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WORKING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

By

Byron Lee Coolie, Jr.

B.S., Elizabeth City State University, 2013

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the

College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts

"

"Department of Theatre Arts

"University of Louisville

"Louisville, Kentucky

"

August 2016

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Approved on

August 15, 2016

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memories of Eloise “Momo” Coolie, Geraldine Jeffreys,
and Irvin “Poppa” Graham.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God for granting me the opportunity to pursue a Masters of Fine Arts in theatre arts. I also would like to thank my former mentor and sister, Billicia Charnelle Hines for her teachings, wisdom, and relentless tough love. I am grateful for my thesis advisor, Johnny L. Jones for his guidance through this thesis project.

To my family: (parents) Lorie and Kirby Jolly, Byron (Sr.) and Toinetta Coolie, thank you and I love you all. My loved ones: Sidney Edwards, Derek Graham, Candace Jennings, Sultan Omar El-Amin, Ken Tate, Walter R. Swan, Alan Matthew and Shalisa Miller, and Elaine Douglass.

To my friends: Neil Tyrone Pritchard, Jon Huffman, Dathan Hooper, Marci Janese Duncan, Talym S. Jinn, Larry Powell, Josh Boone, and finally my classmates, The Fantastic Four (Casey Moulton, Konrad Davis, and Candice Handy). We made it!

ABSTRACT

WORKING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

Byron Lee Coolie, Jr.

June 23, 2016

This thesis serves as an examination (or exploration) of how an actor can approach a role by working from the outside in, also known as the external acting approach. This thesis also chronicles my beginnings as an actor and preparations for my thesis role as the character of Lymon Jackson in *The Piano Lesson*. In this thesis, I explain how I uncovered my growth, overcame challenges, failures, and successes in the role of Lymon. I elaborate on how I, initially an internal actor, externally approached a muscular and complex role for the very first time. Also, I describe my undergraduate training and the production experiences of my three-year graduate career at the University of Louisville leading into my thesis role. Finally, I advocate for how the external acting approach can help an actor take ownership of the role.

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INTRODUCTION

An acting thesis is defined as an analysis that follows an actor's approach to a role. This thesis has one goal: to provide evidence that a role can be fully discovered with the external acting technique. This thesis highlights acting training and experiences from my undergraduate and graduate careers. For my thesis I played the role of Lymon Jackson in *The Piano Lesson*, which was my first August Wilson production. Lymon Jackson is a supporting character in the play, which earned the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Furthermore, this was my first time working with director Baron Kelly, an established Broadway and film actor who brought a certain level of prestige to the theatre faculty and the production. It was partially the influence of Baron Kelly that led me to explore the external acting technique, the opposite of the technique I typically use. After experiencing challenges in rehearsal, I decided that it was time to try something new.

Working from the "outside in" is a phrase I have used to explain the external acting approach. The approach is an option the actor has for developing a character. The actor begins to create who his character is physically (body position, gestures, voice) as opposed to who he is mentally (past experiences, intentions, desires). Furthermore, the external acting approach requires the actor to take an idea or image and physicalize it without emotion or processed thought. This technique requires a great deal of observation of people, of self, and very close analysis of the play. The external acting approach is a

style that is often bigger and more physical than its counterpart, the internal acting approach.

Actress and drama teacher Uta Hagen wrote *Respect for Acting*, the first acting text I ever read. With this book I acquired the internal acting approach that I primarily used as an undergraduate. It helps the actor turn a mere thought into an action filled with intention and power. However, through my experience, I found that the internal acting approach did not consistently give my characters those same intentions and power. In contrast, the external acting approach allows me to perform more consistently with control and ease.

Internal acting is defined as a technique where the actor creates the character from within. He first ponders the character's emotional life and the character's full intuition in a very intimate fashion. His instincts start small and the character's actions grow larger in rehearsal. The internal acting technique is based in different forms. These include emotional memory (Hagen 46), substitution (Hagen 34), and the five senses technique (Hagen 60).

In support of my external acting approach, I have used concepts provided in the text *Stagecraft Stanislavsky and External Acting Techniques*. In it, author Robert Blumenfeld writes about the physical life of the character: "The physical life is of equal importance with the mental life" (Blumenfeld 71) and "the physical life communicates the internal psychological state" (Blumenfeld 71). This means that the actor must be in tune with his character through both his mind and body. The actor must be fully clear about his character's intentions through his body without thinking too hard about what

his character is saying. The external acting approach forces the actor to develop his character from his body to his mind. The internal acting approach forces the actor to create his character from his mind to his body. It was through the external acting approach, particularly discussed in *Stagecraft Stanislavski and External Acting Techniques*, that I created Lymon's movements and voice.

This document explains how an actor must work from nothing into full completion of his character. An actor may limit his character's discoveries when he tries to know everything about his character before rehearsal. Of course, the actor must know the basic background of his character. Therefore, it is the actor's job to research his character, his past, and his wants and needs in the story. I have learned that the role only becomes more dangerous when the actor attempts to emphasize what he "thinks" he understands about the role. In the early stages of rehearsal, I learned that not knowing the role is better than thinking you know the role.

Conclusively, an actor must know that performing in an August Wilson production is difficult. The play will require research, concentrated listening, and the ability to physicalize the text. There are earned pauses in the script, sudden beat shifts, and fast paced banter that force the actor to listen to his scene partner(s), himself, and the playwright. Wilson forced me to be a detective with the script, the character, the environment, the other characters, and most importantly, with myself. I did not know any of this before entering the rehearsal space. I walked into the rehearsal space without the appropriate tools to seize the role. Performing in an August Wilson production demands close attention. It requires drastic adjustments (and readjustments) to line delivery and the

actor must earn his spontaneity. The spontaneity will eventually find the actor. That is one of the key things I have learned performing as Lymon.

When building a character, the actor must first separate himself from the character he portrays. He must realize that his thoughts are his own and not the character's when he is using any acting approach. If he can separate himself and evaluate his own thoughts, he can then evaluate the character's thoughts. When I was using the internal acting approach, using my own past experiences, I could not separate myself from Lymon. When I used the external approach, it was all about Lymon and only Lymon. I forced myself into the external acting approach because the internal acting approach was not working for me. This was my first time performing in a play written by August Wilson and I wanted my performance to be the best it could.

I forced myself to focus on specific details in an effort to blend with the other characters onstage. The first step was listening. The rhythm behind August Wilson's language contains a certain musicality. The actor must understand the play's cadence. Second, the external style required me to realize that less is more and more is less. The harder I tried to feel the emotion, the more setbacks I caused in my pursuit of Lymon. Third, I discovered that in order to portray an August Wilson character, the actor must marry the emotion with the text. Shakespeare and Wilson's languages share strong similarities, for their plays both contain wordy monologues filled with visual images and analogies. I learned in this journey that I was oblivious to August Wilson's writing style. His language is muscular and multifaceted.

Despite the other techniques that I have, the external acting approach enhanced my performance in this role. Throughout this thesis, I answer these primary questions (among others): How did I approach acting before using the external acting technique? How did using the external approach strengthen my thesis performance? What are the major differences between the external and internal acting approaches?

LITERATURE REVIEW

How Analysis Affects Performance

Actress Mary Ellen Snodgrass explains the character background of Lymon in *August Wilson: A Literary Companion*. Snodgrass's sources contributed to the early part of my acting process. Her book provided me with information necessary to analyze Lymon. This study led to my use of the internal acting approach. I also used *How to Stop Acting* by Harold Guskin as a means to act on my impulses and avoid overanalyzing a role. Although actors must be able to analyze plays and their characters, part of my early struggles in my thesis role was due to my overly analytical attitude. As stated earlier, I knew too much about the character of Lymon. When the actor no longer analyzes his role, he no longer restricts his character to what he thinks his character should be. In *The Actor's Art and Craft*, William Esper and Damon DiMarco also agree that an actor "must respond to what you (the actor) hear from your partner without analysis" (Esper and DiMarco 39) in a scene.

Internal Acting Approach

After finding necessary information regarding Lymon's character in *August Wilson: A Literary Companion*, I applied the information with the internal acting approaches described in Hagen's *Respect for Acting*. Through this text, I discovered the substitution and five senses techniques. I have used the substitution technique for

monologues and graduate performances including *Dead Man Walking* in 2014. *Respect for Acting* inspired my internal acting approaches for selected graduate shows, including *The Piano Lesson*.

External Acting Approach

The Stagecraft Stanislavski and External Acting Techniques gave me a few external acting techniques to use. It helped me create the voice and movements of Lymon. I did not start using the external acting approach until the third week of rehearsal. Author Robert Blumenfeld covers the following topics: movement and gesture, posture, technical aspects of language, and finding subtext. I found these topics useful in allowing me to connect to a character in ways I had not before.

CHAPTER 1: UNDERGRADUATE TRAINING

“American actors are usually taught to start with the inside of a character” (Guskin 36).

Elizabeth City State University: The Beginning

The basis of my acting training began at Elizabeth City State University in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. There, the theatre arts department was small and lacked support. Throughout my four-year undergraduate career, there were only six members of the theatre arts department. There was no major. Students could only minor in drama. My instructor was Billicia Charnelle Hines. While some would describe her as a “hardass,” I would describe her as an advocate of honesty, passion, and tough love. I was introduced to the Stanislavski technique from our primary text, *Respect for Acting* by Uta Hagen.

The Substitution Technique

In the book, Hagen speaks of the acting techniques based on Stanislavski’s practices. There are two notable acting concepts I studied in the early development of my acting skills. These include: the substitution technique and the five senses technique. These are different internal acting approaches that demand the actor start from the inside out.

The substitution technique helped me with my transition from comedy to drama. “Webster defines substitution as the act of putting a person or thing in place of another serving the same purpose” (Hagen 35). Substitution is a technique that invites the actor to

play with an increased emotional investment. The actor mentally replaces someone (or something) with a personal experience that gives him an emotional or sensual trigger onstage.

In the *Respect for Acting*, Hagen stresses that the actor is “to lose yourself” (Hagen 34) when substituting. Substitution helps make a scene more literal and believable for me. For instance, in my sophomore year I performed in *My Sister’s Body*. In the play, I portrayed a thug in conflict with the main character. The student who played the main character was my friend, Steve. Steve was a college friend with whom I joked with in our free time. I was scripted to fight him onstage following a five-second stare down. I could not give our scene the seriousness necessary, thus I could not truthfully perform. The scene worked against me in several ways. First, I am not a thug or a person who likes physical confrontation. Second, I do not want to fight my friend in front of strangers. Third, Steve was a clown and loved to make jokes during rehearsal. Therefore, this scene was too difficult to be taken seriously. It was also my first staged fight. In the beginning of the process, this scene was overwhelmingly tough because I knew I was “fighting” my friend. The director’s frustrations were growing and I could not deliver the action the script required. In turn, Steve was becoming discouraged. Therefore, the scene was not real to me. I did not believe my character’s situation. I knew this had become problematic, so I turned to Hagen’s text in need of a solution. According to her:

When an actor has difficulty finding a substitution for the content of a given scene as a whole, he can usually find the root of the problem in the fact that he’s being too literal. Many actors take the outer event and the outer words at face value. An actor may protest ‘But how can I use substitution when I never had the desire to murder anyone.’ (You) must hunt out the psychological objective of the scene, and for that they can find substitution (Hagen 39-40).

In other words, I needed to identify what my character felt mentally. When substituting, the actor may use a person, place, or thing. I chose to use a former bully. He was a six-foot tall jock from my freshman year in high school. The bully always seemed to start fights with me in front of large groups. He was relentless with his insults and wanted to have physical altercations with me. Simply, I hated him and he hated me. This led to the idea of mentally substituting the bully for Steve. The attempt was a success. Onstage, I remembered the embarrassment and hostility the bully spawned in my memory. My muscles and lips tightened, and the stage anxiety was no longer present. I felt the rage and vengeful presence I was unable to unleash on the bully. As soon as the scene began, it was fast, unapologetic, intense, and spontaneous. As I looked into Steve's eyes, nothing was funny. I was filled with the pain, strength, and the frustration my character faced. My rage coincided with my character's given circumstances and I believed my situation. I threw Steve on the couch, "punched," and screamed at him, owning the character. This was the first time that I owned a character in a drama.

The Five Senses Technique

The five senses technique is another concept articulated in *Respect for Acting*. It derives from the sense memory technique. The sense memory technique is "the recall of physical sensations" (Hagen 52). If an actor inhales deeply by opening his mouth and flattening his tongue, he will allow the air to fill his lungs and he will yawn. If an actor uses this trick in bed onstage, he is using sense memory. He is physically triggering his body to create a realistic and believable result. The five senses concept goes further by asking the actor to find what triggers his senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.

Whatever sensual memory the actor uses to excite his senses he can use to access his emotions.

For example, in my Acting 1 class, I performed a Mercutio monologue from *Romeo and Juliet*. Mercutio is Romeo's best friend. I struggled to bring an authentic sense of fun and lightheartedness into the piece. Billicia noted that I was boring, lame, and lifeless in the monologue. Mercutio is a vibrant pivotal character with powerfully magnetic charm and wit. I had no way of conveying those traits through this monologue. I needed an approach to increase my character's believability.

I have a history with the song "Before I Let Go" by Maze featuring Frankie Beverly. I normally hear the song at my family cookout every summer in New Orleans. The song brings joy and love to my spirit. I sing the lyrics with my mother and older relatives and dance with my grandmother to the song. In Mercutio's monologue, he pep talks his best friend into attending a party and forgetting his heartache. While I rehearsed my Mercutio monologue, I played "Before I Let Go" in the background of my rehearsal room. With the song within earshot, I accessed the nostalgic memories of joy and excitement I shared with my family because of the thrill of this moment that was placed inside my body. My instincts took over to the extent where I did not need to think about the next choice to impress or "show" what I was feeling. This is an example of an actor using his sense of hearing as part of the five senses technique.

During my senior year, I was instructed to perform a monologue from *Snow Falling on Cedars*. In the piece, my character is speaking to his love interest, Hatsue. In the beginning, I felt uninspired and tasteless when I performed it. I made a habit of

planning how the monologue should be performed in my head. However, intellectualizing the monologue always worked against me, because I focused on how my body was positioned, what I sounded like, or if I paraphrased a few words in the monologue. I focused on everything but my character's situation and how it would make me feel. My mentor, Billicia, would criticize the monologue for my lack of empathy and emotional presence. She recommended that I refer to Hagen's *Respect for Acting*. As an idea, I bought a Febreze bottle with a flavored scent called Sandlewood. It smelled like my then-girlfriend, whom I was head over heels for. I brought the Febreze bottle to rehearsal and sprayed it in front of me on the stage. After a deep inhale and exhale, I instantly saw my girlfriend's face in my mind. I felt the touch of her skin and heard the sound of her voice before my monologue began. This was the first time I used the five senses technique on a monologue.

Compared to the External Acting Approach

In comparison to the internal acting approach, the external acting approach does not demand the actor search for any type of moment-to-moment replacement. The external acting approach is much like the concept of building a house. When one builds a house, he shapes it in a form he desires. After the house is built with caution, then it is time to place the furniture inside. He must decide where he will place the sofa, television, chairs, bed, etc. Everything from the chair placement to how much silverware he has, he must know and be aware of what he places in his house.

This house analogy applies to the way an actor approaches his character externally. How does his character move? Does he walk with a limp? Does he move with

or without grace? Once the actor finds his character's physical movement, then he eventually discovers his character's voice. What is the character's vocal pitch, tone, and speech pattern? This is great because the actor has now tuned his two instruments for his character: he has found his character's body and voice. His intellect will not work against him as he uncovers his character, because he is not too intimate with his character yet. He does not need to outwit or undo his personal experiences. He is now available to discover his character's emotions, truth, and essence. Once the actor finds his voice and body, he goes further into "the house," by meeting his character's emotions. Soon his instincts are married with his character's intuition.

As stated before, there are several different techniques that relate to the internal acting approach. In turn, there are several different tools for the external acting approach. These external acting techniques are categorized into five different types of movements in the *Stagecraft Stanislavski and External Acting Techniques*. I used two of the five to develop Lymon's character. My first was the "emotional" movement. These are "automatic facial expressions assumed when laughing or crying; but they may also be arbitrary, as when reaching out toward a loved one in order to embrace that person" (Blumenfeld 77). As Lymon, whenever I placed my arms around Berniece (played by Candice Handy) in Act 2 Scene 3, that was an "emotional" movement. The second was the "illustrative" movement. These movements are "gestures (that) usually accompany verbal actions and are meant to make something clearer" (Blumenfeld 77). For instance, in Act 1 Scene 2, I made a choice to point directly at Boy Willie (played by Tyler Madden) on the line "Lymon nothing. *You* go down there and sleep in it." I discovered

these external acting movements and applied them in the middle of *The Piano Lesson* rehearsal.

The substitution and five senses techniques are both forms of the internal acting approach. These techniques use the idea of replacement. For instance, in the scene between Lymon and Berniece substitution can be used. As the actor, I can replace Berniece with a former love interest. After seeing Berniece in her nightgown, I imagined the former love interest and re-experienced the passion and excitement I felt for her. Therefore, my goal to seduce Berniece is fueled with a legitimate truth. If I wanted to use the five senses technique in that scene, I would ask Candice if I could use a perfume that my ex-girlfriend wore. The smell of the perfume would excite my sense of smell and would psychologically connect me to my former love. If I had used the internal acting approach (i.e. the substitution technique or the five senses technique), this is how I would have approached that scene, respectively.

Substitution, the five senses, and the external acting technique all have common influence: the character's inner life. Despite their common influence, these three techniques shape the character's inner life differently. The character's inner life is the living spirit of the character. For instance in Act 1 Scene 1, Boy Willie says Lymon is sleepy and Lymon responds, "I ain't sleepy." My character's inner life said, "What the hell are you talking about? I am wide awake, you idiot!" Although that statement cannot be said, I can use my character's inner life's thoughts to fuel the line. The five senses technique and substitution are solely driven on emotion while external acting is driven on image and physicality. The external acting approach influences the character's inner life based on physicality. If I am sitting on the couch slouched downward with a drooping

head, my inner life will feel tired. If Candice/Berniece for my ex-girlfriend (via substitution technique) or spray her with a nostalgic perfume (via five senses technique), my character's inner life eventually becomes infatuated with Berniece. Although the internal acting approach is helpful, the internal acting approach takes more time for me to put into practice. The external acting approach immediately activates my character's inner life. The external acting approach keeps me more performance ready.

CHAPTER 2: GRADUATE TRAINING

Graduate-Year 1

“For a would-be actor, the prerequisite is *talent*” (Hagen 13).

Monsieur Baptiste: The Con Man: Losing Liberation

An actor must be bold and daring. He is comfortable with the uncomfortable.

Monsieur Baptiste: The Con Man was my first show at the University of Louisville.

“This is a whole new world of theatre. I’m no longer in undergrad,” I thought. The play was a Haitian adaptation of *Tartuffe*, written by Roger Furman. Before, during, and after the rehearsal process, I was severely tested through characterization, ego, and embarrassment. I developed a secret hatred and dismissal for what I thought was the external acting technique. This show was the first time I worked with a director with an abrasive communication style. What do you do when you lose respect and tolerance for your director? I learned that you must focus on the work. Acting in *Monsieur Baptiste: The Con Man* became an experience where I lost my sense of freedom and fearlessness. This was a frustrating experience. It was the first time I was restricted from exploring my character. The cast was directed to make physical gestures that were only based on ideas. However, the director’s harsh communication style became difficult for me.

I was ready to enter the space, make bold choices, and show the Theatre Arts department what I had. On the first day of auditions I made it my mission to either get the

part of Jean Paul, the son, or Andre, Valerie's suitor. Surprisingly, I was cast in dual roles as Gustav and Officer Du Bois. As part of the play, I was required to learn a French accent for the roles. This would be the first full-length play where I performed with an accent.

In the first rehearsal, I learned right away that rehearsals would be like boot camp. In our first exercise, we were instructed to show our character walk. I was nervous because at this point. Luckily, my turn was not immediate. But as I waited in horror, I overthought my character's walk and I lost the liberation necessary to own the role. I was no longer in the mind of my character but in my own mind. The director called my character's name instantly. By contrast, if I had applied the external acting approach to this role, my trust would be in my body instead of my mind. The director ridiculed my physical acting choice. After taking my first steps, she told me to stop and noted that I looked gay and "that walk won't happen in my show!" I was shocked, humiliated, and self-conscious. Instantly, I was hesitant and repulsed by what I might try next. I was taught that there is no right or wrong onstage. There is only truth. That concept did not apply to my experience in this show.

As time progressed, all of my physical and psychological choices were stripped from me. I solely trusted my intuition and instincts for this role. For the role of Gustav, I wanted to mold him after music professor, Dr. Walter R. Swan, my second college mentor at ECSU. Dr. Swan was a charismatic, witty, and articulate intellectual who was big on common sense. He walked with a distinct sway in his hips, leading with his pelvis and swinging his feet forward. For weeks, I practiced his walk, his speech inflections, and all of his gestures that I thought were suitable for the role. I enjoyed sculpting the

character of Gustav. By this attempt, I was making external acting practices though I did not know it then. Every time I made a character discovery, the director criticized it. I had no freedom to sculpt the character based on my own instincts and creativity. Afraid of being scrutinized, I gave up on my external acting attempt and only waited until the director corrected me. I became afraid to explore my character for the very first time.

At this specific moment, I did not appreciate the micro-management from my director. Everything I did or said was wrong, according to her. For instance, “that is another matter” was my line. I was severely criticized for making the word “another” the key word in the sentence as opposed to “matter.” Nothing I brought to the rehearsal was acceptable. Whatever acting choice I made was rejected. I was skeptical and more critical of my own acting choices.

By the start of the run of *Monsieur Baptiste: The Con Man*, acting felt like a day job. I allowed myself to feel defeated in the rehearsal instead of taking each mistake or correction as a step closer to a more accurate portrayal of Gustav. Onstage, I only thought about how to prevent acting errors instead of creatively contributing to the production. I did not try the internal or external acting approach. I was only saying lines and moving. I kept my acting choices very minimal. I became a safe actor instead of a bold one.

Shortly after closing, the graduate actors were reviewed for their semester’s performance. I held the critique of others in high regard. In the reviews of my acting debut in *Monsieur Baptiste: The Con Man*, Professor Daniel Hill thought my character was believable, but found that I was difficult to hear. Both Professor Hill and Professor Russell Vandenbroucke had trouble understanding my line delivery. Professor Hill

wanted to see me make more acting choices and take more risks onstage. He also stated that my character was stale. Dr. Lundeana Thomas stated that my performance was okay but could be better with sharper line delivery.

Clearly, these were not good reviews. I struggled with articulation and speech because I was not confident and felt damaged by the direction given throughout the rehearsal process. Projection and articulation have always been two of my key weaknesses. My director forced me to walk, talk, and “act” in ways that instinctively seemed wrong and I thought this was a form of external acting. I felt nothing true on the inside. Every direction led me to an exaggerated performance that corrupted the audience’s suspension of disbelief. I wanted nothing to do with this form of acting.

This led me to prefer the internal acting approach. It begins when the actor adopts his character’s given circumstances through truthful imagination, impulses, and feeling. He then applies those imaginative and emotional results with his other acting instruments: his voice and his body. He begins to express those imaginary circumstances and emotions through his voice via scripted words and blocking (physical onstage movement). When the actor feels liberated, he is free to make bold acting choices and pursue his character’s goals unapologetically. Once he has achieved this, he is purely in the moment and is highly entertaining for the audience. The actor needs liberation to perform successfully.

Dead Man Walking: Rediscovering Liberation

After closing the run of *Monsieur Baptiste: The Con Man* in the fall 2013 semester, I was set to appear in *Dead Man Walking* in the spring 2014 semester. Liberation is essential for the actor. Acting is instinctual and functions as a means to

convey truthful living in imaginary circumstances. After my first graduate performance, I felt lost. However, I learned that in *Dead Man Walking*, “lost” is not necessarily a bad thing. A lost actor is at an advantage going into the rehearsal because he does not know what to expect in regards to his character discoveries, his acting choices, and the arcs of the scenes in the story. A lost actor has room for revelations and a specific type of freedom.

Dead Man Walking was my first dramatic performance in graduate school. In the beginning of the rehearsal process, I did not know much about the play or its background. *Dead Man Walking* tells the story of a racist inmate named Matthew Poncelet. He is on death row for the murder and rape of a young woman, Hope. Poncelet recruits Sister Helen Prejean, a Roman Catholic nun, as his spiritual counselor. Director Russ Vandenbroucke decided to interracially cast the show by making one of the victim’s parents African American.

In the play I portrayed Clyde Percy, a father indignant about his daughter’s rape and murder at the hands of the racist inmate. Clyde Percy is a man in his mid-thirties and is a common white-collar worker who makes a living as an accountant. Furthermore, he is a man who has been deprived of his first-born daughter, a priceless gift he will never get back. I immediately knew this character would challenge me. I asked myself, “How can I embody the pain of a heartbroken father? What is it like to have a daughter and then lose her?” At the start of this particular rehearsal process I had questions but no answers. While *Monsieur Baptiste: The Con Man* was a comedy, this dramatic role would demand emotional depth and clarity. I knew I needed to try something new in order to accomplish something new.

After reading the play, I had a particular scene that demanded emotional depth. In it, Sister Prejean comes to the Percy's house to learn more about their daughter, Hope. Clyde believes that Sister Prejean has arrived at their house to side with the Percy family after hearing their stories about Hope. However, Sister Prejean eventually reveals she is still an associate of Poncelet. This disclosure infuriates Clyde. He goes into a rant, bashing her for siding with a monster like Poncelet and not defending Hope's honor. The scene ends with Clyde kicking Sister Prejean out of his house. However, the only thing I recognized about my character was his pain and that became the only action that I played. At the start of my characterization process, I thought, "What can I do to show he is sad or angry? I should yell on this line and look angry with my eyebrows arched at my scene partners. This way the audience will believe what my character is going through." This was my first mistake.

When an actor assumes what his character should feel before developing any practical character study, the actor can create errors for himself. For instance, I knew Clyde was upset so I played the whole scene as a man who is only upset. Unknowingly, I was playing the end result. The end result is the extreme end of a situation or scene. This ultimately prevents the audience from seeing a clear outcome with an emotional or logical contrast to the beginning of the scene. Furthermore, this attempt made the scene stale and static.

Performing the Substitution Technique

This role became the very first graduate role where I attempted the substitution technique that I had initially learned as an undergraduate. Substitution allows raw and

rediscovered emotions to drive the actor. The technique helps the actor create an emotional arc within the scene, the very thing I was missing.

In an effort to give a more realistic performance, I recalled my own past experiences of pain during the scene. For example, the thought of my recent grandmother's funeral brought me to tears while reciting my lines. Soon, my natural emotions were married with the text. I was ready to reenter the rehearsal space.

“Working from the opposite” technique is perhaps one of the techniques I use the most. Perhaps Clyde is a happier man than I thought. Possibly, he is fighting to be happy and masks his sadness. Naturally, we do not like to feel upset, therefore, we will do everything in our power to find a way to avoid that particular feeling. In the beginning of Clyde's scene, I made the choice to embrace Sister Prejean's visit. I excitedly told her about the stories of Hope and her last moments with my wife and me; this led to the scene's tragic moments. Soon, I found out about Sister Prejean's allegiance with Poncelet, which baffled Clyde. I immediately thought of my grandmother's funeral and its effect on me. Immediately, this act sent me over the edge. Suddenly, I recreated that distraught state of mind and rage, using my lines as weapons against Sister Prejean. Somehow, through the pain I felt about losing my grandmother, I understood Clyde's position. He lost an irreplaceable loved one in one of the worst ways possible. At this point the bridge between Byron Coolie and Clyde Percy were connected. In the scene, I decided to play from an optimistic perspective instead of a pessimistic one. Ultimately, this gives the scene a contrasting beginning and end, thus forming an emotional arc.

Following my performance in *Dead Man Walking*, I received my graduate performance reviews. Professor Hill stated that I “showed a level of emotional depth that I did not know existed.”¹ Professor Rinda Frye said “I seemed committed and honest with a strong emotional connection.”² Professors Nefertiti Burton and Amy Steiger also found my character believable as someone struggling with the loss of a loved one. These positive reviews encouraged me to continuously use the internal acting approach in most of my following roles.

Graduate-Year 2

Hint!: A Masked Murder Mystery-Musical Approach

My next play became a different challenge. My first experience working in masked commedia came with being a part of *Hint! A Masked Murder Mystery*, directed by Erin Crites and company in the spring of 2015. The show was an adaptation of Clue, the board game. The play had no script. It was formed through pure characterization and improvisation. Unlike *Dead Man Walking*, *Hint!* played to a strength I know I have: improvisation. Before, I only had masked commedia experience in Erin Crites’s movement class, which coincidentally took place that semester. Therefore, the adaptation process was not difficult and I did not view myself as a docile actor through this development.

In this particular production, I used a different method. Fear dictated my approach in *Monsieur Baptiste: The Con Man*. My sense of freedom ruled my approach in *Dead Man Walking*. But it was the power of music that influenced my approach to my

¹ Spring 2014 Review of *Dead Man Walking*

² Spring 2014 Review of *Dead Man Walking*

character in *Hint!*. “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” by James Brown was my personal theme song for my character, Sir Leroy “Mr. Cooch” Coochington. I chose this song because it brings a mood that is overwhelmingly positive and vibrant. Mr. Cooch is an old man that is as playful as he is short-tempered. He is a flirt and has no filter. In addition, Cooch is agile and spry. I needed to feed these character descriptions into my body. Conclusively, the best way to prepare physically was through the art of music and dance. For an hour a day I would dance and walk with the rhythm of this particular song.

I listened to “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” repeatedly until the song was not only stuck in my head but in my body. I chose to listen to the song and sing it while wearing the mask. I did this so my face could adapt to the smooth texture of the mask as I sang the song. Soon, every time I slipped the mask on, the feeling of it triggered the song to play in my head. Soon, I was in character as Mr. Cooch.

In my graduate performance reviews of *Hint!: A Masked Murder Mystery*, director Erin Crites said, “I was a prime example of an actor who took risks and made bold acting choices in rehearsal.”³ Professor Burton stated that she did not recognize me as the character of Mr. Cooch, because my character’s distinctiveness was so strong that she did not believe I played that character. This performance was a result of an external acting approach, but I did not acknowledge this approach at the time. I did not fully know what the external acting approach was at this point in my graduate acting career.

Acting in Film/TV: Less is More

³ Spring 2015 Graduate Review of *Hint!: A Masked Murder Mystery*

In the spring semester of 2015, I took the Acting for Film course instructed by Daniel Hill. I was excited. My ultimate career goal is to go into film acting. This is easier said than done as I learned in the film course.

In the beginning of the course, I had little experience working in front of the camera. We were instructed to memorize a small apologetic monologue and perform it in front of the camera. Once again, I became focused on feeling the emotion in order to show how I was feeling. I forced myself to be upset. Hill gave me a note saying, “don’t get too ‘theatre-y’.” I did not know what that meant until I saw the first recording. As I watched it, I felt uncomfortable because I saw my acting flaws, which were over-exaggerated facial expressions and rushed line deliveries. However, seeing them was necessary to give a stronger performance in the next recording. Once again, I exemplified the internal acting approach by forcing myself to feel a certain way in front of the camera. Naturally, I failed to give a truthful performance when I used this approach.

As Hill advised, “you can’t let the performance take control of you, you take control of the performance.” When performing onstage, the actor must make his actions larger to enlarge his character. Theatre actions are usually over-exaggerated and over-the-top in reality, but from the audience’s perspective those actions are clear and appear natural. However, in film, the actor must reduce those exaggerations and minimize those actions to fit into the camera’s frame. In 2014, I spoke with Amir Arison, an actor at the Labyrinth Theater Company in New York. I asked him questions about acting professionally on camera. “How do you know if you are overacting or doing too much?” Amir replied, “You see what you are doing now? How you are speaking to me with simple and honest intentions, that’s what you do in front of the camera. No more than

this. You need to be relaxed and in control at all times.” That’s when I understood the fundamentals of film acting. The less an actor tries to “act” the more appealing he is on camera. Sometimes, doing nothing in front of the camera may be all that is required to give a great performance.

I was assigned a monologue to perform in front of the camera. I invited myself to take a new approach to film acting. To prepare, I lied down on my back and performed my monologue to the ceiling. Before starting, I took a few deep breaths and allowed my lungs to expand. My upper back pressed against the floor with my eyes fixed on a focal point of the ceiling. I was still, my body was not moving, my face held no tension, and I had breath control. I was relaxed and in control. After I took one more breath, I proceeded with the monologue and performed it repeatedly. Each time I performed the monologue, both my body and voice found their own familiarity and relationship with the text, thus the character. I allowed myself time to think in character, in between lines, and unconsciously married my thoughts with my text. I was not thinking about how I looked. I did not concern myself with adequacy. Hill stated, “On camera, you alone are enough for the camera. Don’t force anything.”

From this course, I learned how less is more and living in the moment can contribute to a truthful performance. When I used the internal acting approach by thinking how I should feel, I forced myself to act a certain way. Because I forced myself to act a certain way, the performance seemed fake and over-articulated. It was not until I relaxed and got in touch with my body, breath, and mind that my actions became clear. I felt relaxed and able to live in the moment. Furthermore, I felt freer externally because I was no longer in my head on camera. Nothing became forced and over-exaggerated. I

trusted my instincts and my words in the texts, believing they were enough to tell the story on camera. Ultimately, I benefited more through the external acting approach than the internal acting approach when I acted on camera.

CHAPTER 3: THESIS PREPARATION

Character Research for the Thesis Role

“Set your own goals, set them for your own approval, and those of your colleagues whom you truly respect. Every actor must demand total discipline of himself if he really means to be an actor” (Hagen 18).

As I prepared for my thesis role, I began to research the character in hopes of being ready for the upcoming read-through of *The Piano Lesson*. Prior to starting the substitution technique, I needed to find clues in the text to create a clear, personal description of Lymon. First, I started with Lymon’s lines. Next, I proceeded to the other characters’ lines and what they say about my character. Third, I looked for the character clues and descriptions given by the playwright. Fourth, I sought outside sources that held information about my character. These sources included books, online articles, and quotes of experienced thespians that know of *The Piano Lesson* and characterization.

Normally, I placed myself at an advantage when I research and make my character discoveries before the rehearsal period. I called this my intellectual period of characterization. In this phase, I sought all the information regarding my character’s background, traits, likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, goals, relationships, tactics, and expectations. I decided to get a head start before the fall semester began.

Below, I share discoveries that I made using the script of *The Piano Lesson*, texts, and observations. With all of these combined efforts, I believed I had conclusively made

the character my own. In addition, I had more information about Lymon to adopt through the use of the internal acting approach. The more I knew about my character, the stronger my performance would be, because I had the knowledge necessary to dictate my emotional and onstage thought process of Lymon.

Discoveries in the Text through Lymon's Lines

“Boy Willie say he going back, but I'm gonna stay. See what it's like up here.” (*The Piano Lesson*, Act 1 Scene 1) (Wilson 3).

This is Lymon's first line in the play. He states his intentions from the very beginning, establishing his goal: to pursue a new life. This was my first discovery of Lymon. This clue led to establishing my relationship with Lymon's character. In an effort to place myself in Lymon's shoes, I asked myself the following questions: What does Lymon want? Has Lymon ever wanted to move to a new place that seemed unfamiliar? What will he have to gain if he moved to the north? I asked questions about Lymon's character and found answers in his lines below.

My question: What does Lymon want?

LYMON: I get me a job and a little place and get set up to where I can make a woman comfortable, I might get married. (Wilson 79).

My question: Why does he want to relocate to the north?

LYMON: They (white people) treat you better up here. (Wilson 38).

My question: What is he leaving behind in the south?

LYMON: They'll never get me to go back down there. The sheriff looking for me. All because they (the southern law system) gonna try and make me work for somebody when I don't want to work for Stovall when he don't pay nothing. It ain't like that up here. (Wilson 76).

My question: What will he do if he moves to the north?

LYMON: Up here is different. I'm gonna get me a job unloading boxcars or something...I'm gonna go over there and see what kind of jobs they have. (Wilson 77).

My question: What are his vulnerabilities?

LYMON: I hate living by myself. (Wilson 79).

In this discovery process, I wanted to place myself deeply into Lymon's state of mind. Through these particular lines, I got a sense of where my character was coming from (the south), where he is (the north), and what he wants (a new life in the north). I got a definite taste of his likes (women) and dislikes (loneliness), desires (a new job) and loathing (unfair law system). From this point, I proceeded to ask myself questions, seeking any personal experiences that emotionally coincide with Lymon's. I did this in order to ensure that each scene holds a level of sincerity and authenticity. Truth has always been the end goal in all of my performances. I tried the substitution technique. I would take Lymon's experiences and compare them to my own personal experiences.

Outside of the lines, Wilson goes further to give his description of the character. In the play, Wilson notes in a stage direction, "Lymon is twenty-nine, Boy Willie's partner, he talks little, and then with straightforwardness that is often disarming." Through Wilson's description, I interpreted Lymon as someone who speaks selectively. Lymon has a number of lines that convey his common sense. For instance, as Boy Willie plots to sell the piano, Lymon offers a helpful suggestion:

All you got do to is find out who he [the interested piano buyer] is and tell him somebody else wanna buy it from you. Tell him you can't make up your mind on who to sell it to, and if he like Doaker say, he'll give you anything you want for it (Act 1, Scene 1) (Wilson 12).

According to Mary Ellen Snodgrass, the author of *August Wilson: A Literary Companion*, Lymon is someone who "projects a complex image of a Southern rube

blessed with humor, common sense, and honor” (Snodgrass 116). This confirms that Lymon is a man of common sense. He uses simple responses like the one above to contribute to Boy Willie’s plan to move the piano. This serves as specific evidence that Lymon is a key contributor to moving the story along.

Character Discoveries in the Text through Other Character’s Lines

In my next read-through, I scanned for lines that talk about Lymon. For instance, Boy Willie says:

Lymon bought that truck so he have him a place to sleep. He down there wasn’t doing no work or nothing. Sheriff looking for him. He bought that truck to keep away from the sheriff. Got Stovall looking for him too. He down there sleeping in that truck ducking and dodging both of them. I told him come on let’s go up and see my sister (Act 1 Scene 1) (Wilson 6).

Lymon has a history of being outside the law. Boy Willie’s acknowledgment of Lymon’s history led to another discovery: his fear. Lymon fears the sheriff and despises the south’s unfair judicial system. For instance, the sheriff claims Lymon and Boy Willie stole wood and the sheriff shot Lymon in the stomach. The judge forced Lymon to work for Mr. Stovall. This adds to why he does not want to return to the south. Lymon’s lines below are marked as evidence:

They ambushed us right there that road dip down and around that bend in the creek. Crawley tried to fight them. Me and Boy Willie got away but the sheriff got us. Say we was stealing wood. They shot me in my stomach... Fined me a hundred dollars. Mr. Stovall come and paid my hundred dollars and the judge say I got to work for him to pay back his hundred dollars. I told them I’d rather take my thirty days but they wouldn’t let me do that (Act 1 Scene 2) (Wilson 37).

Soon, I realized Lymon’s character arc. He is introduced as a quiet, mere sidekick of Boy Willie in the beginning. In Act 1 Scene 1, Boy Willie says, “Me and Lymon selling watermelons. We got a whole truck out there. Got a whole truckload of

watermelons. We brought them up here to sell” (Wilson 2). Throughout the play, Lymon slowly builds a perspective of his own. In Act 1 Scene 1, Lymon suggests that Boy Willie stay in the north with him, which angers Boy Willie. Lymon then gains full confidence as he tries on the “magic suit” in Act 2 Scene 1. In Act 2 Scene 3, we see the boldness of Lymon as he successfully seduces Berniece, a cold, fixed woman. From this point, Lymon is a changed man with a sure perspective, applying his personal agenda as he pursues Grace (played by Sidney Edwards), a job, and a life in the north. The script does not explain why Lymon chooses Grace over Berniece. I concluded that Lymon ultimately wants change. It was imperative that I internalize these clues in order to put my internal acting approach into practice. I found information regarding Lymon’s background and expectations. Soon, it was time to piece all of these discoveries together and place them onstage.

At this point, I was more than willing to use the internal acting approach for this role. I used the internal acting approach because I wanted to find the same success I found in my performance of *Dead Man Walking*. However, if I would have used the external acting approach, I could have used those descriptions to help me physicalize Lymon’s character. How would a man that is “straightforward and disarming” speak? How would he walk and interact with others? I would focus on the physical gestures he would make as he said the lines. The purpose of the character research was intended to understand my character’s background and his narrative in the story. However, the character information did not allow me to explore Lymon’s character. The external acting approach is not driven by character research. It is driven by the actor’s physical

discoveries and realizations about his character. The external acting approach helps the actor measure his performance in the play.

CHAPTER 4: THE REHEARSAL PERIOD

“The art of the dramatic actor is the art of internal and external action” -- Stanislavski (Blumenfeld 3).

Read-through and Implementing the Internal Acting Approach

Earlier I established that substitution in acting is replacing a character’s situation with a personal situation that evokes a similar emotion. As stated above, I have usually made my discoveries about my character before physically approaching the role. In the past, I have always thought it was best to know as much as possible about my character before playing him onstage. This process is also prior to the first read-through for rehearsal. Before the read-through, the substitution technique was my most trusted acting practice.

As soon as I was cast as Lymon I knew my end goal was to deliver a truthful, authentic performance through a sense of ease and smoothness. The first read-through was in late September 2015.

Despite my confidence and research prior to the read-through, I felt overwhelmed by the weight of the thesis role. I was concerned with which acting choices would work and which would not work. I considered Guskin’s quote in *How to Stop Acting*: “Theater has a built-in process that allows the actor to uncover the character: rehearsal” (Guskin 96). However, none of that wisdom applied here. I was doing the worst thing an actor can

do: overthink. In *Respect for Acting*, Uta Hagen writes, “Real thinking is active” (Hagen 66). Naturally, I used the text because analysis is an internal acting practice. I believed that “thinking” onstage would be harmless for my character because characters are people and people think. It worked well in *Dead Man Walking* due to my emotional state. The internal acting process requires a moment-to-moment process that patiently invites the actor to understand his character. I thought about what I was going to say and observed how I felt about it.

This was my first time working with director Baron Kelly. Although I was excited, his directing style was one I was not accustomed to. “Articulate!” “Drive it!” and “Don’t get too soft!” were phrases he would shout while we were performing our scenes. At the time, I did not know what these phrases meant. This was a new challenge for me, but I still trusted myself with the internal acting technique as time passed. I did not ask my director what the phrases meant. I wanted to discover them on my own. When internalizing a character, every moment onstage must be a thought. “The actor must explore the character piece by piece, moment by moment in rehearsal” (Guskin 97). These shouts echoing in the rehearsal room made me self-conscious about the choices I would make. For instance, in Act 2 Scene 3, Lymon has a story he tells about his previous failed attempts to find a woman. I chose to take pauses in between the lines of the monologue because in those moments I was thinking in character.

For instance, in the first read-through of Lymon’s monologue below, I took a pause that was two to three seconds long:

Mostly, they [women] be lonely (Paused) and looking for somebody to spend the night with them. Sometimes it matters who it is and sometimes it don’t matter.

That's why I'm here now. (Paused) Dolly is liable not even to recognize me if she sees me again. (Paused) I don't like women like that. I like my women to be with me in a nice and easy way. (Paused) That way we both can enjoy ourselves. The way I see it we the only two people like us in the world. We got to see how we fit with each other. A woman that don't want to take the time to do that I don't bother with. (Paused). Used to. Used to bother with all of them (Wilson 78).

In the next passage, the beat changes once again and the monologue begins to dive deeper into Lymon's past:

Then I woke up one time to this one woman and I didn't know who she was. She was the prettiest woman I have ever seen in my life. (Paused) I spent the whole night with her and I didn't even know it. I had never taken the time to look at her. I guess she kinda knew I ain't look at her. She must have known that cause she ain't wanted to see me no more. If she had wanted to see me I believe we might have got married. (Paused) How come you ain't married? It seem like to me you would be married. (Paused) I remember Avery from down home. I used to call him plain old Avery. Now he Reverend Avery. That's kinda funny about him becoming a preacher. I like when he told about how that come to him in a dream about the sheep people and them hobos. Nothing ever come to me in a dream like that . (Paused) I just dream about women. (Paused) Can't ever seem to find the right one (Wilson 78).

Instinctually, I chose to feel and empathize with Lymon's memories and what he may have felt. The pauses were also instinctual, and I personally felt emotional within those beat changes. Also, I was thinking about how the next line made me feel in the midst of my beat change. Despite my truth in these pauses, they were weakening the pace of the show. When I tried the internal acting technique for other shows, this worked. This was not the right call for this play. Professor Kelly sought a particular style of acting that I was unfamiliar with. There were obstacles I faced that the internal acting approach did not prepare me for. The pauses were only the beginning of a plethora of issues I would have as I began to characterize Lymon. I applied every internal acting technique I knew in rehearsal. I researched the character's background via the script, other texts, and sources about *The Piano Lesson* and Lymon's character. I read the script many times to

prepare for rehearsals. However, my performance in the read-through felt inauthentic. I did not own Lymon's words or his past. I understood his thoughts, but they did not translate into the authentic performance I expected to have. This was the first time I began to question my internal acting approach.

Internal Acting Approach and its Problems in the Rehearsal Space

As I read through the play, I relied solely on my instincts, knowledge of the internal acting technique, and my research. While reading the play I had trouble with a number of things. The first was my lack of ownership of the text. Actress Glenn Close addresses the subject of an actor taking his words off its page. In *How to Stop Acting*, Close states, "You have to force yourself to get through that barrier of shyness — to force the words out and speak them — so you can slowly start beyond that and into the character" (Guskin 1). In other words, no matter how uncomfortable or unsure you are in the moment, you must force yourself out of the comfort zone onstage. At this stage of my performance, it was time to get the character of Lymon into my body. It was time to put the play on its feet by moving into the rehearsal space. In the following weeks, we began to block our characters' movements onstage.

Wilson's language was my second challenge. Some of his dialogue is grammatically incorrect and repetitive. The characters speak in an irregular rhythm that I could not grasp. For instance, one of Lymon's toughest lines was, "I like when he told about how that come to him in a dream about them sheep people and them hobos" (Wilson 78). I found Lymon's lines to be incredibly odd and I could not place them in my mouth. Therefore, I paraphrased a majority of his lines. For instance, I wanted to say, "I

liked it when he told me the dream about them sheep people and them hobos.” I knew the thought or the main idea Lymon wanted to address in a particular moment. I internalized what I believed were Lymon’s thoughts. I made myself enjoy Avery’s story, which Lymon refers to in the line: “I do not know anyone that could tell a story like that. I never had a dream like that before.” My director always stated that the actor must be “word perfect.” No matter how honest the actor is in the moment, the actor must honor the playwright by performing with the exact words written in the text.

Whether an actor is using sense memory, emotional recall, substitution, or any internal acting technique, he needs patience, understanding, and concentration. Internal acting techniques force the actor to dive deep into his personal experience that has a similar emotional arc to his character. The actor needs focus without distractions. In rehearsals I did not receive that. “Drive it! Articulate! Don’t get too soft!” were the words my director used while we performed the scenes. Consequently, I was distracted. The phrases were yelled loudly and unpredictably. I could not focus on the scene at hand. I was lost, ungrounded, and unsure in every moment onstage. I was not acting. When an actor is scared, he makes the very dangerous decision of playing his actions safe. He speaks quickly through his lines, hoping to rid his character’s moments as if it is a game of hot potato. He then is unable to perform the role at his full potential. I became that actor. Little did I know, the director used those phrases to monitor the tempo. These odd phrases were used to coach the cast and sculpt the play the way the director intended.

In my private time outside rehearsal, I would spend an hour or two warming up and rehearsing Lymon’s lines to myself. I recalled the emotion of the text, cited the lines

in my head clearly, and said them to myself. Although the words did feel natural, somehow my private rehearsal performances did not translate into the rehearsal space.

In my spare time, I spent a lot of time implementing the analyses and research about Lymon. How could I convey “a complex image of a southern rube blessed with humor, common sense, and honor” as Lymon is described? I forced myself to think too much about what I said. Through the internal acting approach, I decided to find the emotional arc in the scene and then act upon my character’s scenario. For instance, how could I show those descriptions of Lymon into my performance? It is the actor’s duty to stay true to his character. I knew I wanted to stay truthful to my character research. However, this research led to a restriction that prevented me from exploring my character because I knew too much about him. I researched Lymon so much that I lacked spontaneity onstage. I was too focused on showing all that I knew about Lymon through my performance.

Despite my efforts with the internal acting approach, I ran into a plethora of issues that did not fit my director’s vision of Lymon. My character’s walk was too contemporary for he walked with too much of a bob that conveyed confidence. My line delivery was also too contemporary, because I emphasized the wrong words. My speech pattern was off, because I spoke like a man who was living in the 2010s as opposed to a man who lived in the 1930s. Because Lymon’s character was described as comical and humorous in previous analyses, I tried to make him funny. I made my eyes bigger during punchlines and smiled hard during moments where I felt a smile was needed. However, these choices took away from the moment at the time. For instance, in Act 1 Scene 1, Berniece tells Boy Willie, Doaker (played by Clyde Harper), and Lymon about her

terrified sighting of Sutter's ghost. During her explanation, Lymon asks, "Did he have on a hat?" (Wilson 14). Clearly, the question did not progress the ghost investigation, therefore, this particular moment invites hilarity. In early rehearsals, I had been saying the line with an excited intention, a wide smile, and big-eyed expression. Also, this choice addressed the description of Lymon being humorous. However, the moment was not funny and failed to address the hilarity as much as I thought. Every time I paused to think, my director would tell me "drive it!" or "pick up the pace!" This confused me, because I did not know there was a pace. This was my first realization toward making character changes.

I moved around a lot and tried comical bits in certain scenes. For example, in Act 1 Scene 1, I tried laughing at Boy Willie's jokes about Doaker in the beginning. I made big and wide faces in order to react at something surprising, like Berniece accusing Lymon of stealing the truck and watermelons. Director Baron Kelly said, "Lymon is simple. He doesn't need all the extra stuff. Keep him minimal and simple. He is very straight to the point." Thereafter, I only laughed when I found something funny and moved when I needed to move into the kitchen or to allow someone to sit down on the couch. Through this exercise, I purposely overacted to find out how simple of a man Lymon is. I decided to make Lymon a laid back guy with a simple, straightforward attitude. That became my character's foundation.

From The Internal Acting to the External Acting Approach

Through this experience I added to the simplicity of Lymon by applying the "less is more" concept. If I am speaking onstage, it is only with the intention to get my point

across. If I am not speaking, I am listening. If I am not listening, I am not acting. In the first act of *The Piano Lesson*, Lymon hardly speaks. He plays the same role as the audience does in this play. He is getting to know all of the other characters, developing his own relationships and perspectives on every situation that occurs. He is the simple outsider who is only in the north for one thing: a new life. Before, I thought there was a need to show a desire to leave the south in most of Lymon's speeches. However, the text did that for me. My director said, "The less you 'show' us the more you give us." I made no facial expressions unless I thought the situation was extreme. For instance, Berniece explaining Sutter's Ghost sighting, the argument between Boy Willie and Berniece, and realizing the "magical" effect of Wining Boy's suit were all moments that I instinctually chose to react with excitement.

Guskin states, "When I rejected analysis, I found that I was free, full, and available to be me again, and surprisingly so were my emotions—without prolonged work of emotional recall" (Guskin 39). In the early rehearsal process, I had difficulty making the words my own. The script is extremely conversational and contains intentional grammatical errors. Soon, I was ready to clearly pursue Lymon's intentions. "An actor should know his or her own language, and how it works" (Blumenfeld 43). No matter how the language is written, the actor must be comfortable with his character's words. I took extra time to say Lymon's lines. For instance, in Act 1 Scene 2, Lymon's line, "we ducked down and around the bend of the creek" became one of my toughest lines due to the distinct dialect. After constant repetition and moving around my body, I perfected the line and became comfortable saying it.

As mentioned before, my director would shout three phrases: “drive it!” “articulate!” and “don’t get too soft.” I learned that “Drive it” means to accelerate the pace of the monologue. “Articulate” means to clearly enunciate your words. “Don’t get too soft” means project your words aloud so everyone can hear you. The more I heard my director shout these phrases, the clearer my speech came to me. My director would typically shout “drive it” towards the beginning and middle of most character’s monologues. It was then that I understood the purpose of “drive it.” The direction is there to remind the company that these characters are talking fast yet deliberately. I was thinking about Lymon too much in the moment. Therefore, I could not be in the moment. The actor must think on the line. This is where my acting process began to change.

There are several types of external acting techniques. I did not know many at the time. Before preparing for our monologues in Shakespeare class, my classmates and I physicalized every word in order to get the meaning across. We developed a chart that listed three columns. The first column was the word itself, the second was a denotative word (the word’s primary meaning), and the third column was a connotative word (the word’s secondary meaning). For example, if my word is “house” my denotative word would be “home” (the word’s primary meaning) and my connotative word would be “warmth.” Right away I have two different words and meanings associated with one word. I would then contemplate what the word “house” meant through the individual meanings of home and warmth. Although “home” and “warmth” symbolize two different meanings, both words give a truthful meaning behind the word “house” via word association.

The next step is to physicalize the meaning of the word “house.” I would get down on all fours and push my back up towards the ceiling, embodying the shape of a house while saying the word “house.” Then, I would move to my next word and embody it the same way. I personified every word in my most lengthy monologues and rehearsed them that way. Sometimes before rehearsal, I would use my body to tell the story of the monologue without saying anything. For instance, miming or physicalizing the monologue is a great way to embody it. This forced me to get the words comfortably into my body. Therefore, the word and its meanings will subconsciously be in my body and speaking Lymon’s dialogue became second nature to me.

In actor, author, and acting coach William Esper’s book, *The Actor’s Art and Craft*, he writes, “You must respond to what you hear from your partner without analysis” (Esper and DiMarco 39). This change in my acting led to another flaw regarding the internal acting approach: analysis. I was too focused on presenting what I knew about Lymon’s character background and consequently distracted myself from telling the story of the play. “Knowing too much, the audience will get bored. So will I. But playing what the character is literally saying can be very stimulating, allows for twists and turns moment by moment” (Guskin 54). I cannot worry how this character is being perceived while acting. I was not playing the role. “When he (the actor) attacks his fear, he also attacks his intellect, which leaves him only with his instinct to rely on” (Guskin 110). This practice became my own variation of the external acting approach. I allowed the words from the script to literally become part of me. First, I would say the text through my body by actively physicalizing each word. Second, I would add the text. Third, I would physically and vocally rehearse the text and the movements together,

twice marrying my two acting instruments. As I performed this exercise, I found the true emotion that lay within the text. This exercise also prevented me from thinking and only allowed me to focus on my impulses. For example, in the following texts Lymon touches upon a number of subjects that causes a number of emotional beats in the following monologue. The words in parentheses indicated short movements and gestures:

I get me a job (I made a flexing gesture because job meant strength to me) and a little place (turned my body into a home by shifting to a downward dog position) and get set up to where I can make a woman comfortable I might get married (I hugged myself). Avery's nice. (I smiled, pressing my hands together) You ought to go ahead and get married. (I brushed my hands towards an imaginary scene partner as if to encourage them) You be a preacher's wife you won't have to work. (I performed push-ups to personify work) I hate living by myself. (I got on all fours and pressed my body into the floor) I didn't want to be no strain on my mama so I left home when I was sixteen. (I shrank and made myself little, folding into a ball onto the floor to represent neglect, loneliness, and youth) Everything I tried seem like it just didn't work out. (Banged my fists on the floor) Now I'm trying this (I shrugged) (Wilson 79).

I decided to use each word and say them with my own motivation. Each word fueled by imagination in one way or another. The external acting technique helped me create pure subtext because I knew exactly what the words meant. My body gave meaning to the words and I found Lymon's intentions. "If you are involved in the actions, you will feel as if you are saying the lines for the first time" (Blumenfeld 41). Surely, I said each of my lines as if I was saying them for the first time. When I applied the external acting approach, I felt open enough to allow the character's dialogue to tell the story. My mind and body were in sync with Lymon's language.

These movements were made without emotions or analyzed thoughts. These were movements I had repeatedly done as I rehearsed this monologue that eventually led to a true emotional state, correct word-for-word line memorization, and enunciation on the

italicized words. I was “articulating” the words the way Baron Kelly directed. I drove through certain parts of the monologue, telling the story without thinking and smoothly adjusting to beat changes effortlessly. I felt growth, truth, and fearlessness. I was no longer self-conscious about lines or Lymon’s character. I was acting again and readily returned to rehearsal.

Rehearsal Reactions

Due to this newfound external acting approach, I was no longer in my head. I was outside of myself and focused on my character’s body. I began wearing character boots to rehearsal instead of my own casual sneakers. This further differentiated the distance of my own traits from Lymon’s traits. For instance, the heavy character boots forced me to walk differently around the rehearsal space. The boots involuntarily powered me to position my feet further away from my body while I was sitting. When I wore my own shoes I had a “contemporary walk” and sat down like a man that lived in the 2010s instead of the 1930s. The boots strengthened my walk and my character’s body language when he listened. Due to my physical practices with the text, my inner life was filled with the inspiration. However, the rehearsal movements would create an obvious distraction to others so I used only the words as a weapon to drive my points and clearly address them to my scene partners. For example, I always felt the need to attack Boy Willie, correcting him if he stated false information about me. The following interactions with Boy Willie empowered me to use the text towards him:

BOY WILLIE: Lymon going back down there and sleep in the truck so the people don’t take the watermelons.

LYMON: Lymon nothing. You go down there and sleep in it.

BOY WILLIE: You was sleeping in it down home, nigger! I don't know nothing about sleeping in no truck.

LYMON: I aint sleeping in no truck. (Wilson 33).

Professor Kelly also emphasized using the language to its fullest capacity. This meant to pay close attention to the use of pronouns, repeated words, sounds, and the antithesis (opposing words). For instance, Lymon and Boy Willie's use of the words "you" and "I" is antithetical. Therefore, my relationship of how I feel about "you" being Boy Willie should differentiate how I feel about "I" being myself (Lymon). This created a banter that went back and forth like a tennis match. Because of this concept, Tyler and I were no longer thinking onstage. The lines were second nature to us and we were actively "doing" instead of "thinking."

As I warmed up, I continued to focus on my body by stretching and practicing Lymon's walk in character shoes. The focus of my body became more important as I practiced the external acting approach. For example, I paid close attention to how I walked, sat, ran, and stood in comparison to Lymon's actions. Although I focused on my body, I did not lose sight of my character's intentions, likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities.

As I internalized Lymon, I noticed I have always had a tendency to think ahead of my lines and what is happening. Furthermore, I had thought hard about Lymon's circumstances and misplaced myself in the momentum of the play. However, as I began to externalize his circumstances, I felt more empathy, understanding, and heard more than my own thoughts. Because of the external acting approach, I became a team player

in the production. I officially began using the external acting technique in the third week of rehearsal.

Rehearsal is also a period when the actor can make mistakes or be over the top as long as it is truthful. I understood this definition leading into the performance period. Professor Kelly, fellow cast mates, and the stage crew were pleased with the discoveries I made about Lymon. Fellow cast mates Clyde Harper and Sidney Edwards offered positive observations regarding my sudden character growth. Clyde told me, “You have been having some good nights in rehearsal. You were funny and in the moment. There was no ‘acting’ going on.” Sidney stated, “I saw that he really allowed those connections to fuel his character decisions.” Professor Kelly told me, “You are finally climbing ‘Mount Wilson’!” At that point, I knew I was performance ready.

CHAPTER 5: THE PERFORMANCE PERIOD

The Opening: Wednesday night

The production of *The Piano Lesson* took place at the UofL Playhouse. Naturally, I was nervous on the opening night. However, an actor still must trust himself in the work he has done throughout the rehearsal process. I had placed myself out of my comfort zone and made dangerous choices onstage in rehearsal. However, my energy throughout that opening day was different. On most opening days, I placed myself into an internal acting-like practice in order to live through my character's state of mind. However, there was a difference to how I approached this opening night compared to previous ones. I was more confident and secure about my character.

Leading into the evening, I felt more confident and secure in my character and my potential contributions to the opening. Because my acting practices were external, I relied on my physical movements that guided my acting choices as Lymon. I did not have to rely on a full connection with a personal experience. There were no substitution techniques taking place. Because the external acting process is an outside in approach, I could rely less on my imagination and more on my character's motivation. In comparison to other opening nights, I was relieved because my emotions were not suppressed and abused in order to recall personal experiences. The external acting approach was not founded on emotions, but only on physical movement through the text. My body found

enough raw emotion to fill the heightened language of Wilson. Therefore, I was able to marry the emotion with the text through physicality and controlled instinct.

The first scene was my toughest because it not only introduces Lymon, it introduces the world of the play itself. I wanted to establish a respectful and charming rapport with the audience. My heart raced each time Maretha (played by Demi Handley) played the piano at the start of the show. I converted the music into fuel. This anxiety is called fear. "Fear is a big subject in acting. Fear weakens the actor, undermining his trust and his instinct. The best way to deal with fear is to attack it," writes Guskin (86). I instantly knew the first scene would determine the flow of the play and my performance. I put my full trust in my body to the point where thinking with my mind was not an option. As soon as Doaker opened the door to greet Boy Willie I immediately came in with a bright smile, solely focused on Doaker and looking for a comfortable seat in the house. I arched my back and shoved my head forward, pushing my shoulders back to create the image of me hanging my head. Soon, I felt tired and in need of a seat. I did this move subtly yet unapologetically. I arched my eyebrows to create an angry face in response to what Boy Willie said about me. This frustrated me in character. At this moment, Lymon corrects Boy Willie. Lymon tells Boy Willie he refuses to take him home because Lymon wants to live in the north. Afterwards, I decided (as Lymon) to sit down to relieve my frustration with Boy Willie, relaxing into the scene. From that point, my body and its instincts guided my character throughout the rest of the play. The external acting technique helped embody the character of Lymon so well I felt as if I was a driver on cruise control.

Thursday Night: Beating Second Show Slump via External Acting Technique

In the past, I have been wary of the second show slump. A second show slump typically results from the idea that the actors become too comfortable with a show and lose the magical adrenaline of opening night. The actors settle for a “good” performance, unconsciously disallowing themselves to perform to their full potential. The idea is very similar to “sophomore slump” for athletes in their second professional season. That did not occur in this particular performance. An actor’s job with his character is never finished. I knew at this point I was not finished with Lymon, despite a successful opening. To avoid a second show slump, I took a different approach to build a stronger performance. I prepared for the second show as if it was another rehearsal.

In the past, I believed that once the actor debuts his character on opening night, he has reached his final destination. Normally, this is where I slipped into my second show slump performance with the internal acting approach. Naturally, after a great opening I would usually attempt to replicate the performance manufacturing the same “good” moments I had the previous night. For instance, in *Dead Man Walking* I cried during the scene where I confess my frustrations about the loss of my daughter. This worked opening night because I thought heavily about my grandmother’s funeral, which forced me into tears. The next night, I tried the same thing in the scene and the effect did not happen. I felt empty and this time slightly more frustrated. At that moment, I was no longer pursuing an intention; I was looking for replicated results. Because I was looking for imitated results, I was not being spontaneous and trusting myself in the moment. Thus, my performance was a shell of itself because of my internal acting practices.

The external acting approach showed me to trust my intentions and instincts and not my emotions. This is logical because a character's intentions in a linear plot never changes. I continued to rehearse my monologues and lines by miming them and adding the texts to the movements. Each time I walked, sat, talked, and ate as a southern, country man, I felt true about my character. Because my body was in sync with the flow of the play's dialogue, I did not miss a beat. I was consistent, unbothered by the audience's reactions, or other performers' thoughts of me. I was immediate and charged with the same adrenaline from opening night. The external acting approach only allowed me to focus on one thing: Lymon's intentions. For instance, in Act 1 Scene 1, Lymon explains to Doaker how his truck operates:

We broke down twice in West Virginia. The first time was just as soon as we *got* out of Sunflower. About forty miles out she broke down. We *got* it *going* and *got* all the way to West Virginia before she broke down again (Wilson 3).

As I performed this small speech, I used the repetition of the words in the passage above. The words "got" and "going" both begin with "g," which allows me to play with alliteration. I hit those "g" sounds sharply by enunciating and getting my mouth around those words. I kept track of those sounds by directly pointing at Doaker to help me hit those "g" consonants. It felt like rapping a song and maintaining a fun rhythm. This technique also helped me keep track of my lines, word for word. This passage earned a few chuckles from the audience due to the strong alliterations and my full commitment to the line delivery. I kept with this approach until the end of the show. This was the first time I had a great second performance without the feeling of a second show slump.

Friday through Sunday Performances

It is the actor's job to remain sharp and keep his acting fresh during a production run. It is very easy for anyone to get comfortable with a good job and give a lukewarm performance. He must keep his acting choices fresh, honest, and bold. However, from the most charming, enthusiastic audiences to the toughest and quietest audiences, the external acting approach kept my acting consistent. Because the internal acting approach was based on emotion and intuition, my performances were rather inconsistent. As the production continued I did not lose any momentum.

Although the production run of *The Piano Lesson* drew great responses from the audiences, I felt I had a few shortcomings in a few of the performances. I have a habit of judging myself when I am already onstage. I thought that I made Lymon too sophisticated at times. Some of my words were over articulated in the performance. One line in particular was, "Boy Willie say if you get down there too early and wake the people they get mad at you and won't buy nothing from you." In some performances, I noticed I lost the southern and uneducated tone in this line. I always believed it was the incorrect grammar and word placement in the sentence that made it tough to get my mouth around the words. Professor Nefertiti Burton later confirmed that my take on Lymon was too sophisticated at times.

Combining the "less is more" concept with the external acting approach later in my thesis process increased my understanding of Lymon. Showing less holds power. For instance, watching someone stand still holding back his tears is more effective than watching a man wail. Particularly, in my first scene, Act 1 Scene 1, I hardly moved my

feet and only turned my head towards Boy Willie and Doaker when they were talking. I would occasionally turn my head to the floor and listen to them in order to not appear stiff onstage. Once I combined these two tactics my acting professor, Carol Stewart, stated, “you had a quiet yet intense presence as that character (Lymon).”

Berta Berta: Singing Onstage

In *Stagecraft Stanislavski and External Acting Techniques*, Blumenfeld makes suggestions for different voices. He speaks about voice qualifiers, which are vocal patterns “connected to communication of subtext, as are expressive vocal sounds such as cries, sounds, and shouts” (Blumenfeld 20). Voice qualifiers give actors the option to make his delivery “hoarse, drunken, sick, whining, raspy, loud, soft-spoken, high-pitched, obsequious, or drawling, all communicate a condition or relationship” (Blumenfeld 20). This means the actor can actively create a voice based on a character’s relationship with another character. For instance, when speaking to Boy Willie, I deepened the pitch of my voice through the baseness of my chest. I spoke with him through the “direction of air” technique in Blumenfeld’s text. In the “direction of air” technique the actor manipulates the breath of air coming up through his vocal cords. He sends the air from his chest and out through his mouth for baseness. This requires the actor to use his chest, an external acting tool. This is an approach I had not used before.

Before graduate school, I was anxious about one thing in performance: singing. I was not a talented singer before or during most of graduate school. However, I did not find my singing voice until my first year, briefly, in voice class. The role of Lymon presented me with a stronger challenge than acting: singing in front of others. In addition,

I was directed to use a wooden spoon as an instrument that played a difficult role in performing “Berta Berta” with cast mates Tyler Madden (Boy Willie), Clyde Harper (Doaker), and Keith McGill (Wining Boy). Each one of us has had different training and experiences singing. However, I knew I was the least experienced of the four. Professor Kelly instructed us to feel the grim environment of Parchman Farm. Notably, “Berta Berta” is a song black prisoners sang as they worked at Parchman Farm Penitentiary in Mississippi. The audience needed to “feel” those trials as we worked. I had difficulty matching pitch and staying on beat, beating the wooden spoon against the oven.

In early rehearsals, I approached the song with a “how-can-I-avoid-a-mistake” concept. However, the more I thought about making a mistake, the more mistake-prone I became. Like my acting approach, I applied the external acting approach to my singing performance of “Berta Berta.” With each song lyric, I created a physical gesture with my body. For example, review the following passage from the play:

“Raise them up higher, let them drop on down, oh-ah,
Raise them up higher, let them drop on down, well” (Wilson 40).

During the exercise, I took the word “raise” and physically performed the act of raising something. Then I would use the word “them” and actively point as if I am pointing to a group of people. Next, I would physicalize the word “up.” I continued to do this to every single song lyric of “Berta Berta.” Soon, I had the entire song in my body and I was performance ready for the song.

Throughout the run I realized the external acting approach keeps me at ease because I am less reliant on my emotions. I learned that I not only can I apply the

external approach to my acting, but the technique is also applicable to my singing voice as well. “Berta Berta” was the first song I sang with the external acting approach. In comparison to previous methods, I found myself more satisfied with the outcome of the external acting approach. The internal acting approach places me inside of my head, using techniques such as substitution and the five senses technique. When using these techniques, I thought too hard about what I was doing while acting onstage. When I used the external acting approach I was not judging myself. By placing the words in my body, I felt more confident about what my character was saying. Because of the external acting approach, I left the stage with a feeling of accomplishment.

CHAPTER 6: AFTERMATH AND CONCLUSION

“Byron Coolie is also fairly beguiling as Lymon, adopting a more laid-back presence as Boy Willie’s partner. He delivered small punctuating moments early on, when Lymon is pure support and he handles himself very well when the character is given the focus in unexpected ways.”

– Keith Waits, Arts-Louisville Review

Reviews

After closing, I was enamored with the choice I made to change my acting approach. As I reflected on my thesis process, I was curious to know what my director thought of my performance. Soon, he confirmed his thoughts and observations in my graduate evaluations. Professor Baron Kelly stated:

“Byron had an epiphany during the rehearsal and performance period of the show. [He] was bold and fearless and began to let the character play through him. I finally began to see Byron not playing ideas but rather allowed himself to be affected by the circumstances of a partner.”⁴

Things I Could Change

After the show’s closing, I questioned if I had the right to be proud of my work. I examined if I had shortcomings during the performance period. I got an answer from Professor Laura Early. She stated:

“I enjoyed Byron’s performance. He was just fascinating to watch when he was just listening. I was a little confused by his pursuit of Berniece. It seemed to come out of nowhere, but maybe it is just seeing her in her nightgown that did it. If that

⁴ Fall 2015 Graduate Review of *The Piano Lesson*

was all it took for him to be interested and see her in a different light, I think he could have made that clearer.”⁵

After reading this, I recalled the moments of taking my time as I observed Berniece and how appealing she was in the seduction scene. However, I did recall a moment of over internalizing my thought process with the use of the substitution technique. First, I glanced at her nightgown and noticed how the lighting on it reminded me of an old flame. I remembered the details of how Berniece visually compared to my ex-girlfriend. Second, I allowed those memories to occur in my mind in the midst of the scene. Third, I noticed Berniece was looking at me right before my cue line and then I spoke, lacking intent. I regained my intention as my body remembered the blocking. In an instant, I was able to escape my habits from the internal acting approach and maintain habits from the external acting approach. Consequently, I allowed myself to be distracted in that moment, which might have led to Professor Early’s confusion about my actions in the scene.

I was told Lymon had sure stage presence. Although I portrayed the character with laid-back nature, I wondered if I truly filled the space. If not, could others tell if I did? Before, my stage presence was smaller because the internal acting approach creates a very intimate space for the actor because the technique is extremely private. The University of Louisville Playhouse has very peculiar acoustics. The cast thought we were shouting our lines but in reality, our voices sounded like standard voices in close proximity.

⁵ Fall 2015 Graduate Review of *The Piano Lesson*

In hindsight, I could have spent less time researching the character of Lymon right before rehearsal. The analysis about Lymon weakened my exploration because it narrowed my perception of what Lymon could have been. Normally, I do heavier character research with the internal acting approach. However, I found that the analysis was not needed. The external acting approach would have prevented me from over-analyzing Lymon's character and given me more time to focus on my articulation issues. I could have spent more time adjusting to August Wilson's text and getting used to the complex wordplay in the script. Because the text was one of my strongest challenges during the rehearsal process, I believe I could have spent more time preparing for it. If I had used the external acting approach in the pre-rehearsal process, I would have been more prepped for the rehearsal period.

Moving Forward: Future Roles

In following roles, I was cast to portray Robert in Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* at the University of Louisville and Kentucky Shakespeare Festival, directed by Russ Vandenbroucke and Matt Wallace, respectively. The particular writing styles of Shakespeare and Pinter force the actors to fully turn their attention to the text. More importantly, my thesis process as Lymon has served as a great preparation for these upcoming roles. I was prepared through text analysis, enhanced listening skills, and physicality. This was because of the external acting technique.

In *Betrayal*, I was required to learn a British accent, playing a 40-year-old publisher of wit, charisma, and charm. Of course, the character of Robert is far different from Lymon. In the role of Robert, I was able to attack the lines with immediacy in scene

work. Pinter's writing style demands a fast-paced, back-and-forth-line delivery between scene partners much like the back and forth conversations between Lymon and Boy Willie. In Act 2 Scene 4, Boy Willie forces the reluctant Lymon to remove the piano from the Charles' house. The two men argue over the moving logistics for the piano resulting in a comic bit because of the quick-paced back and forth dialogue. Because three of the four speaking characters in *Betrayal* interact, this opens room for plenty back and forth chitchat between the characters.

As mentioned earlier, playwrights William Shakespeare and August Wilson hold key similarities in their texts, characters, and themes. Their themes generally cover familial relationships, heritage, love, supernatural characters, balanced amounts of drama and comedy, and finally wordy, visual language. Shakespearean actor Gregory Maupin once told me, "Shakespeare character's monologues are meant to be driven. You must be ready because they are quick and smooth. They must flow together very nicely." After Gregory's advice, I instantly connected his wise words to Professor Kelly's words. Professor Kelly would shout "drive it!", "articulate!", and "don't get too soft!"

unforgivably throughout rehearsal. Professor Kelly's preparation not only helped prepare me for August Wilson productions, but it also prepared me for future productions written by Harold Pinter and William Shakespeare. This was the growth I needed in my final graduate year.

The external acting approach kept me focused on my body and my scene partners. I always thought the internal acting approach was the proper way to embody a role. However, I learned that was not true for me. In the external acting approach, I was reassured that less is more in acting. Also, I put less pressure on myself as an actor trying to show the audience what I can do. Living in the moment is more important than creating a moment onstage.

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