chekhov technique. This time I approached it as if I had never learned it before. I found much more success in

finding psychological gestures and allowing my body to conform to staccato (quick) and legato (slow) movements. While experimenting with psychological gestures we applied them to archetypes such as the hero, the lover, royalty, the victim, the outsider, and the thief. One of the factors that helped create believable gestures was committing with our entire bodies. We examined how a lover uses his legs or the difference between how a thief uses his/her arms versus royalty. Without full commitment, the honesty within the archetype does not exist.

With the study of *Commedia d'ell Arte*, improvisation has been a huge component in my movement training thus far. In class we have played several different improvisation games such as Categories, Literal Mammals, Haikus, Return Clerk, and Alphabet Conversation. I personally enjoy Return Clerk. The game involves two people: one person is the store clerk and the other is a customer returning a very particular item. The item is decided by the audience. The clerk knows what the item is, but the customer does not. The object of the exercise is to have the clerk help the customer figure out what he/she is returning without mentioning what the item actually is. Instead the clerk must provide clues about the item's appearance or use while discussing why the item needs to be returned. The game requires specificity and good listening. Listening is extremely important because it influences how we respond. Actors tend to fall into the trap of concentrating on remembering lines instead of concentrating on pursuing their objective. This results in a failure to listen to the opposite performer, thus creating an unrealistic exchange of listening and responding.

I believe that improvisation projects complete sincerity because everything that happens is quick and is said within the moment. Usually, nothing is prepared during an

improvisational scene except for a brief scenario. By channeling the moment-to-moment reactions that occur in improvisation, I am able to explore truthful moments that happen in various scenes. An example of this occurred in *The Tempest*. There is a scene in which the court jester, Trinculo, played by undergraduate actor James Thompson, steals my bottle of wine and I (in my drunken state) attempt to get it back. During one of the rehearsals, James decided to hold the bottle high over my head to prevent me from reaching it. Without much thought, I simply tickled his torso, which caused him to drop the bottle into my hands. None of this was suggested by the director, but it was still a believable tactic and further justified the relationship between Stephano and Trinculo.

ACADEMICS

My academic and writing classes included Playscript Analysis, Performance Theory, Tools for a Global Theatre (taught by Professor Amy Steiger), and Approaching African American Theatre (taught by Professor Lundeana Thomas). Out of all of these courses, I found Playscript Analysis to be the most useful and effective for my performances on stage. One assignment that proved extremely helpful in deciphering Shakespeare's text was a language analysis for *Romeo and Juliet*. For this assignment we had to find a speech in verse from the text, determine the scansion for the speech, research any unfamiliar terms and imagery, and then identify patterns of speech, sound, and energy within the speech that might determine specific traits of the character. Our source for learning how to analyze speech came from Cicely Berry's method in *The Actor and the Text*. I enjoyed this assignment so much that I decided to expand it for my final project and analyze four more speeches from the play.

I used these same tools of analysis during my performance as Caliban and Ferdinand in our department's touring Repertory Company production of *The Tempest*. Making note of specific speech patterns and uses of imagery provided easy access for me to emotionally connect with Caliban's frustrations with Prospero and Ferdinand's love for Miranda. This technique of analysis has provided me with the tools necessary to find specific characteristics in the classical roles that I've played. By finding these characteristics, I am able to determine the mental and physical traits of my characters, thus making them more engaging and believable to the audience.

When the time came to propose thesis roles, I suggested roles that would challenge me in terms of character exploration. I also wanted to apply certain aspects of my training from the past two and half years. My first choice was the role of Blackstache in *Peter and the Starcatcher* by Rick Elice. My approach to Blackstache would have involved an immense amount of physical exploration to fulfill the comedic aspects of the part. Therefore, any physical constraints would be diminished. Unfortunately, the performance rights for *Peter and the Starcatcher* were unavailable, and I was forced to eliminate it as a possible thesis choice. The part of Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello* was my second choice. I thought a Shakespearean performance would fulfill my aspirations to gain full confidence of performing classical works. I also knew that I would be able to use the Shakespeare training I received from Professor Hill's class as well as the script analysis methods I received from Professor Steiger. The department ultimately decided to add the show into the next season and I was to play Iago.

CHAPTER THREE CREATING THE AUTHENTIC GREEN-EYED MONSTER

Iago is an ensign in the Venetian army serving under his general, Othello.

Although he is considered an honest and good person by others, he feels betrayed for two main reasons. The first is for being passed over for the rank of lieutenant by Othello, who has given the position to an inexperienced soldier named Michael Cassio. The second reason is that he fears Othello has slept with his wife, Emilia. As one who is very good at manipulating others, Iago sets out for revenge by getting Cassio removed from his position as lieutenant and planting seeds of jealousy and doubt into Othello's mind over his wife's faithfulness. He ultimately succeeds in his plan, which results in the deaths of Othello, Desdemona, Emilia, and Rodrigo, his assistant. However, he is exposed at the end of the play but does not provide any explanation for his actions. The role is very demanding and requires a clear connection to the text and psychology of the character. The theme of racism can be found easily in *Othello*. Iago is considered by many to be a racist simply for his remarks in the opening scene, but I disagree with this claim. My argument is that if Iago was truly a racist, his hatred for Othello would exist for different reasons rather than for Othello promoting Cassio to lieutenant and allegedly having affair with his wife. Iago merely uses racism as a device to influence others to hate Othello

Playing a role like Iago can be very intimidating. However, I would not have proposed Shakespeare's *Othello* to the department if I was not willing to take on the

challenge. My creation of Iago was a daunting task. I had to be cautious of simply playing the quality of a villain. In other words, I could not justify his actions for the desire to be evil. Instead of labeling Iago as the archetypal villain, I decided to identify him as a victim who commits acts that could be considered villainous. I believe that a victim is one who is suffering. There is evidence in the script that justifies Iago as someone who may suffer from psychopathy and narcissistic personality disorder. I continued this exploration and approached the role with a method that involved using patterns in the language to influence my use of the Michael Chekhov acting technique. By taking this approach, I could create an authentic character in which the audience would empathize, thus eliminating the space between the spectator and the performer.

IAGO: THE PSYCOPATHIC NARCISSIST IN MODERN THEATRE

Culture has sadly become accustomed to seeing news reports of violent acts committed by individuals who allegedly suffer from mental illnesses. *Othello* is a play that arguably contains themes relative to these same issues-particularly with the character of Iago. I used these ideas to help convey a character that audiences would be able to connect with socially, which would further result in a state of empathy. While doing extensive character research, I noticed textual evidence that identifies Iago as a person who suffers from psychopathy as well as narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). Once again, my objective was not to vocally and physically project the qualities of a psychopath or a narcissist, or play Iago as a stereotypical villain whom most audience members and readers would be familiar. My goal was to create an authentic character that a modern audience could empathize with.

Iago is considered Shakespeare's greatest villain. Instead of portraying a villain, I had to portray someone who is struggling to destroy another individual. This creates another challenge, which is to find the justification in his actions. I believe that Iago is suffering from certain psychological trauma, which establishes him as a victim. Scholars are still trying to decipher Iago's mental state in *Othello*. Dennis F. Borman describes his views on Iago in his article titled, “‘Thou Art a Villain’: From the Ensign to Iago--Blood Changes in Othello”:

...Iago has no understanding of social graces; his language is gross and unattractive; unfitting for a gentleman; he is put down repeatedly in a class sense; he fails to stand up for himself when various members of the play directly attribute him with being base in origin, a slur no gentleman could endure; there is a lack of family solidarity—he and Emilia are not intertwined...he is totally selfish, espousing philosophy of egotism; and lastly when his evil deeds are out in the open, Iago never repents. (Borman,78)

Another article in *Shakespeare Quarterly* written by Paul Cefalu, titled, “The Burdens of Mind Reading in Shakespeare’s *Othello*: A Cognitive and Psychoanalytic Approach to Iago’s Theory of Mind,” also discusses Iago’s motivations and the mental forces that drive him throughout the play:

The source of Iago’s discontentment is the motive for his evil. Just what is that source? Much of Iago’s perturbations stem from envy, even paranoia, directed at Othello, Cassio, and Desdemona. Yet to ascribe discontentment to envy or paranoia is to mistake a symptom for a cause. What leads to such uneasiness and thence to envy is his consuming tracking of others, as if he is discomposed by the

very process of mindfulness rather than any particular content or intentional object. (Cefalu, 271)

My approach began with research into certain mental disorders that are associated with violence. Both psychopathy and NPD characterize individuals as being antisocial, containing little to no remorse and performing bold and risky behavior. Raymond W. Novaco gives a more detailed description in his article titled, "Anger as a Risk Factor for Violence among the Mentally Disordered":

Psychopathy can be differentiated from other personality disorders on the basis of its characteristic pattern of interpersonal, affective, and behavioral symptoms. Interpersonally, psychopaths are grandiose, egocentric, manipulative, dominant, forceful, and coldhearted. Affectively, they display shallow and labile emotions, are unable to form long-lasting bonds to people, principles, or goals, and are lacking in empathy, anxiety, and genuine guilt or remorse. (Novaco,81)

There are several examples in the script in which Iago's behavior could be considered psychopathic. These include his use of manipulation of other characters based on their weaknesses, his dominance over Rodrigo, Emilia, Othello, and his cold-heartedness when he displays little to no remorse for his actions, as well as intense jealousy for not being promoted to Lieutenant. Iago's jealousy is most-likely a result of him suffering from NPD. In her book, titled *Interpersonal Diagnosis and Treatment of Personality Disorders*, Doctor Lorna Smith Benjamin summarizes NPD as having "...extreme vulnerability to criticism or being ignored, together with a strong wish for love, support, and admiring deference from others..." and individuals with NPD are,

"Totally lacking in empathy, these persons treat others with contempt, and hold the self above and beyond the fray" (Benjamin, 399-00). The most obvious evidence of Iago suffering from NPD is his jealousy. Michael H. Stone, author of *Anatomy of Evil*, writes that "Jealousy is best understood as the extreme of an emotional state for which our brains are wired to safeguard what is most precious to us: a sexual mate by whom we hope to have children who will carry our genes (half of them, anyway) into the next generation"(Stone 57). In two of his soliloquies, Iago lets the audience know that he is wary of Othello engaging in an affair with his wife, Emilia:

...I hate the Moor:
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
He has done my office: I know not if't be true;
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety..." (I,iii. 378-82)

For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof
Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards;
And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife— (II,i. 294-98)

He is frustrated and humiliated because of Cassio's promotion over him, and he believes that Othello has slept with his wife. This causes Iago's jealousy to rise to a very high level. Jealousy is a common emotion relatable in most, if not all, audience members. By gaining the audience's empathy toward my feelings and reactions of jealousy, the authenticity of my performance would increase greatly. The last lines of these soliloquies imply that Iago is plotting against Othello. In his book, Stone also mentions, "...where jealousy is extreme, serious crimes including murder can be the outcome and may occur quite suddenly—literally in the heat of passion" (Stone 55), and it is evident from these

speeches that Iago is planning something extreme that will lead to murder. In addition to gaining audience empathy, I also had to get them to hate Othello as well.

Iago also tends to improvise rather quickly and doesn't always think about his actions before he commits them. This characteristic of Iago can be described as what Novaco calls "Impulsive reaction," which is defined as "the tendency to respond impulsively [and] is thought to be a dimension of anger that is related to aggressive behavior" (81). A clear example of this in the play occurs in Act Five, scene two when Emilia confesses how her husband had her steal the handkerchief from Desdemona, which reveals Iago's treachery, resulting in Iago impulsively threatening his wife. Iago murdering his wife can be determined as what Novaco calls, "Physical confrontation," which he describes as "The inclination to do physical harm to others [and] is the most consequential problem feature of anger." Novaco also states that "Becoming angry commonly signifies that one is out of control, being driven by uncivilized forces that ultimately must be checked" (22). He also lists several provocations that cause one to be angry, such as "disrespectful treatment", "unfairness/ injustice", "frustration/ interruption", "annoying traits", and "irritations" (22). Iago deals with all of these emotions throughout the play. The challenge was to pursue my objective with enough energy to invoke those same feelings and reactions within myself to a point in which the audience will develop similar feelings.

CUTTING THE SCRIPT

Shakespeare's *Othello* contains a total of 3,177 lines. It would have been a wonderful experience to perform the entire script, but today's audiences are not

accustomed to sitting through four hours of Shakespeare, especially the majority of audience members who would be viewing our production. Most audience members who view our productions are students required to see them for a class. Professor Hill and I knew that we had to make many cuts to the script, because if we didn't, the audience would become disengaged. In order for me to win the audience's empathy and reduce the space between us, I needed their full engagement.

Our method to cutting the script was simple: we simply wanted to tell the story and have the audience out of the theater no later than 10:15 PM. In order to achieve this we had to remove any excess metaphors, similes, and repetition that slowed the pace of the story. Two examples of how we trimmed certain areas are in my speeches to Rodrigo in Act One, scene one and Act One, scene three. In Act One, scene one, when I'm explaining to Rodrigo my reasons for serving under Othello, despite my hatred toward him, there is a large section of descriptive words and phrases:

Iago: O, sir, content you;
I follow him to serve my turn upon him:
We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
Cannot be truly follow'd. You shall mark
Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave,
That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,
Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,
For nought but provender, and when he's old, cashier'd:
Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are
Who, trimm'd in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,
And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,
Do well thrive by them and when they have lined their coats
Do themselves homage: these fellows have some soul;
And such a one do I profess myself. For, sir,
It is as sure as you are Roderigo,
Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago:
In following him, I follow but myself;
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
But seeming so, for my peculiar end:

For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at: I am not what I am. (I,i.41-65)

Although Iago uses many interesting phrases and metaphors, it contains too many to make a simple point. Professor Hill and I ultimately decided to trim the speech as follows:

Iago: O, sir, content you
I follow him to serve my turn upon him:
We cannot be all masters, nor all masters
Cannot be truly follow'd. I am not what I am. (I,i.41-65)

This version still contains some of Iago's deceptive language, yet it is very direct and emphasizes his point, which is that he is only pretending to follow Othello. This act of telling Rodrigo that he is only pretending to serve Othello is also relevant to Iago's psychotic behavior of manipulation. He is essentially inspiring Rodrigo to follow him in his quest to destroy Othello. After trimming this speech from the fourth line all the way to the last, the audience will become interested in Iago's struggle for justice right from the very beginning. Therefore, my attempt at manipulating their empathy starts almost immediately.

Overall, I did not let the absent lines affect my character development. I decided that if my character didn't actively use the words to pursue his objective, then it wasn't important enough to apply to my performance. However, Iago's use of plant and nature imagery in Act One, scene three, did have some influence over my physical choices of the scene despite removing most of it from the script. One example is in the following speech.

Iago: Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners: so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions: but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts, whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion. (I,iii.319-33)

The modified version below was our final choice for the production.

Iago: Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners: If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions: but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts, whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion. (I,iii. 319-33)

Even though we removed Iago's description of harvesting different plants, I couldn't get the image of him as a gardener out of my head. I still found myself using my hands to gesture the idea of growth and control as I spoke to Rodrigo during this moment. Iago is a great deviser who has the power to influence others, just like he has the ability to

influence the growth of his garden. Aside from this moment, no other specific imagery or lines that were cut had any influence over my performance.

Another aspect that influenced our modifications to the script was Shakespeare's use of repetition. An example of this is also in Act One; scene three, in which Iago is inspiring Rodrigo to liquidate his funds in order to travel to Cyprus and win the heart of Desdemona. In this famous speech, Iago instructs Rodrigo, "put money your purse," a total of eight times. Professor Hill and I decided to cut the speech by making Iago's reasons and instructions simpler and shorter, taking out much of the imagery as well as three instances in which Iago says "put money in your purse." By doing so, the speech is shorter and would maintain the audience's attention, causing them to also join Rodrigo and me on our journey toward revenge. Professor Hill and I continued to make similar modifications to the rest of the script. Ultimately, we reduced the script to a point in which our production would be no longer than two and a half hours with intermission included.

Once I received a draft of the script containing most of our cuts, I immediately started memorizing my lines. I believe that as a student in an MFA program, I need to subject myself to the standards of professional theaters. This meant having my lines memorized by the time rehearsals started. However, I did not receive a final copy of the script until the beginning of October. I knew that it would be very difficult to be completely off book by our first read through, given the commitments I had with my course schedule. Iago has eight hundred and ninety-five lines before any cuts or changes. I didn't count, but after cutting the script, I estimated I had close to six hundred and fifty to seven hundred lines to memorize.

My technique in memorization involves engaging in some sort of physical activity while going over the lines. I prefer to bring my script with me to the gym and walk on a treadmill or ride a stationary bike while trying to memorize different parts of my script. Another activity I found useful during last year's production of *Dead Man Walking* is stacking and re-stacking our rehearsal blocks while saying the lines out loud. I find that engaging in physical activity while reciting my character's lines provides a sense of vocal and physical naturalism. That naturalism is what helps create authenticity on stage because it prevents the performance from becoming monotonous or one-noted, resulting in a bored and disengaged audience.

ANALYZING THE LANGUAGE

One of the most challenging feats of performing Shakespeare is developing a strong connection to the language. His poetic verse and prose forms can be received by an audience many different ways depending on how an actor delivers the text. Iago's dialogue contains many large speeches in both prose and blank verse, and I wanted to make sure that I committed to each one of them in a way that grabbed the audience's attention and pulled them into my world of deceit and manipulation. Both forms of speech contain their challenges. Blank verse is a rhythmic form of speech containing various amounts of poetic expression. The actor must be sure to stress the correct syllables so as not to disrupt the rhythm of the speech. Prose is not written in any particular rhythm, making it less poetic, yet it may still contain various amounts of imagery. Typically, it is very active and used to drive the story.

I found Iago's use of prose to be very active, especially when enticing Rodrigo to help carry out his deeds. Examples of this are found in Act One, scene three when Iago inspires Rodrigo to sell his land and use the money to travel to Cyprus and buy jewels and gifts for Desdemona. He also returns to the form in Act Four when persuading Othello to strangle Desdemona in her bed and again, with Rodrigo, when he encourages him to help assassinate Cassio. Iago's blank verse is very expressive, especially in his soliloquies when showering the audience with his frustration over Cassio's promotion and Othello's alleged affair with Emilia, or when he communicates how he will bring Othello to his demise. The only time I thought Iago's use of verse was more active than expressive was in Act Three, scene three when he is planting seeds of doubt into Othello's mind about the faithfulness of Desdemona. It was during that scene in which I felt the need to focus solely on the actions of my character and less on the language despite the form in which it was written.

The methods I used to analyze Iago's language included the tools I learned in Daniel Hill's Shakespeare Acting class, involving the marking of operative words, trochees, feminine endings, and the meter of the text. I also used the language analysis tools in Chapter Four of Cicely Berry's book, *The Actor and the Text*, in which the text is examined based on structure, energy, imagery, and sound. To exemplify my methods, I'll use Iago's declaration to Othello at the end of Act Three, scene three.

Iago: Do not rise yet
Witness, you ever-burning lights above,
You elements that clip us round about,
Witness that here Iago doth give up
The excellency of his wit, hand, heart,
To wrong'd Othello's service! Let him command,
And to obey shall be in me remorse,
What bloody work so ever. (III,iii.469-76)

The first step I take when scanning Shakespeare's verse is to mark all the operatives in each line. Operatives are important words that emphasize the meaning of the line. In addition, they also help connect the thought in the line that suggests a certain mood or feeling in the character. It is important to stress these words as not to allow the audience to misconstrue what the character is saying or doing, losing their focus. I would consider the operatives in the first three lines of Iago's speech to be 'rise', 'witness', 'lights', 'above', 'elements', 'clip', and 'about'. Marking these words as the operatives suggests that Iago is calling for attention, not just from Othello, but to a higher power. By emphasizing these words, I could develop a sense of wonder and power that would grasp the audience's attention and fill them with similar feelings. Perhaps if I did this they would empathize with Iago's sense of devotion and commitment. The command to the stars above is also suggestive of Iago's narcissistic tendencies because he is seeking credit for his devotion to Othello.

The next step in my analysis involves scanning the rhythm and meter of the text. Shakespeare's verse follows a particular rhythm based on the length of the lines. Most of his lines are written in iambic pentameter: one line consisting of five sets of two syllables. The clarity of the words and lines come from the stresses placed on the syllables, and the stresses will depend on the length of the syllable. I would have to be as clear as possible in order to capture and maintain the audience's attention. Looking at the fourth and fifth line of the speech, you can see that they both contain ten syllables, making them iambic lines. You can see below where I decided to place my stressed and unstressed certain syllables in these lines.

Witness that here Iago doth give up

The excellency of his wit, hand, heart,
You'll notice that the first syllable in 'witness' is stressed; making the word a trochee. By turning the word into a trochee in the middle of this speech, Iago attacks the speech causing the audience to remain engaged. In Robert Cohen's book, *Acting One*, he defines an attack as "the delivery of the first word of a speech" (191). Later he states that "Technically, the actor must attack each speech vigorously in order to get the attention (focus) of the audience immediately at the outset of the speech" (191).

It was important that I scan each line written in verse in order to maintain clarity. Clarity will help define the thoughts of the Iago's actions and will also define the sounds of the words through projection and enunciation. All of this is important to execute throughout the text in order to keep the audience engaged. If I stressed the wrong words or syllables, the audience could easily become confused about Iago's intentions based on the delivery of the words. This would result in disengagement, which would cause them to distance themselves and lose empathy for my character.

Lastly, I examined the lines and found specific sound patterns based on the vowels and consonants. This helped me in determining the actions Iago executed to achieve his goal, as well as the emotions he felt while performing them. In this speech, I noticed how Iago uses the letter 'L' numerous times. When I think of the letter 'L', I think of the word 'love' or the idea of roundness. Coincidentally, this speech is a declaration of Iago's love and service to Othello. In the third line Shakespeare uses the same vowel sounds congruently with the words 'round' and 'about'. You'll notice that, when speaking these words, your lips expand and then contract. I interpreted this as, not only the phonetic feeling of roundness, but a linguistic metaphor on how Iago and Othello's

antithetical relationship is evolving to a mutual one. I also noticed the use of the consonants 't' and 'd' in 'wit', 'hand', and 'heart'. The feeling of the tongue closing in on the soft palate while speaking these words made me interpret this line as Iago sealing his devotion to his general. The action of devoting and committing underneath these words also signifies them as operatives, making them important to emphasize in the speech. Finding the different sound patterns in these lines was important in determining Iago's emotional journey in this speech. I was able to use the energy of the sounds to match the energy necessary for his actions in the scene. This would cause feelings and reactions to develop in me that, hopefully, would manipulate the audience into feeling similar reactions, thus relating to Iago's psychopathy.

Shakespeare's plays are full of imagery, and it's important for actors to emphasize it. It keeps the audience in the world of the play and it helps the character achieve their goal. Cicely Berry writes,

Without being literary about it, when you are working on a play, it is always a good thing to look through the whole of it and find out what the recurring images are, for that helps to place the play in our imagination. And this in turn helps the language we have to use ring true, however small the part we have in it...From an actor's point of view the images are of two kinds: those which paint an external picture, and those revealing an inner landscape. But in neither case are the images merely descriptive; they are always an extension of the character, of how he perceives things, and therefore are always a point of recognition. (Berry 110-11)

The imagery in Iago's speech, though minimal, consists of references to the stars and higher powers (i.e. "ever-burning lights above," "elements that clip us round about"). This could be construed in different ways. The obvious perception is that Iago is swearing his allegiance to Othello by a higher power. I could also argue that the use of the words "round about" is an ironic foreshadowing of Iago's ultimate demise. He will rise to power and then get defeated, which influences the phrase "what goes around, comes around." However, I expect to destroy Othello and I expect the audience to go along with me. I chose to emphasize this imagery as the obvious interpretation. His call to a higher power in this moment is a bold move in his scheme against Othello. Bold and disinhibited behavior is common in psychopathy. Professor Hill and I eliminated much of the imagery in the play in order to prevent the story from slowing down. Therefore, I knew that I had to make good use of the remaining imagery in Iago's language to help keep the audience by my side.

REHEARSALS: APPLYING THE MICHAEL CHEKHOV TECHNIQUE TO THE LANGUAGE

Iago is a very complex character and can be difficult to understand, simply for the fact that he provides no explanation for his actions. I had to be cautious in my portrayal. It would have been very easy to fall into the trap of playing qualities instead of playing actions. In Iago's case, those qualities would be malevolence, villainy, or anger. It's arguable that Iago is an evil individual, based on his treachery, but my focus had to remain on the active pursuit of destroying Othello. An entire audience cannot relate to being evil or being a psychopath, but they can relate to a struggle over power. I needed the audience to understand Iago's struggle for power over Othello.

I was fortunate to have Professor Hill as the director for *Othello*. He was also the professor in my Shakespeare acting class, so I was familiar with his directing techniques and his approach to Shakespeare. The other fortune of having him as a director was the freedom he allowed me in the exploration of my character. He trusted me to develop bold and specific choices during our blocking rehearsals, with only an occasional suggestion to create a clearer picture on stage. I wanted to challenge myself and approach the role using Michael Chekhov's acting technique. I struggled with this methodology in the past, and I wanted to use it for a character whose motivation is also difficult for me to understand. Some of the discoveries I made during my reintroduction to the technique in my movement and acting courses made me confident that this was the right approach to Iago. He is a psychologically-driven character whose actions are based on his emotions. He also invites the audience into his scheme, which relates to Chekhov's mentioning of "*reciprocal action*" between the performer and the spectator. I felt I had a clearer understanding of how to approach a text with the methodology after applying it to my work in class. Lastly, I wanted to put my past struggles with Chekhov's methodology behind me.

In the weeks before our rehearsals began, I went over my script and focused on the application of Chekhov's technique to various sections in Iago's speech. As we started blocking the show, I made it a habit to find a private, open space and experiment with my choices twenty to thirty minutes before rehearsal started. Two sources that have assisted me with this approach are Michael Chekhov's book *To The Actor* and Lenard Petit's book *The Michael Chekhov Handbook-For the Actor*.

The main philosophy from the Chekhov methodology is that acting is both psychological and physical. In his book, Chekhov states, "The body of an actor must absorb psychological qualities, must be filled and permeated with them so that they will convert it gradually into a sensitive membrane, a kind of receiver and conveyor of the subtlest images, feelings, emotions and will impulses" (Chekhov 2). Any psychological state that we are engaged in will affect us physically. For example, entering a house which we have never been inside may cause our bodies to contract from nervousness or unfamiliarity. Eating food that we find delicious may cause our bodies to expand, versus the physical contraction that may occur from eating food that we find tastes disgusting. Our psychology always affects our physicality.

For Iago, his physical state could not represent villainy. It had to represent his psychological condition in the scene while actively pursuing his objective. Lenard Petit states in his book that, "Movement is not gymnastic but psychological in that it affords us the experience of states and conditions of being...The body must act as a sponge to absorb psychological values or qualities from the movements" (Petit, 15). The language of Shakespeare's characters is an excellent indicator of their psychology and state of being. I decided to use the patterns in Iago's language to influence my use of Chekhov's acting technique. By combining my use of the language as well as a psycho-physical methodology, I could develop specific feelings and reactions in the audience that would match my own state of being; causing the space between us to disappear. Essentially, I would manipulate the audience into admiring me and joining me in my scheme which continues to display Iago as a narcissist and a psychopath.

One of the first exercises of Chekhov's technique is exploring a series of physical tempos that are known as molding, floating, flying, radiating, and staccato. Molding can be compared to the image of being surrounded by walls of clay and trying to escape from those walls. Every part of your body must move in a fashion that exhibits molding clay. It is very slow and you must imagine a sense of resistance against your movements. Floating can be imagined as being surrounded by water. Like molding, the movement is slow, but the tension and resistance is much lighter. Flying can be imagined as being completely weightless. The movements should not have any resistance, and they should be extremely light and free. Radiating creates the sense of leaving the body. To radiate is to project your energy out through different parts of the body. It is the sensation that takes over when entering a different state of mind before reaching a certain physical state. Chekhov informs readers that "Radiation must precede and follow all your actual movements" (Chekhov, 12). Staccato movements are fast, sharp, and direct, similar to the head of a pigeon. After reading the script several times and experimenting with these different tempos, I decided that Iago is a character who primarily radiates. He radiates his energy on to other characters during his moments of manipulation, and he radiates his frustration of not getting what he believes he deserves to the audience during his soliloquies. Both of these are qualities suggestive of psychopathy and NPD. The other relying factor for Iago's radiation is that he lives in the psychological state of his plan's success before the plan is even executed, particularly in Act Two, scene three.

In this scene, Iago pressures Cassio to drink a toast to Othello's health, knowing that if Cassio becomes drunk his level of anger will raise very easily and result in his demotion. Iago knows how smart he is because he is aware of everyone's weaknesses.

At the end of his speech to the audience Iago delivers the following two lines: "If consequence do but approve my dream / My boat sails freely both with wind and stream" (II, iii.43-44). I felt the sound of the rhyming couplet, 'dream' and 'stream', invoked a sense of energy that suggested a state of progression. In rehearsals I experimented with radiating by using my eyes to project a state of enthusiasm, trying to live in the moment of Cassio's demotion before it occurs. If I could get the audience excited with my eyes and enthusiastic with my preparation with the bottles of beer and wine, I could get them on my side in my destruction of Cassio. In early rehearsals, our props were minimal so I had to mime all the wine and beer bottles, which proved difficult because I had to create authentic moments without props. Once the physical props arrived in rehearsals, I could experiment with picking them up, twisting the caps off the bottles and setting up my scheme.

A huge component of Chekhov's technique is the use of imagery. Imagery also influences atmospheres, psychological gestures, and imaginary centers, similar to how Shakespeare uses imagery to influence the emotions of his characters. The more specific the imagery is, the more sincere your character will appear to the audience. Chekhov says, "The oftener and more intently you look *into* your image, the sooner it awakens in you those feelings, emotions, and will impulses so necessary to your performance of the character" (Chekhov, 25). A wise piece of advice that I live by as an actor is that if I believe it, then so will the audience. Therefore, if I believed myself to be experiencing similar feelings and reactions as Iago, the audience would experience them too.

Throughout rehearsals, I experimented with the idea of Iago's breath becoming short and fast and difficult to recover in particular parts of certain scenes. One example

is during Act III; iii, right after Othello has threatened to kill me if my presumptions are wrong about Desdemona's unfaithfulness to him. Iago's speech goes as follows:

Iago: O grace, O heave defend me!
Are you a man, have you a soul or sense?
God buy you, take mine office--O wretched fool,
That livest to make thine honesty a vice!
O monstrous world, take note, take note, O world,
To be direct and honest, is not safe
I thank you for this profit and from hence
I'll love no friend since love breeds such offence. (Act III;iii 379-86)

Iago fears for his life at this point, but he also tries to make Othello feel sorry for him angering Othello with his statements. He realizes he has underestimated Othello's anger, and must ensure the death of Cassio and Desdemona in order to save his own life. There had to be a sense of immense fear. After reading this speech and reciting it out loud several times, I couldn't help but notice a consistent use of the phonetic 's' sound as well as the five 'O's. The numerous 's' sounds make the speech very breathy. The feeling from reciting the 'O's also resembles a release of air from the body. While working on this speech in rehearsals, I started to imagine Iago's breath leaving him, his lungs contracting, and the immense amount of difficulty of trying to refill them. In doing so, my breathing became very short and fast. This idea of my breath leaving me was reflective of Iago losing Othello's admiration and Othello's sympathy, which is suggestive of both Iago's NPD and his psychopathic tendencies. His need for Othello's sympathy is indicative of Dr. Benjamin's description of NPD as needing strong love and support. At the same time, he is deceiving Othello by pretending to shame himself for making Othello feel suspicious and uncomfortable. My hopes were to get the audience to notice the fear in my body and breath. By noticing the trauma of that moment, their breathing would also become very short and fast, resulting in a sense of fear for Iago's survival as

well as hope for his success, which creates an atmosphere of suspense that helps maintain audience engagement.

I find Chekhov's implement of atmospheres to be very useful when trying to elicit specific emotional reactions in the actor and the audience. Petit states that "It is a fatal mistake to let the actors go on *playing* an atmosphere, because all real intentions and actions become secondary. Chekhov warns us about this. The *reaction* to the atmosphere is what we should be interested in" (Petit 81). It was important that I played the actions within the atmosphere, similar to my earlier explanation of not playing Iago's villainy, but rather playing the actions within his villainy. For example, if I chose an atmosphere of extreme coldness, I would not act in the scene as if I am very cold. I would pursue my objective while imagining a very cold environment. Also, my reactions on stage had to be parallel with my reactions to the atmospheres I chose, based off the text.

A prime example of my use of an atmosphere was in the first scene of *Othello*. This is a crucial moment in the play because the exposition from Iago introduces the audience to his desire for revenge against Othello. In the following lines (containing cuts from the original script) we discover that Iago hates Othello for promoting Cassio when he was the one who deserved the position.

Iago: Despise me if I do not, three great ones of the city,
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Oft capp'd to him, and by the faith of man,
I know my price, I am worth no worse a place
But he, as loving his own pride and purposes,
Nonsuits my mediators: for "Certes" says he,
"I have already chosen my officer,"
And what was he?
Forsooth, a great arithmetician,
One Michael Cassio, a Florentine, (I, i. 8-20)

I wanted to project an idea of extreme discomfort in these beginning moments. Iago is terribly frustrated and disgusted. I related the 'p' sounds in the words 'capp'd', 'price', 'place', 'pride', and 'purposes' to the sounds of thick bubbles popping. The first image that came to my mind was the atmosphere of trudging in a rank-smelling swamp, with air bubbles randomly popping. And then when I mention the name, Michael Cassio, my nose catches a very foul stench from the swamp, causing a rise in my level of discomfort. I experimented with this in rehearsals, and I found that it fit quite well with the opening of the play. It became easy for me to believe that I was not given the promotion which I believed I deserved, so I felt betrayed, disgusted, and jealous of Cassio's success. All of this is indicative of one suffering from NPD. If I believed that I was disgusted over Cassio's promotion, the audience was sure to be disgusted as well and would surely empathize with my frustrations.

One of Michael Chekhov's most useful tools for exploring characterization is the psychological gesture (PG). The PG physically defines your character with a psychological desire. According to Chekhov the PG must be "strong," "simple," and "have a clear and definite form" (Chekhov 71). For Iago's PG, I had to create something that suggested a desire for revenge and what was rightfully mine. The PG also correlates to a character's type. As stated before, Iago could easily be classified as a villain because of the treachery he commits. However, I chose to view him as a victim due to being passed up for a promotion, and also from suffering from paranoia due the belief that Othello and his wife have had an affair. Those are Iago's inner demons that torment him psychologically. Petit makes the following claim:

The psychological gesture must in the end become an *inner gesture*. It is found with the physical body, it corresponds to the archetype and is archetypal in its form. The gesture is never shown to the public. *It must become an inner gesture*, an archetypal image that is in Chekhov's words, a crystallization of the will forces of the character. (Petit, 69)

Imagery also influences the PG. By using imagery to understand the archetype, an actor can create a gesture that physically defines the inner psychology of that type. It is also repeated several times until it is a sincere representation of the character for the actor. If the gesture does not come from within, then it is not sincere. It is also not seen by the audience.

I struggled while trying to come up with a PG for Iago. For a long period in the rehearsal process, my attempts resembled an angry individual taking something that he felt rightfully belonged to him. But that always seemed villainous in some way. In fact, almost every time I came up with something that felt pertinent to his character, it seemed to represent him primarily as a villain. I referred back to the script, my research on psychological disorders, and illustrations in the chapter on psychological gestures in Chekhov's book. I recalled the moment in Iago's soliloquy in Act Two, scene one, in which he describes how his suspicions are physically affecting him. While reflecting on his anger over his wife's alleged affair with Othello, Iago informs the audience "...the thought, whereof/ Doth (like a poisonous mineral) gnaw my inwards/ And nothing can or shall content my soul/ Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife" (291-94). I started from scratch and reevaluated the gesture with these lines in the back of my mind. I imagined a pain inside my stomach so strong that it brought me to my knees. Then, as I grasped my

stomach area, I would reach out in anger with one arm, as if trying to reach something that I desperately needed. Something about this gesture felt right for Iago. It typed him as a victim, struggling for something difficult to grasp. I began performing this gesture before rehearsing as we got closer to technical rehearsals. Eventually, this gesture evolved into something much more subtle, but very unpleasant for some people to understand.

Two days before opening night, for reasons I cannot explain, I began to think about the time I had a terrible cockroach infestation in my house. I remember being so disgusted and frustrated at the same time. I used those memories to imagine a hundred cockroaches crawling around the inside of me shortly before going on stage in the first scene. The imagery of this sent lots of chills through my body, which created a certain level of discomfort. I refrained from explaining my preshow ritual to my fellow cast mates, similar to how Iago does not reveal his anger over Emilia's alleged affair with Othello with the other characters. I wanted my inner torment to match his as well.

Imagery also influences the energy that drives our daily motions. If we walk into the kitchen because something smells good, then it is more than likely that we will lead with our nose. As humans we tend to lead with a particular part of our body, and so must our characters in order to distinguish their specific type. Chekhov refers to this area as the imaginary center. Similar to the PG, it defines the character. Petit also discusses the imaginary center in his book.

Moving from a centre has a powerful impact on how you will move the body. This is a building block in developing the psychological gesture for the archetype. The imaginary centre is also a completely effective tool in

itself to define your character. It is a sure and confident way towards transformation. (Petit, 73)

Some examples of a character's imaginary center include the following: A lover who leads with his pelvis, a cook or pastry chef who is led by the nose, a witch who leads with her finger nails, or the soldier who leads with his chest. One important note to make is that a character's center can change throughout the play and also turn into specific images. While working on a scene from the play, *Dinner with Friends*, in Professor Kelly's acting class, I used several different centers. In the scene I played a husband who confronted his wife, with whom he was separated, about a dinner she had with a couple of our friends. When I begin to interrogate my wife about the dinner conversation, I place x-ray goggles in my eyes, to suggest my disbelief of what she's telling me. At the end of the scene I degrade her and make her feel worthless, so I chose to turn my eyes into razor blades, suggesting my character metaphorically cutting his wife into pieces. All of these came through exploration and experimentation.

Iago is a fantastic manipulator and deviser who is aware of everyone's weaknesses with his ability to read people. Because of this trait, I decided to experiment with placing his imaginary center in his head. As rehearsals progressed, I started to incorporate various images to go along with his center. For instance, in the first scene when Iago is yelling up to Brabantio to alarm him of his Desdemona's secret marriage, Iago throws words of guilt at Brabantio for not thanking him and Rodrigo for their report. Consider the following lines spoken by Iago in Act One, scene one: "Zounds, sir, you are one of those that will not serve God, if the devil bid you. Because we come to do you service you think we are ruffians. You'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse" (108-11). While reciting these lines I noticed a consistent use of 'd' and 'b' consonants the

words when emphasizing the operative words 'devil', 'bid', 'do', 'daughter', and 'Barbary'.

I then imagined those words turning into rocks shooting from my mouth and hitting Brabantio in the face. I kept this center all the way through performances, thinking that if I used those images well enough, the audience would actually see the rocks flying through the air. This would provide some feelings of frustration in the audience that would begin to match my level of frustration.

My eyes also became a beacon for an imaginary center. There were two points in the play in which I placed snake tongues in my eyes. This was relative to Iago's ability to read people and use his manipulation of others to carry out his plans. An article on PetMD.com, titled "Why do Snakes Use Their Tongues?", provided some useful information.

When the tongue is flicked out into the air, receptors on the tongue pick up minuscule chemical particles, which are perceived as scent. When the tongue is retracted into its sheath, the tips of the tongue fit neatly into the Jacobson's organ, sending the chemical information that has been gathered through the organ and to the brain, where the information is quickly processed and analyzed so that the snake can act promptly on it. (2015)

Two times in the play where I employed this particular center and imagery were in Act Two, Scene I and Act Four, scene two. At the beginning of Act Two, Iago has decided that he is going to use Cassio's "smooth dispose" to make it seem as if he and Desdemona are engaging in an affair. As everyone arrives in Cyprus, Iago notices Cassio kneel and kiss Desdemona's hand to welcome her. Cassio then kisses Emilia's hand, ensuring it as a courtesy, to which Iago says the following line about his wife: "Sir, would she give you

so much of her lips/ As of her tongue she has bestowed on me/ You'd have enough" (II, i. 100-02). After reading and reciting this line to myself numerous times, I couldn't help but notice the number of times the letter 's' was used as well as the emphasis of the operative word tongue. When I think of the sound that an 's' makes I always think of a snake, and so I explored the idea of placing snake tongues in my eyes. They are used to pick up signals, and that is exactly what Iago is doing in this scene while observing Cassio's behavior. A snake can also be a metaphor for someone who is considered sneaky or deceptive, similar to a psychopath and also how Iago moves from one point of his plan to the next.

In Act Four, scene two, Rodrigo confronts Iago for giving Desdemona gifts and jewels but receiving nothing in return. After warning Iago that he will "seek satisfaction" from him, the taken-aback Iago replies with the following line: "Why, now I see there's mettle in thee, and even from this time do build on thee a better opinion than ever before. Give me thy hand Rodrigo: thou hast taken against me a most just exception, but yet I protest, I have dealt most directly in the affairs" (205-09). I immediately noticed the frequent use of the 'st' at the end of 'hast', 'against', 'most', 'just', and 'protest'. The phonetic 'st' sound, to me, resembled the sound of a snake striking its prey. This is also a moment in which Iago is using his manipulation skills to entice Rodrigo into helping with Cassio's demise later that night. Once again, he is also reflecting his psychopathic and narcissistic tendencies by enticing Rodrigo to assist him with his evil deeds, having no remorse or sympathy for him. I explored this in rehearsals, and even found myself feeling deceptive and sarcastic, but at the same time, honoring Rodrigo's frustration with a certain understanding. I needed to use my eyes to make Rodrigo accept my

reconciliation. That way, when I "protest," the audience will enjoy the moment, the same way Iago does.

This moment evolved in rehearsals. At first, as Rodrigo began to shake my hand, I yanked him toward me with some force when I protested to signify a threat or acceptance of a challenge. After trying this a few times, I found that it wasn't relating to the text or Iago's deceptive ways. Finally, I decided to make a choice in which I extended my hand to Rodrigo, but before he could clasp it I retracted and turned to cross downstage--essentially deceiving him. After hearing several laughs from the other actors in the rehearsal room who were watching, I knew I had found a very authentic choice.

Warming up before any rehearsal and performance is extremely important. It gives the actor physical and vocal energy and is a reminder to focus on the tasks of what is being rehearsed. I engaged myself in a physical warm up before several rehearsals and each performance. This warm up is Petit's book under the exercise titled "Staccato/Legato" (38). It is a series of movements in which an individual radiates energy in all six directions of movement: right, left, up, down, forwards, and backwards. First, you stand in present time with your body straight and relaxed. Next, you will lunge to your right, extending your arms as if radiating beams of energy from each part of your body that faces that direction. Then you will return to the original standing position and repeat the movement in the left direction. After returning to standing position, you will send your energy upward, downward, forward and backward, always returning to the original standing position between each direction. This sequence is repeated for a total of six times: two times in staccato (quick tempo), two times in legato (slow tempo), and then one more time in staccato and one more in legato. To keep my mind focused with

this exercise, I started imagining Iago's moments with other characters that correlated with the tempos and movements. Therefore, I concentrated on maintaining psychological and physical connections. For example, a staccato lunge to the left connected to the moment of telling Rodrigo to go after Cassio during Act Two, scene three. A legato lunge forward connected with Iago trying to console Desdemona after Othello's accusations.

Overall, I found that many of my choices worked well in rehearsals. At first it was difficult to remember each choice at each moment because lines weren't memorized, but as I got closer to complete memorization it became much easier. The biggest fortune I had in rehearsals, aside from a very supportive cast and crew, was a director who allowed me to explore my character through my own process without any interference. The sense of trust between Professor Hill and I helped our rehearsal process run very smoothly, and the students at the University of Louisville's Theatre Arts Department are very lucky to have his presence.

FIGHT CAPTAIN: ENSURING AUTHENTIC VIOLENCE

One of the most rewarding experiences in our production was hearing gasps from the audience during moments of violence. This resulted from our attention to detail in executing our moments of stage combat. Many of Shakespeare's plays contain several moments of violence, and *Othello* is no exception. Typically, a fight choreographer is brought in to choreograph moments of stage combat. The choreography serves two purposes: to ensure the safety of the performer and to make the violence look as authentic as possible. Our director, Professor Hill, had lots of experience with stage combat, so he

served as our fight choreographer. He appointed me as Fight Captain. My job, along with our stage manager, was to orchestrate our fight call an hour before each performance. Fight call is a short rehearsal of every combat sequence in which each sequence is performed at three different speeds in order to ensure the safety of each performer. I took it upon myself to use my position as Fight Captain to maintain the authenticity in order to maintain audience engagement, as well as to manipulate their emotions to a state in which they empathize with the action and characters on stage.

My previous stage combat experience consisted of nothing more than various slaps, punches, kicks, shoves, and hair pulls. I did not have much experience with weapons. I looked at the position of Fight Captain as a way of learning more about authenticating violence on stage. The most important rule to follow in stage combat is keeping safety as the highest priority. No act of stage combat is ever performed as fast as a real-life situation. Stage combat is measured in speeds that range from one to ten, one being slowest and ten being fastest. All rehearsals with weapons were practiced at three different speeds. The first was a two, then a five, and then a seven, which is considered the proper speed during an actual performance. The speed should never reach a ten. Another important rule to follow is making eye contact with the opposite performer before the sequence begins. This establishes an agreement between performers to signify they are ready to execute a sequence or move. The actors in our production who performed sequences of combat were Shaleen Cholera (Othello), Megan Kubac (Desdemona), Casey Moulton (Cassio), Crystian Wiltshire (Rodrigo), Xavier Bleuel (Montano), Megg Ward (Emilia), Candice Handy (Bianca), and myself (Iago). The combat in our production involved fights with real swords and daggers, as well as slaps,

shoves, falls, and a choke. I was excited to learn how to authenticate violence with stage weapons.

Our fight calls always began with sequences involving any type of blade. As stated before, the swords and daggers were real but dulled down to avoid serious injury. The first sequence of combat in our fight call was a short quarrel fight between Cassio and Rodrigo. Casey had to swing his sword above Crystian's head, in front of Crystian's stomach, and then then knock Crystian to the ground. One of the most important factors in this sequence depended on the footwork of the actors. In his book, titled *Stage Combat*, William Hobbs provides proper footwork techniques.

The essential requirement is to maintain a safe distance at all times, and this can be achieved provided that footwork is planned to marry with the sword strokes. When a single attack is launched the defender need not move, but if the attacker is to advance the defender in order to keep a safe distance must take a corresponding number of steps back. (Hobbs, 31)

If any of their footwork did not follow the proper choreography, the sequence could have resulted in an unrealistic scene or, even worse, injury. It was also imperative that Casey's sword swings remained a safe distance from Crystian's head and stomach. Also, Crystian had to make sure to duck and jump backward at the right time to avoid injury. Crystian also had to fall safely on his side. A sloppy fight scene can cause an inauthentic performance, resulting in a lack of engagement from the audience. The faulty choreography can divert the audience's attention from the illusion and, instead, fear for the safety of the actors.

Other crucial moments that involved the use of a blade were Iago stabbing and killing Rodrigo and Emilia. This was challenging because our daggers and knives did not have retractable blades. Our prop department refrained from using those type of weapons due to the danger of a blade failing to retract. Instead, we had to mask any stabbing that occurred on stage. J.D. Martinez suggests a method of masking any blade-to-body impact in his book, *Combat Mime: A Non-Violent Approach to Stage Violence*.

If you must use a weapon and the fight must be resolved by the use of that weapon, mask the actual moment of impact with a set piece of a mass of people, so that the attacker can stab far upstage of the victim and still look convincing. For further effect, create some vocal reaction, or knap, as you would an uppercut punch. A convincing scream of agony by the victim, who then reveals a bloody, nasty wound, will often be more than sufficient for an audience. (Martinez, 192)

I did not have any set pieces or masses of people to mask the impact of the swords and the action occurred downstage. However, Professor Hill suggested a way to make it look authentic. To mask Rodrigo's stabbing, Crystian had to face downstage while I pretended to thrust the knife into his back. To make the stabbing look realistic I had to rotate my wrist, pointing the knife downward instead of forward, so as not to injure Crystian but to also make it seem as if the knife is entering his body. Similar steps were taken for Emilia's stabbing, but there were other challenges, particularly the timing on both our parts. Instead of facing downstage, Megg would have to turn upstage into the sword at the exact time in which I rotate my hand so that the blade is placed flat on her stomach. After that, she immediately had to place her hands over the blade, and turn downstage as

I pulled it back and ran off stage. This illusion made it seem as if I stabbed her and pulled it out of her body.

Once again, proper timing is crucial to maintain safety and also to ensure authentic moments of combat that would keep an audience engaged. I am glad to say that our audiences seemed to be quite engaged during our moments of stage combat- particularly with Rodrigo's stabbing. I was very fortunate to gain more stage combat experience. I hope to continue learning more aspects of stage combat as I move further into my career.

SELF-EVALUATION

On opening night, I was very excited to finally have an audience. There would be no more soliloquies directed toward the stage managers or empty chairs. I was finally able to talk to an audience that had not seen the show. However, I also became concerned with clarity. A large percentage of our audience members were students required to see the production for class. I began to question if they would be able to understand the language or follow the story. It was imperative that the audience comprehend the action of the play. If they didn't, then they wouldn't be able to join me in my plot against Othello. Another series of questions that raced through my mind involved the resonance of the story and how it would affect any audience member that wasn't Caucasian. There have been numerous incidents that have sparked racial tension in the country, and our production is a reminder that those issues are still relevant.

Since my proposal of this play, I had been cautious about how to approach the role so as not to project the idea of a man trying to destroy another due to racist views. We had discussed these issues in our read-throughs of the script, but my argument rested on the fact that Iago was trying to destroy Othello, not because he was a racist, but because Othello allegedly slept with his wife and promoted Cassio to the rank of lieutenant instead over him. I also relied on Iago's keen sense of other people's weaknesses. He may not be a racist, but he knows that Brabantio is, and he uses that knowledge to manipulate Brabantio in trying to stop the marriage between Othello and

Desdemona during Act One. One example of this was on opening night when I referred to Othello as the Devil while trying to persuade Brabantio to wake up and stop the wedding. Without thinking about it, my voice became very hoarse and the word was projected with an atmosphere of evilness behind it.

I felt extremely focused during the first three productions, but I also felt like I was rushing my lines. I couldn't tell if this was because I really was rushing, or if I was concerned about the pace of the production. The other possibility was the fact that the show just seemed to be moving along quickly for me since I was in all but one scene. Other than that, I felt a sense of control on stage that I've never felt before. It was as if I had a command of the stage as well as the characters around me. I think the presence of the audience had a major influence on that sense of control. Perhaps my interaction with them made me feel larger in the sense that it wasn't just me who was trying to destroy Othello, but a small army in which I was the leader.

The most affected performance of the run was our fourth. Crystian Wiltshire, who played Rodrigo, was considerably late from a performance at a local professional theater. I was informed by the stage managers that we would start the show at Act I, II in order to give Crystian enough time to get into costume and get focused. Professor Hill and I discussed modifications in the scene to account for a missing Rodrigo. I immediately focused on the opening lines of that scene, but then I was struck with a major dilemma. Would the audience understand why I despise Cassio without my exposition from the opening scene? I started Act I, II just as I usually did and focused on being present on stage. Crystian ended up arriving just as we had started the scene, and any modifications were scrapped. I was not angry over the issue nor did I hold any

animosity toward Crystian or Daniel. There are times in which we have no control and we have to accept things the way they are. Still, I tried to think of a solution to my earlier dilemma.

Before my entrance in Act One, scene three, I started to think of a way in which I could inform the audience of Cassio's promotion over myself. I had to be sure not to throw any of the actors or crew off during the scene, so any changes that I made to my lines had to occur while I was alone on stage, talking to the audience. I started to think of how I could incorporate lines from my exposition into my first soliloquy. However, as much as I was comfortable with my lines, I felt that it would endanger my performance. If I froze on stage in the middle of my soliloquy the audience would no longer be enticed by Iago conjuring up a plot against Othello. Instead, they would be distracted from the story by a confused and unprofessional-looking actor who would be suffering from stage fright.

Robert Cohen defines stage fright as "the numbing fear of evaluation by others" and will "easily dampen your enthusiasm, inhibit your movement, constrict your voice, and paralyze your reflexes" (Cohen 101-02). If the audience witnessed my movements transform from fluidity to stiffness they might notice that I have frozen on stage because of a struggle to finish the soliloquy. I needed them to be engaged in Iago's scheme, not an actor fighting to remember his lines. Therefore, I refrained from making any unadvised changes from the director and just played the role as I rehearsed it. It was the professional thing to do.

I thought the last show was my best. I never felt as if I was rushing through my lines. I connected to all of my atmospheres and centers and felt extremely connected to

the audience during my soliloquies. The best example I can think of is the soliloquy toward the end of Act Two, scene three. I took my time with the lines and focused on imagining putting the last parts of some sort of machine and then flipping the switch to turn it on. I could feel it in my voice during my emphasis of the word "pitch" on the line "So will I turn her virtue into pitch" (351). My inflection went up at the end of the line and my head turned directly toward the audience to make sure I had their attention. This was my way of suiting my imagery to the text, as if the atmosphere behind saying the line was to flip on a machine that will set the rest of my plan in motion, and then let the audience watch my plan unfold. Another example of this was in Act Four, scene one when Othello decides that he is going to poison Desdemona. After he commands me to retrieve the poison, I protest and suggest strangling her in her bed. This moment was different from previous performances because I originally imagined my hand reaching out at strangling Desdemona. But this time, I imagined strangling Othello which gave me more purpose in my cross downstage toward him. This may have been a result of performing the show just four hours earlier, or because I just felt more grounded in the text and in my physicality than I was the previous performances. Either way, I was extremely satisfied with my performance that evening and wished the entire cast had another weekend to perform the show.

CONCLUSION

As I look back on my experience, I must say that I am extremely satisfied with my approach to Iago. I am not sure if the idea of mental illness will continue to be projected in future performances of *Othello*. In recent news and media sources, there seems to be a balance in culture's struggle with racial issues as well as understanding mental illness's role in violence. It's arguable that both issues are relevant in the play, and I hope that the arts will continue to be an avenue in which culture can explore these issues.

I feel much more confident with the Michael Chekhov acting technique now that I have a clearer understanding of the tools and applications of his methodology. Looking back on my past struggles with his method, I wish I were able to go back and apply it to several of my performances in past productions from my earlier years of training. I have grown to appreciate the value of incorporating imagery with a piece of text in order to invest an audience in an authentic, psycho-physical creation. Now that I am more in touch with my physical awareness, I hope to explore other roles in the future that challenge me to push my physical limits.

The most challenging component of this process was maintaining focus when trying to apply the method to the text in rehearsals, mainly because I had struggled to make sure I knew the lines word-for-word. I tend to be a perfectionist in my craft, especially when it comes to memorization. The past three years have taught me to memorize lines quickly and to also focus on the actions beneath the words. In the case of

my portrayal of Iago, I had to focus on the actions and my choice of imagery beneath the words and within the scene. That is where the authenticity lies. This struggle has helped me as an actor by challenging my levels of concentration. If that focus is ever lost, then the show is in danger of being compromised because Iago is the driving force of the story. If the story is lost, then the audience has no reason to be invested.

Another important lesson that this process has taught me is the value of applying specific techniques to a performance. Similar to my portrayal of Stephano in *The Tempest* and Judge Hathorne in *The Crucible*, playing the role of Iago while incorporating the tools of the Chekhov method has provided me with a way to conjure audience investment in my characters and create a state of authenticity. It is important that I continue to focus on application of technique instead of getting on stage and trying to be real. Being real is a subjective idea that does not sell to an audience.

I believe there is value for other actors with the methods that I used in my approach to Iago. Incorporating Chekhov's use of imagery is an excellent way to connect to Shakespeare's language as well as getting in touch with a character's psychological and physical traits. The benefit of this approach is that it allows actors to escape their own physical, and even mental, limitations instead of forcing any change within their voice and bodies, which can result in a "forced" or unrealistic performance. One instance in which I found the exploration of imagery to be useful in terms of maintaining focus was during my community service at the Brook KMI, a large, multi-purpose treatment center in Louisville, Kentucky. The facility houses and schools adolescents who have chemical dependency for social, emotional, attention, and eating disorders as well as adolescents who are dealing with family and domestic difficulties. While teaching the

students about theatre and Shakespeare, some of them seem to have trouble maintaining focus, but when I have them incorporate imagery in a particular exercise their focus is very strong. As I continue to develop a career as a professional actor, I hope to use this same approach in my work. I have found a method that allows me to escape my mental and physical inhibitions in order to create authenticity on stage. I hope I can also pass this method on to other actors as I pursue a career in professional theatre and film.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Travis Stolp

1403 Clara Ave.

Louisville, KY 40215

(714) 345-8554 - tjstolp29@gmail.com

March, 2015

EDUCATIONAL RECORD

Orange Coast College (OCC) - Costa Mesa, CA 2003-
2006

University of California, Irvine (UCI) - Irvine, CA 2006-
2008

Bachelor of Arts, Drama

University of Louisville (UofL) - Louisville, KY 2012-
2015

Master of Fine Arts, Performance

Repertory Company 2013-2014

MFA Thesis Topic and Work

Recreating the Green-Eyed Monster: Iago for Modern Audiences

Thesis Committee: Amy Steiger (Thesis Advisor), Julia Dietrich, Baron Kelly

Areas of Specialty in Performance:

Realism	Linklater (voice)	Movement Techniques
Shakespeare	Audition Techniques	Various Dialects
Anton Chekhov	Rehearsal Techniques	Michael Chekhov
Script Analysis	Improvisation	Commedia d'ell Arte

Other Areas of Interest in Performance and Theatre:

Suzuki (Voice)	Lessac (voice)	Viewpoints
Clowning	Design Elements	Musical Theatre
Performance Theory	Theatre History	Directing
Asian Theatre	Artaud/Brecht	Theatrical Design

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of Louisville (UL)

2012-2015

- **Enjoyment of Theatre (4 Sections)** - Responsible in assisting with lectures and teaching basic principles of theatre, including theatre history, philosophy, playwriting, theatrical design, acting, business of theatre. In addition, I assisted professors in creating assignments, quizzes, lectures, extra credit opportunities, and maintaining records for attendance and grades using Blackboard.
- **Acting for Non Majors (6 Sections)** - Responsible for teaching basic fundamentals of acting to undergraduate students. The course involved scene work and the understanding that a character is always in pursuit of an objective and uses actions/tactics in order to achieve the objective. The course also consisted of theatre games, improvisational exercises, and production critiques. I also maintained my own attendance records and grades on Blackboard.
- **Acting One (1 Section)** - Responsible for teaching acting specifically for first-year theatre majors or minors. The course contained a deeper understanding of characterization and objective pursuit with monologues and scene work, as well as experimenting with different choices and actions. Course exercises included theatre games/ exercises, improvisation, and script analysis. Responsible for maintaining attendance records and grades on Blackboard.

AWARDS: Graduate Dean's Citation (University of Louisville, 2015)