Adding texture through historical research: using dramaturgy to aid in the creation of Elizabeth (Bess) Borney.

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ADDING TEXTURE THROUGH HISTORICAL RESEARCH: USING DRAMATURGY TO AID IN THE CREATION OF ELIZABETH (BESS) BORNEY

By
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B.F.A., Belmont University, 2016

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, KY

May 2024
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A Thesis

Approved On

March 23rd, 2024

By the following Thesis Committee:

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Thesis Director, Nefertiti Burton

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Jerry Tolson
DEDICATION

Esse Quam Videri…

For my mother, my great aunts, and my grandfather.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Jehovah Rapha, I could not have made this three-year journey without your guidance. You constantly healed and restored me throughout these past three years of graduate school. I am here because of you Lord. Thank You.

Mother, you raised me alone. You looked to God for guidance and did your best. What a journey the two of us have been on these last 29 years. I love you. I am grateful for you.

To my family. I miss you all every single day of my life. No one on earth makes me laugh and smile more.

To my friends. Y’all helped me make it through this process. Y’all are gifts from God.

Paul and Marji, my Nashville parents. The support you both have given since we met in 2012 is immeasurable. Thank you.

Time to move forward and upward.
ABSTRACT

ADDING TEXTURE THROUGH HISTORICAL RESEARCH: USING DRAMATURGY TO AID IN THE CREATION OF ELIZABETH (BESS) BORNEY

Nyazia Brittany Martin

March 22nd, 2024

This thesis follows my work with the production *The Old Settler* by John Henry Redwood. This document explores my process as an actor, and how I decided to capitalize on an opportunity to study Dramaturgy and apply what I learned to my actors' process. In the pages of this thesis I present the pieces of my process, including my vocal and movement work based in Laban and Alexander Technique. I give personal examples of how my dive into dramaturgical work positively affected how I crafted the role of Elizabeth (Bess) Borney. I also detail the transition out of my work for Elizabeth and into my dramaturgical work crafting the role Aunt Ester in *Gem of the Ocean*. 
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis outlines my self-introduction to the study of dramaturgy. I detail this attempt to educate myself and acquire basic dramaturgical skills to aid in crafting the character of Elizabeth (Bess) Borney in John Henry Redwood’s play, *The Old Settler*. I present a full analysis of the character I portrayed. I explore how I added dramaturgy to my current process in creating a character. I offer an example of a dramaturgical packet. Finally I give detailed insight into how I used that research in the rehearsal room and during performances. I conclude with a glimpse into my continued use of dramaturgy as The Old Settler production ends and the process for August Wilson’s play Gem of the Ocean begins.

My audition process for the University of Louisville’s Theatre Arts Department’s Master of Fine Arts Program was a rigorous one. I was instructed to come to the in-person audition with two memorized monologues. I stood on the stage in the Thrust theater and performed both pieces for Dr. Janna Segal, Dr. Ari Calvano, Professor Rachel Carter, and Dr. Baron Kelly. After performing the monologues I was given another monologue and asked to spend ten minutes looking over it and come back in the room and perform it.

After that part of the process, I took an acting class with the Director of the African American Theatre Program at the time, Dr. Baron Kelly. I was asked to sit and reflect on a Playscript Interpretation class led by Dr. Russell Vandenbroucke. There were two meet
and greet sessions, one with the students of the master’s program and the faculty, and another with the students who were masters’ students but were also working towards earning the Graduate Certificate in African American Theatre here at the university. I ended the evening by attending their production of *Eurydice*, directed by Dr. Ari Calvano. Based on my personal experience, the entire day seemed devoted mainly to the physical work of an actor, with the exception of the play script class. However, I was also informed by all of the MFA students, that while the program focuses on helping its students grow as an actor, the program’s focus also lies in the completion of a thesis role and supplemental document. The role is a difficult part that you play in the third year of your graduate studies, which challenges you as an actor, and is used to showcase all of your training in the program. The thesis document is the final requirement for fulfillment of the degree. While the idea of having to write a thesis was not high on my list of joy inducing activities, I felt the growth I could potentially have as an actor in the theatre department's environment was worth devising a thesis as well. I completed the audition process and was offered a space for the fall semester. This occurred in 2018. Various obstacles made the transition to Louisville impossible then. However, I was persistent in my endeavors, and I finally began my tenure as a student in the program in the fall of 2021. In a wonderfully simple and yet detail oriented book, *Ghost Light, An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*, author Michael Mark Chemers writes this about dramaturgy: “Dramaturgy is a term that refers to both the aesthetic architecture of a piece of dramatic literature (its structure, themes, goals, and conventions) and the practical philosophy of theater practice employed to create a full performance” (Chemers 3). He goes on to break this down a step further noting, “In
practice, dramaturgy refers to the accumulated techniques that all theatrical artists
employ to do three things:

➢ Determine what the aesthetic architecture of a piece of dramatic literature
actually is (analysis)

➢ Discover everything needed to transform that inert script into a living
piece of theater (research)

➢ Apply that knowledge in a way that makes sense to a living audience at this
time in this place (practical application)” (Chemers 3)

I felt that step number one is a step I have always included in my preparation for a
play. For the purposes of creating my thesis performance I focused greatly on step
numbers two and three, research and application. My research included sourcing several
books and photographs and reading through each of the sources I found. I took detailed
notes on the information I found to be the most relevant in relation to the text of the
play. My process of application was to then use those notes as a way to bridge a gap
between ideas in my head and the creation of the physical performance of the character
Elizabeth. *The Old Settler* takes place in the 1940’s. Therefore, I wanted to gain a better
understanding of the formalities and rituals of the time period, in order to apply that
information to how my character would function in her daily life. The play is a realistic
drama. As it relates to theatre, the definition of realism I find to be the clearest and
succinct is in William Demastes’ book, *Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition*.
He writes, “Literary realism…is a model that attempts to reconstruct in an abbreviated
but not inaccurate manner the world that we inhabit” (3-4).

In the fall of 2022 the University of Louisville’s Theatre Arts department opened
our season with *Blood at the Root* by Dominique Morisseau. Dr. Janna Segal, The Director of Graduate Studies for the theatre department was the production's dramaturg. It is incredibly fortunate that the department has a faculty member with a specialization in educational and professional Dramaturgy. Hiring an outside dramaturgical professional would cost the department significant funds. Dr. Segal arrived at a rehearsal with packets she had created containing information about the play as well as historical and cultural data, statistics, and details, that we as actors might find useful in creating the production. We were given the information and encouraged to use it as the production was built. Dr. Segal also worked with the directors and the actors on different moments in the script. I read the information and used it in some of the decision making regarding the vocal choices of my character. The next two department productions were *Gloria* by Brendan Jacobs-Jenkins and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* by Rachel Sheinkin and William Finn. Neither production had a dramaturg. The final production of the season was *Fairview* by Jackie Sibblies Drury. The production was able to hire a dramaturg. The cast was assembled via Zoom call and the information presented. While I found a generous amount of the information presented helpful, I did not agree with all of the details offered. For example, the dramaturg argued that the 1959 film version of *Imitation of Life*, paled in comparison to the 1934 version. The dramaturg presented the opinion that the lens through which the racial biases of the time were presented in the earlier film, had a deeper impact and were more damaging. Simply based on my experiences as an African American woman, I disagreed. There were elements in the 1959 film that I have experienced many times myself, and elements in the 1934 version I have never found to be true for me.
personally. In a production such as *Fairview*, where one’s own interpretation of race and racial biases are crucial to the plot, the dramaturges presentation raised concerns. I came to the conclusion it might therefore be useful to learn about dramaturgy, so I might be able to do this specific kind of research myself, for any roles I might play in the future. Being able to do the research myself allowed for me to not be reliant on any one person’s opinions. The incentive to study dramaturgy and use it, presented itself when *The Old Settler* by John Henry Redwood was announced as the first show of the 2023-2024 season.

My first year in the MFA program, multiple students in their third year gave me advice on approaching thesis work. The main thing they advised me to do was find a director. I was told it was much easier to get a play into the season lineup if you had a director who was onboard with the idea, if not equally as passionate about the play as you. I started thinking about what characters I have always wanted to play, and what types of stories I am drawn to. As my second year of the program began to come to a close, I began to shift my focus to my thesis project. What show could I see myself writing about? What could I write about for chapters and chapters and not bore myself to tears, let alone a committee, and the College of Arts and Sciences? I began to think about my other passions besides theatre. I have enjoyed studying history since I was a little girl. I found it fascinating to figure out how we have gotten to the point we are currently at by examining the details of our past. I love seeing how the past affects our actions and lives today. I remembered Dr. Segal speaking to the cast of *Blood at the Root* about the research she had done to find the information she had brought us. And finally it came to me that there might be a way to combine my two loves, theatre and
history. Dramaturgy! I could use Dramaturgy as a frame for my thesis work.

I remembered my love of the play *The Old Settler*, and specifically the character Elizabeth, and decided it would be the play I would work to get included in the season, so I could ultimately use it as my thesis show. I began to campaign. I spoke to other students who would be voting on the season about the play. I chatted with different faculty members who I felt would understand my desire to portray Elizabeth. I contacted Professor Booker and asked to schedule a one-on-one meeting with her. I wanted time to explain my thoughts on how our program producing the play would benefit not just me but the department as well. I wanted an opportunity to explain my deep passion for the play. I also wanted to plead my case for her to direct the show. She listened to my thoughts, asked questions, and told me to let her think about it. While she thought about it, I continued my side of working to get the play in the season. I filled out the department form to officially put forth the play as a candidate for the upcoming season. At the next department faculty and staff meeting, which I attended as the graduate student liaison, when the conversation shifted to the upcoming season, I pleaded my personal case for the show. When the question was raised about a director for the show Professor Booker announced she would direct. Not long after, the season was announced, and *The Old Settler* was named the first show of the 2023/2024 season. Auditions were held, and I was offered the role of Elizabeth (Bess) Barney in The Old Settler.

I decided to focus on dramaturgy and the use of my dramaturgical findings to help aid in the creation of my role, as the basis for my written thesis. The production did hire a dramaturg for *The Old Settler*. However, we did not get any information from our
dramaturg until well into the production. Not knowing from the beginning of the production process whether we would be able to afford a dramaturg, doing the research myself long before the rehearsal period began saved my process.

In his book, Chemers notes that many dramaturgs started out in other artistic positions such as actors, directors, designers, etc. that were somehow sucked into dramaturgy (6-7). Chemers speaks pointedly on this phenomenon of artists flocking to dramaturgy. He explains to the reader that despite the idea that many do not know about dramaturgy until they come into contact with someone engaged in the artform, quickly one is able to see how crucial the work is in creating a production (6). But what do dramaturgs do? Professional dramaturgs work at “...the application of critical philosophy and aesthetics to dramatic production, to be able to comparatively analyze texts in multiple languages and from multiple historical periods, and to be able to develop strategies for putting even ancient scripts into contexts that make them relevant and immediate for modern audiences” (Chemer 10). I found that in researching what I thought was just the history of a specific time period, what I was actually doing was learning about the philosophies and aesthetics of the time period, in order to develop my actors' process, to create a full character for my audience. Chemer also quotes another work, a short story entitled, The Garden of Forking Paths by Jorge Luis Borge. Chemer notes that Borge has a fantastic explanation of dramaturgy and its importance.

On individual projects, the dramaturg can be the artist who functions in a multifaceted manner helping the director and other artists to develop and shape the sociological, textual, directing, acting, and design values… Alternately, a dramaturg may appear to overlap with other artists in their duties, especially in interpreting the
play and shaping the production, so that an apparent redundancy may be manifested. But it is a redundancy that often leads to increased creativity (Chemers 8) Borge’s words on Dramaturgy rang true for me in my personal discovery of dramaturgy for the purpose of completing the role of Elizabeth as well this document. But more so, it pulls into focus how work I set out to do for my own personal gain ended up functioning as a tool for collaborating with others in the production to make it even stronger.

John Henry Redwood’s play *The Old Settler* is in my estimation, a family drama. It is a love story between two sisters. The plot unfolds as the lives of the sisters are disrupted. When a young man traveling from the south moves to Harlem looking for his long-lost girlfriend and rents a room in their apartment, tensions erupt. Buried feelings move to the surface and seemingly long-forgotten desires bubble to the surface. In my opinion the characters are written with depth and feeling, which I suspect may be a result of playwright Redwood’s childhood spent with the women in his family who raised him (Kaufman). Four characters make up the cast. Elizabeth (Bess) Borny and Quilly McGrath are the sisters, and the play takes place in Elizabeth’s apartment. Husband Witherspoon is the young man who rents a room in the apartment. Lou Bessie Preston, (also known as Charmaine), is the young woman Husband believes himself to be in love with at the start of the play.

I first encountered this piece of art, when I watched the Public Broadcasting Service’s adaptation of the play *The Old Settler* in middle school. The filmed version starred Phylicia Rashad and Debbie Allen, who also directed (Perry). More information on this version can be found in the *Appendix* under the section *The Old Settler PBS Version*. I became obsessed with the story. As a young girl my favorite television show
was The Cosby Show. I emotionally connected with the character Clair, who was played by Ms. Rashad. I began following her career. When I found The Old Settler film it was another piece of her work, I felt connected to. The relationships felt real. The emotions on display were heavy and thought provoking. I could not name the connection I felt to the character of Elizabeth as a sixth grader. However, now I understand it was a fear of loneliness. During my childhood, I was witness to several relationships that did not last in my family. I saw the breakdown of the familial unit time and time again, and I consequently developed a deep fear of history repeating itself. I saw a similar future to Elizabeth’s as a possibility in my life. It was torturous, and simultaneously grounding. I could not get enough of this film. I eventually bought the script on eBay and read it. Over the years I have returned to the film and to the script time and time again because of how much it touches me emotionally. It has never been far from my thoughts.

When encouraged by professors to submit a play proposal for consideration into the season selection- the process through which the University’s Theatre department chooses its upcoming season, I submitted The Old Settler for consideration. In 2022, more than a decade after first reading the play, I was able to introduce one of my favorite plays to a new group of people. When it was chosen and I was offered the leading role of Elizabeth, I was elated.

What I did not want was to mimic Ms. Rashad's performance of Elizabeth. The core of this thesis examines how the additional dramaturgical research combined with my typical process, led to a deeper understanding of the historical aspects of the piece, essentially enabling me to construct my own version of Elizabeth rooted in realism.
CHAPTER I: CHARACTER ANALYSIS

CREATING A "PHOTOGRAPH" OF ELIZABETH

Before I could become Elizabeth, I had to figure out who she was. I asked myself two questions as I began my character analysis work. I asked, “who am I?” and “Who is she?” I asked myself those two questions because I wanted to make sure I understood both the core similarities and differences between the character and myself—and not just the obvious ones. I wanted to figure out how to take what was given to me by the playwright (the Given Circumstances) and use the historical information I gathered to create a fully rounded, three-dimensional character. I wanted to be able to create and see a picture of Elizabeth in my head.

In the opening pages of the script the playwright lists the cast in order of appearance. The first to be named is Elizabeth. The script says, “ELIZABETH (Bess) BORNY-Black woman, 55-years-old” (Redwood, 6). In that first description of the character I noted we had something in common and something that made us different. I am also a Black woman. However, I am not 55 years old. I turned 29 years old during the production. So while there was something that connected me immediately to Elizabeth- our race- there was also a great divide that I had to figure out how to navigate: playing a character with a 25+ year age gap between us. As I read through the script it became apparent to me that although on the surface there were not many
things that I shared in common with Elizabeth besides our race, there were aspects of our personalities that had some significant parallels. We are both caregivers. We both support others, and we share similar hopes and dreams. Throughout the play Elizabeth takes care of all the other characters. Whether or not they consistently treat her with kindness and respect, she still finds ways to help them. This caregiving reveals itself in many different forms. She argues with her sister constantly, but at the same time, she has essentially taken care of Quilly their entire lives. Elizabeth reveals in the play that when her family was still in Halifax, North Carolina she left and went north to New York to work and provide for her family by sending money home to them. Eventually when their mother died, she returned home to get her sister, and then she brought her back to New York with her. She then continues supporting her sister by caring for her financially until she is able to work. She helped her sister get a job as well. After her sister left her husband and was alone, she moved back into her apartment (Redwood, 56). Elizabeth is a constant support system for her sister. Elizabeth takes care of Husband as well. She explains why engaging with Lou Bessie is not healthy for him. At the end of the play despite it hurting her, she does not accept Husband’s proposal to leave for Frogmore with him and tells him that the two of them being together is not what is best for him (Redwood, 64-65). She is always putting others ahead of herself and her own dreams and desires. In a way she even helps Lou Bessie. She does not let Lou Bessie pretend to be something other than what and who she truly is. Elizabeth calls Lou Bessie out on her egregious behavior (Redwood, 61). She forces Lou Bessie to be truthful about her devious motives. Elizabeth and I are both incredibly passionate about God. Some of the moments in the script where she is the happiest is when she is
discussing her love of God and reminiscing about her life in the church. I grew up in
the church and danced for God for many years of my life. Finally, the kindred hopes
and dreams. She clearly has the desire to be in a loving partner relationship. She wants
a significant other to share her life with. Finding these three aspects of her personality
and realizing that we share these core parts of ourselves was a moment for me as an
actor to start building my approach to playing Elizabeth.

The first time we meet Elizabeth she is wearing all black. She is coming from a
funeral, and she has clearly chosen to blend in. Historically black or dark colors have
been a sign of mourning and are worn to funerals. “As Westerners, we might wear
white to weddings and black to funerals. These examples show that colours and
affective meanings are associated in natural languages and cultural traditions
(Jonauskaite 1). The script says, “She is dressed in black with a black hat and veil. She
is carrying a black pocketbook, black gloves and… (Redwood 7). Almost immediately
after entering the stage, Elizabeth exits to her bedroom and returns having changed into
her house dress. In the first nine pages of the script we are exposed to a woman who
seemingly does not make a spectacle of herself as compared to her sister. While Quilly
is dressed in white with gold embellishments, Elizabeth is wearing black from head to
toe the first moment we meet her. And when she changes, she changes into something
modest and simple. So we have a female-presenting and at least outwardly, modest
woman. To some degree the character Elizabeth must also look her age, as one of the
other characters comments that after seeing Elizabeth and Husband together the age
gap was so clear that friends of hers called Elizabeth an Old Old Settler. So appearance
wise, Elizabeth looks like she is in her fifties. One might be able to deduce that
Elizabeth is at least healthy for her age. At the top of the play she enters and goes right to the radio to shut it off, and after a minute or so her sister, Quilly, arrives out of breath and complaining about the stairs they have just had to climb. Beyond, race and age however, the script does not give any other physical descriptions of Bess such as, slim, overweight, muscular, lean. So I did not feel I had to work physically (exercise/diets/etc.) to get myself to look a certain way.

Analyzing Elizabeth’s personality goes a long way into seeing how and why she responds to the other characters in the play, and how she relates to me. The duel and overlapping relationships are what create the main conflict in the story. The main relationship is the sisterly relationship between Elizabeth and Quilly. There is the friendly turned romantic relationship between Elizabeth and Husband, which ultimately causes major conflict between Elizabeth and Quilly and changes their dynamic. There is the relationship between Husband and Quilly, full of tension as a result of Elizabeth and Husband’s relationship. Husband and Lou Bessie share a relationship. And finally there is relationship that exists between Elizabeth and Lou Bessie. Elizabeth lives at the intersection of all of the relationships.

An example of the relationship dynamics at play occurs when Quilly makes Elizabeth confront a truth. In the midst of a disagreement over Elizabeth’s relationship with Husband, Quilly asks Elizabeth what she is going to do when Husband expects his carnal needs and desires to be fulfilled? (Redwood 55-56). Quilly continues pressing her sister by reminding her that she is too old to have any children. This idea of age and its relation to marriage and procreation, resonated with me. The idea of not being married or marrying later and subsequently having children later than I originally
planned, or worse- not having children at all, is a very real point of anxiety and fear for me. In this way it made it easier for me as an actor to tap into the emotions Elizabeth is feeling as she goes through this journey. Thematically this idea of love and age stood out to me, because this was one of the points where, despite our age difference, I really felt like I understood Elizabeth's desperation for her relationship with Husband to be rooted in truth and for it to have real substance.

Elizabeth is seemingly diligent and conscientious in her everyday life, which often makes her seem uptight, especially in comparison to other characters. She goes to church, works and comes home. At the very top of the play we get a glimpse into her thought processes and the dynamic it has created with her sister. Quilly enters at top and scene and the first thing Elizabeth mentions is that her sister has forgotten again to turn off the radio. Quilly responds that she has done this on purpose as a way to potentially ward off danger. Elizabeth quickly responds that things are different, and she must pay the electric bill, pointedly naming her sister's actions as unrealistic and without regard (Redwood, 8). Elizabeth’s general attitude towards life seems to be to approach situations and people with kindness and do what is morally right. Elizabeth is kindhearted and generous. She is affectionate and incredibly empathetic. These qualities reveal themselves in her everyday actions as well as how she treats the people in her life. She is sweet to each of the characters, even Lou Bessie, right up until the moment where she finally loses her temper with her. When Husband suggests he will continue to call Lou Bessie by her given name, Elizabeth replies, “Well, I think if a person feels that they need to change their name, then we should respect what they want to call themselves” (Redwood, 28). Elizabeth in that moment treats Lou Bessie
with more kindness than members of her family have according to Husband’s report on her family's response to Lou Bessie’s pregnancy out of wedlock (Redwood, 40). Elizabeth is nothing if not a consummate protector of her sister, even in the moments when she is frustrated with her. This consistency with which Elizabeth looks after her sisters wellbeing, makes Quilly’s previous betrayal (which occurred before the start of the play) such a devastating blow. It also leads to the breaking down of their communication and their close relationship. At the same time, Elizabeth understands the importance of family and no matter how often she squabbles with Quilly she still maintains responsibility for her. Elizabeth follows the rules. She has done “the right " thing her entire life. She takes care of her family; she takes care of her sister. She works and provides not only for herself but for others. Her own desires and dreams seem always to be placed on the back burner. Then along comes Husband. And for a moment we see Elizabeth start to dream again and see the possibility of the life she always wanted, but that she either gave up, lost sight of, or was taken from her. No matter the state of their relationship, be it friendly or romantic, Elizabeth takes care of Husband. She gives him life advice; she gives him advice on women. She educates him on life. She does not let him take the easy way out of situations. She shows him the error of his ways or explains how to look at all sides of the situation. At the end of the play Elizabeth’s generosity takes center stage as she pushes Husband to find his own way. She returns his engagement ring as she knows that although marrying him will bring them happiness in the present, and perhaps even for a little while in the future, ultimately it is not what is best for him. She knows there is a chance her heart will be broken in the future, but she knows with certainty that the possibility of his suffering is
even greater. So she breaks off the relationship.

One of the most interesting things about Elizabeth is that she really does understand what is going on around her. At the end of Act I Scene iii, Elizabeth asks husband where Lou Bessie sleeps, when she is not working. Elizabeth is telling Husband that Lou Bessie is most likely sleeping or co-habitating with someone else (Redwood 26-27). She is not naive but rather incessantly hopeful. She knows from the beginning that this romance with Husband is a long shot. This is apparent in one of her arguments with Quilly on the subject matter. Quilly questions her sister about her and Husband’s eventual sex life as well as the possibility of Husband wanting an heir despite Elizabeth’s age (Redwood 55-56). With both women knowing Elizabeth will not be able to provide one, Elizabeth is unable to respond with anything except telling her sister how mean and cruel she is (Redwood 56). She is not actually able to dispute Quilly’s insinuations. Even though Quilly’s delivery is rough and even nasty at times, Elizabeth also knows that her sister is correct in her assessment of the situation that has developed between Elizabeth, Husband, and Lou Bessie. Elizabeth knows the type of woman Lou Bessie is from the moment they first meet. Elizabeth immediately picks up on Lou Bessie’s nucleus being money. Lou Bessie does not care that Husband would be making said money by going to war. She sees only potential self-profit. Elizabeth eventually calls her out on it, noting that in her quest to better herself she is putting herself above everyone else (Redwood 61). Perplexingly enough, although Elizabeth is able to read Lou Bessie immediately and she knows her feelings about Husband are unstable, she appears to have a block when understanding her sister. Elizabeth genuinely feels that Quilly goes beyond normal sisterly bickering, attacks her, and is
unnecessarily cruel to her. Whether it's stealing her boyfriend or commenting on her sex life- or lack thereof, Quilly always has something negative to say to Elizabeth. It is not until close to the end of the play when Quilly reveals the truth about her marriage and with sincerity apologizes to her sister, that Elizabeth is able to see exactly why Quilly acts the way she does. This is one of the biggest moments of understanding that occurs in the play. Up until now, every single time the two sisters argue there is an emotional wall keeping Elizabeth from truly understanding the root of Quilly’s fears, and how those fears have manifested into actions that ultimately hurt Elizabeth. Finally we get to a place of complete understanding that the intention was not ever to hurt Elizabeth, but to save herself from her worst fears, loneliness and abandonment, from coming true. Elizabeth upon this discovery has a beautiful moment that showcases her disposition, as she understands her sister fully for possibly the first time. In the last scene of the play, Elizabeth tells Quilly, who at the moment is not speaking with her, that she will continue to love her despite their circumstances. She also makes sure to let her sister know that despite the fact that she is choosing to leave and live with Husband, her home is always by default, Quilly’s home as well (Redwood, 63). However, for once she still decides to choose herself and her potential happiness. Further information on the relationship between Elizabeth and Husband and the thematic elements of love and age can be found in Appendix section Themes.

The Elizabeth the audience meets at the top of the play is a lonely woman. She jokes and laughs with her sister but there is a deep sadness. The moment Husband enters her environment a spark of hope is ignited, and it becomes clear that a long-buried desire has returned to the forefront of her heart and mind. Finding love, and
genuine companionship reveals itself to be something of importance to Elizabeth. It takes the events of the play unfolding, for Elizabeth to realize she has this with her sister. Eventually through gaining and losing her relationship with Husband she figures this out.

At the start of the play we meet a very specific Elizabeth with very particular morals and values. Elizabeth is hardworking and humble. She is self-restrained. She is kind, she is respectful, and patient. In *The Anatomy of Patriotism*, Adison Beals writes, “Nineteen forties America largely equated gender with performance… women upheld standards of chastity and sexual respectability” (6). Elizabeth engages with the moral standards of the times. Over the arc of the play it seems some of these morals and values start to unravel. She stops going to church, she starts wearing tight fitting clothing, and going out at night. The slackening of her morals and values become the tactics she uses in her attempt to reach her goal of securing a future with Husband. Even her drinking habits reveal a change as she starts to drink alcohol. For a period of time Elizabeth sees there is a great possibility of getting what she wants, and her values take a dive as her relationship with Husband continues to grow. It appears that the more her values shift into alignment with those of Lou Bessie the closer she comes to getting what she wants: a romantic partner, and family. Elizabeth shows great persistence. She steamrolls ahead, investing in this new relationship, changing herself, changing her everyday activities. However, this does not last. Eventually her persistence lessens, and she stops pursuing the relationship with Husband. This happens the moment she realizes that this goal is riddled with potential emotional and mental disaster. Husband does not show up on time to pick Elizabeth up for their train
back down south. When he finally arrives the next morning, he admits he ran into Lou Bessie and lost track of time. “Bess, I swear on my mama’s grave I didn’t mean to cause us to miss that train. I was on my way to that barber shop like you told me, but then I ran into Lou Bessie... Then... I kind of ... stayed for a while... and time kind of ...

“(Redwood 64). In that moment it becomes clear that Lou Bessie may always be a threat to their relationship. At the end of the day no matter what Elizabeth’s desires are, her integrity always returns to the forefront of her being and her actions reveal that. Her ethics always influence her actions, and ultimately those values keep her from getting what she wants in physical form. One might argue that following her values gives her peace in knowing $she is doing the right thing. However, in the final moments of the play as she cries in her sister's arms after sending her lover away, is there peace, or is there just settling back into the formalities of her life? I choose to believe she took comfort in her sister’s presence and that their relationship moving forward would be stronger. Quilly had finally apologized and allowed space for growth between them, and Elizabeth had chosen herself for once. Both moments allowed for peace of mind for Elizabeth.

When I first read the play, I thought Quilly might fit the description of antagonist. From the first time Quilly appears in the play and speaks to her sister you see that although their conversations and bickering can be likened to that of typical sisterly behavior there is something deeper between them that is going unsaid. This continues for most of the play. Every moment that Elizabeth gets something that she wants, Quilly speaks out against it. She seems mean and has a jealous deposition. However, after reading the play several more times the conclusion I reached was that there are
two main antagonists of the piece. The character Lou Bessie and what she represents, as well as Quilly. Not only is Lou Bessie the antithesis of Elizabeth, but she is also the direct parallel of a younger Quilly. She is a repetition of Elizabeth's earlier relationship with her younger sister pre-play. Quilly’s treatment of Elizabeth, although it often comes off as sisterly jabbing, is in actuality competitive and cruel behavior aimed at Elizabeth.

Lou Bessie shows up, this young woman who has the entire world at her fingertips, and she is the opposite of Elizabeth in every way. She is young, she dresses in the fashion of the times, she spends her time partying, she has had a child. And she seems to easily attract and be able to keep a man’s attention. Elizabeth wants a partner. Specifically, she wants Husband as her partner. When Husband first arrives in Harlem, he is there looking for Lou Bessie. He wants to convince her to return home to Frogmore with him. He is not there to start any kind of relationship with Elizabeth. However, as it becomes clear that his principles and ideals do not align with Lou Bessie’s but rather those of Elizabeth, he quickly becomes entangled in a relationship with her. Lou Bessie fights this. She wants Husband for her own reasons. She has another man in Harlem that she has a relationship with, but she also wants Husband. Both women cannot have this man and thus another conflict becomes the center of the story. There is a scene in which Elizabeth explains to Lou Bessie that she understands the type of person that she is. She knows that Lou Bessie is just using Husband for his money, whereas Elizabeth wants to create a true family with him.

“You don’t want Husband; you want his money. But it ain’t just that you’ll take his money, you’ll suck all the life out of him... use him up. Then you’ll leave him flat
and empty. See, I know that you knew Husband was up here looking for you. You only came around when you heard that Husband had come into a piece of money. And that was the first thing that came out of your mouth... what you was going to do with his money” (Redwood, 61).

Lou Bessie counters with an attack, telling Elizabeth she can take Husband any time she wants. These two women are playing opposite of each other from the start. In the research part of my process, learning about the morals and values of the time period was crucial in attempting to understanding why these two women behave in the way they do. What were the societal expectations placed upon women in Harlem in the 1940’s? Figuring out these things became the start of piecing together the core of Elizabeth’s personality. This was the key to diving deeper into the information given on the pages of the script.
CHAPTER II: THE PROCESS

FINDING ELIZABETH BORNEY: MIND, BODY, SPIRIT

My acting process is the planned course of action I take to transform myself into a character. The process is made up of vocal, movement, and acting based methodologies. For each character I play, as I work through the steps of my process as an actor, I pay close attention to the methods of creation that work best for me. The intention being that in understanding what tools work best for me, I can continue to maintain a process that will make me a stronger actor, and lead to more work in my profession. In this chapter I lay out the various acting methods and techniques that make up my personal acting process. I also explain how uniting my process with my dramaturgical findings facilitated a deeper understanding of my character’s circumstances. It also ultimately led me to consider the addition of dramaturgical work as a permanent fixture in my process.

While I have been cast in a few roles in productions that fall outside of the category of realism, the majority of my career has placed me in roles in plays that are under the classification of realism. As previously stated, realism in this document is defined as, “a model that attempts to reconstruct in an abbreviated but not inaccurate manner the world that we inhabit” (Demastes 3-4). As a result the
process I have molded and created for myself is a representation of what I have found necessary to include in my process because of my work to date. This is not to suggest that this process would not work for any other style of theatre. Only that my process as an actor has developed as a result of the type of theatre that I am drawn to as well as what others see me in, and ultimately cast me in. *The Old Settler* is a realistic drama. I approached working on Elizabeth with the process I describe below.
PLAYSCRIPT INTERPRETATION

When dealing in Realism I believe there is no better place to begin than the script. As an actor when I am cast in a show that script becomes my best friend for the duration of the show. The script is the roadmap of a production. Many things come from the text itself. I always feel lucky when things are revealed within the pages of the script, if not blatantly described in the first pages, like the set design. Many playwrights will often give insight into the types of costumes that would be appropriate for the characters, some even give vivid illustrations of those costumes, as John Henry Redwood, the playwright of *The Old Settler* does in the opening stage directions at the top of the play. There may even be clues about music and lighting. The characters are absolutely illustrated in the pages of the play, as what they do or not do, what they say or do not say, what they wear, tell you the story of who this person is. Now this is not always true. Some playwrights find it more prudent to let the production team and artists find out everything about the play without any descriptions other than the absolute basics, such as time, location and characters. Therefore as an actor it is my first responsibility to familiarize myself with the script inside and out. It is my task to put to use what is given to me by the playwright, and then to discover what is not written on the page but is still part of the story being told. The way I categorize my findings is by answering Uta Hagen’s questions.
Uta Hagen was an acting teacher well known for developing her own acting technique built on her foundation of Stanislavsky’s Acting Method. Konstantin Stanislavsky, often referred to as the father of modern acting, is most known for his contribution to the acting art form, with a system he developed that focuses on three distinct parts of an actor’s training, the preparation, the building of character and the creation of a role. Stanislavsky’s acting method is a series of training techniques designed to help the actors create believable characters and develop natural performances. (Hagen) Hagen, eventually a student of Stanislavsky, was born in Germany but rose to fame in America playing many iconic roles, including but not limited to, Joan of Arc in Saint Joan, Blanche DuBois in A Streetcar Named Desire, Desdemona in Othello, and Martha in Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? In the mid 1940’s she began teaching her own techniques. Hagen’s acting techniques encourage actors to avoid over-intellectualizing their processes and instead root themselves in rigorous observation of daily life. (Hagen) During my undergraduate training I was exposed to two of her actor exercises. “The Basic Object Exercise” sometimes called “two minutes of daily life,” requires the actor to replicate activities from their own daily routine in specific detail (think making breakfast or getting ready to go out). The goal of this exercise is to increase the actor’s awareness of their un-observed behavior. Three Entrances is the other exercise. Starting off-stage, the actor enters the environment of the scene. The actor's performance should answer three questions: What did I just do? What am I going to do? What is the first thing I want?” (Backstage) Once my undergraduate class had mastered those exercises, our professor Bill Feheely, moved on to what Uta Hagen is perhaps most known for among actors: her nine questions,
“These questions help actors develop the granular details of their character’s backstory.

The questions come from Hagen’s first book, *Respect for Acting*. The questions are as follows:

1. **Who am I?** This question’s answer includes all relevant details from name and age to physical traits, education, and beliefs.

2. **What time is it?** Depending on the scene, the most relevant measure of time can be the era, the season, the day, or even the specific minute.

3. **Where am I?** This answer covers the country, town, neighborhood, room, or even the specific part of the room.

4. **What surrounds me?** Characters can be surrounded by anything from weather to furnishings, landscape, or people.

5. **What are the given circumstances?** Given circumstances include what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen to a character.

6. **What are my relationships?** Relationships can be with other characters in the play, inanimate objects, or even recent events.

7. **What do I want?** Wants can be what the character desires in the moment, or in the overall course of the play.

8. **What is in my way?** This is the actor’s chance to understand the obstacles the character must react to and overcome.

9. **What do I do to get what I want?** In Hagen’s teaching, “do” means physical action” (Hagen).

I answer each question for every character I am cast as. Completing Uta Hagen’s Nine questions consistently yields results that reveal answers about my character. I answer all the questions based on information taken directly from the text. However, also having dramaturgical work, served as a way to eventually deepen all those answers, by giving them roots founded in historical facts. I have the emotional core of my character. I move to the vocal and physical parts.
VOICE

My first year of graduate school I was introduced to the Alexander Technique. “The basic principles of the Alexander Technique can help you become aware of and eliminate habitual patterns that hinder freedom of voice” (McEvenue). What the technique helped me realize is that your voice is connected to your emotions. Therefore, without proper knowledge of how to use your voice, your voice can hinder you as an actor just as much as it can help you. I have found when studying the Alexander Technique, the most important thing is to simply be aware of my habitual tendencies and not judge myself. The moment I judge myself, I tend to slow my breathing, and sometimes stop all together. I also contract many of the muscles in my body. Especially the ones in my neck, shoulders, and chest. All three we think of as primary areas for breath support and therefore vocal support. What Alexander Technique has shown me through the process of finding Elizabeth’s voice is that the breath runs through the entire body. In finding my healthiest alignment, I was able to see that my breath returns naturally without me having to force it and find access to a free path to all my emotions. Furthermore I was able to connect with those emotions as I spoke, sang, or just breathed. Tapping into how I breathe as myself has helped me tremendously. Once I find a neutral state for my breath and my voice, I am then able to make choices that are not just what I do normally, but specific choices my character would make. The length of a breath might change, or how deeply I breathe
under certain emotional circumstances might change.

All of the work I did in researching to ensure I understood the context of the text of the piece also became extremely helpful as I approached using the Alexander technique. In Voice II, the class focused on textual patterns and how that affects the voice. We worked on understanding a piece of text based on several factors, like where the thoughts end in a line, or how the imagery a line of text can conjure up in the mind. Because I made sure to understand what everything in the script meant, as I approached this part of voice work, I felt although I could paint a picture vocal of who Elizabeth is when I spoke. I think there is a poetry to how everyone speaks, no matter how they sound. The dramaturgy work along with the voice work, helped me find that. As I worked on finding Elizabeth’s voice, I started with finding my primary control, and all the space I could throughout my body. I wanted to find a vulnerable physical state that allowed for me to use what I discovered during my research to find Elizabeth’s natural state. Once I allowed myself to find my breath, I started just speaking Elizabeth’s text over and over. I combined my knowledge of the given circumstances of the play, with my supported breath and the emotions and the range of Elizabeth’s voice began to reveal itself. There were similarities and differences in our vocal patterns. I discovered we both breathe deeply, often pause and speak quietly in moments of deliberation and contemplation. This was particularly clear during the scene when Elizabeth and Husband reminisce about the south and the church (Redwood, 29-30). I found that Elizabeth often speaks faster than I do. Especially in moments of great distress or anger. This occurred several times during the play, most often when Elizabeth and Quilly were at odds.
I first encountered Laban while studying for my Bachelor of Fine Arts in performance in my undergraduate program. “Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is a method and language for describing, visualizing, interpreting and documenting all varieties of human movement. Also known as Laban/ Bartenieff Movement Analysis, the method uses a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating contributions from anatomy, kinesiology, psychology, Labanotation, and many other fields. It is one type of Laban Movement Study, originating from the work of Rudolf Laban, developed and extended by Lisa Ullmann, Irmgard Bartenieff, Warren Lamb and many others. (Laban Institute) I first heard the term Laban in Movement class at Belmont University. My professor was Brent Maddox. Brent studied with Tina Garland, a “certified Movement Analyst of Laban Movement.” (Uflarts) I was introduced to Laban through the “Efforts”. According to the Laban Efforts in Action website, “An Effort can be understood as a way of identifying the ‘quality’ of our movement during action: the sensation or feel that our movement has both for ourselves and others. During action there are eight types of Effort that emerge.

Laban called them the ‘Efforts of Action Drive’. In other words, they are the key types of Effort that are expressed when we are motivated to act. Laban named these Effort qualities: Floating, Dabbing, Wringing, Thrusting, Pressing, Flicking, Slashing,
and Gliding. (Laban) At first these ideas seemed very ethereal. However, as I continued studying them, I began to realize that in my everyday life I had moments when I glided through campus from one cobblestone pathway to another. There were other days where I was so frustrated and sad, I could do nothing but press my way through a class exercise. I began to understand that these qualities of movement, these “Efforts” were how I moved about in my life daily. I then realized if my everyday movement consisted of these qualities, then the same must apply for the everyday movement of the characters I play.

As I worked on Elizabeth’s movement, the first thing I thought about was her age. I wanted to bridge together how she might move her body given her age, and her work, as well as the circumstances of the action in the play. I started with just moving around and speaking the text as Elizabeth. In my apartment I sat down on the couch. I got out of my bed and walked from the back of the apartment to the kitchen. I bent down to pick things up. As I did all of these movements and spoke the text aloud, I found that the efforts began to reveal themselves. As the actor I found myself as Elizabeth wringing constantly. The wringing movements manifested as a result of Elizabeth’s exhaustion in caring for everyone around her, oftentimes with little to no gratitude. Every so often she would flick. The flicks usually happened on their own when combined with a heightened moment in the script as well as the vocal choices that were becoming Elizabeth as a result of the Alexander work.
INTEGRATING DRAMATURGY

Typically I do some sort of historical research when I accept a role. Or at the very least I will look up information, if there is anything in the script that I am unfamiliar with. Because I chose to explore Dramaturgy as a lens through which I crafted my character, the research I did was significantly more comprehensive. This production of *The Old Settler* by John Henry Redwood took place between September and October of 2023, in Louisville, Kentucky. The play takes place in 1943 in Harlem, New York. This means there are items, costumes, makeup, and possibly language used, that are not common to the audience's mind and or ear, and perhaps even to the actors upon first read- so historical research was done. The research provided a way to bridge the historical gaps between actor and character, as well as production and audience. The fulfillment of this gap between actor and character is where the addition of my dramaturgical research was incredibly useful as a part of my process. More information about Harlem, New York as well as the other locations mentioned in the play can be found in *Appendix* section *Harlem and other locations of importance*.

I spent a tremendous amount of time combing through the script so that I knew all of the details presented. I needed to know as much as I could on the most basic level. After reading *The Old Settler* script, I knew my character as she is described by the playwright. For example, after reading the script I knew her age. I knew that she was the
elder of the two sisters. I knew that the action of the play takes place in her apartment. etc. etc. What I needed to figure out was the greater context of the world in which this character exists. One might argue, this is vital for any play, but I would argue this becomes especially necessary for a play that takes place in a different era than the present time the production is being produced in, in order to fill in any missing knowledge.

Researching all these different facets of life in the 1940’s helped me connect to Elizabeth mentally, physically, and even emotionally. One example of this is how my research of the music became a great tool in finding Elizabeth. As I conducted my research on the time period, music specifically began to illuminate itself in a way I was not expecting. Through my research I discovered what music was popular during the 1940’s. I looked up many different genre’s of music, and ultimately focused on the music that would have been heard in places like the Savory Ballroom, or the music being sung in the church houses. For example in James Abbington’s book, *Readings in African American Church Music and Worship*, he speaks to the music that permeated the African American church in the 1900’s, and how it grew from the preaching of the slaves into spirituals sung (41-43). The book also speaks to the use of hymns in the African American church as a means of social commentary on the struggles of the times (49-50). This made me think about how growing up in the church listening to those hymns might have affected Elizabeth. I used that knowledge, plus what was presented in the script to come up with a playlist I used to get into character before the start of the show each night. I learned about the different musical venues African Americans frequented. I learned about how race affected the creation of music. And I also found some fascinating
parallels between music and religion. With all of the knowledge about music, I decided to try adding something new to my process. I created a playlist of not just the songs in the show that my character sings, but I included other songs from the time period. I added songs that made me think of Elizabeth as well as songs that I thought she would like. I listened to the songs constantly throughout the entirety of the production. I listened in the shower; I listened in the car on my way to rehearsal. I listened at the top of rehearsal as I warmed up. Having a knowledge of the music created a gateway that I could open, and it helped me access Elizabeth emotionally.

I must note simply that what the dramaturgical process I went through did for me, was open a window. The process of researching allowed me to make more specific acting choices about my character that were rooted in historical accuracy. While to some this might seem like I gave myself a load of extra work, I found this work to be advantageous in helping me build a fuller character. After I did my research, I began figuring out how I might fold the newly obtained knowledge into the vocal and movement choices I was making for my character.

All of this work, answering Hagen’s questions, digging into the historical contents of the play, reading the script multiple times, etc. took place before I stepped into the rehearsal room for the first time. All of the aforementioned is what I would call pre-work, or outside work. “Outside” refers to work done outside of the production's rehearsal room with the director and the rest of the cast members. There is a certain amount of work that I consider preparation work that belongs solely to me as the actor, work that I want ingrained in my head long before I step into that rehearsal room and come face to face with the ideas of the director and have to stand in front of another actor and react to what
they are giving me. I do all of this work so that ultimately the core character is my
creation, and should my director have a different vision for the work, I have material to
back up my choices or at the very least figure out how to incorporate my beliefs about
my character into the portrait the director is envisioning.
CHAPTER III: THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENED

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DIRECTOR

My relationship as an actor under Professor Booker’s direction did not start with *The Old Settler*. The semester before, she cast me as Beverly in the University's production of Jackie Sibblies Drury’s *Fairview*. It was incredibly helpful to work with Professor Booker and establish a trusting working relationship with her the semester before working together on *The Old Settler*. I was able to see how she worked with actors, and gave direction, as well as how she collaborated with the designers. Although it was never my plan to share my dramaturgical work with the cast, knowing how Professor Booker ran her rehearsals, gave me confidence in bringing my knowledge to the table.

Whenever she asked why I choose to play a moment a specific way I knew I could reveal to her my outside work, and even if it did not align with her original vision, she would hear me out. Having this type of strong working relationship made walking into the first rehearsal for my thesis show significantly less stressful.
MY OWN ELIZABETH (BEŠS)

Going into the rehearsal process, one thing that was extremely important to me, was creating my own version of the character. I started with unlearning Phylica Rashad’s Elizabeth. Bill Feelhey, my undergraduate acting professor, instructed me once to learn my lines without any emotion attached. He said if you learn them with emotions attached it will be harder for you to unlearn your own habits and then separate them from choices the character might make. He was essentially saying, if you get so attached to saying your lines one particular way, when you get into the rehearsal room, or onstage, you won’t be acting, because you won’t be reacting to what your scene partner is giving you in the moment, or following your director's notes, but simply repeating the text as it was memorized. I did not want to perform Elizabeth with Ms. Rashad’s emotions attached. As a third-year graduate student pursuing a career in professional acting I had no interest in copying Ms. Rashad’s performance, as beloved as it is to me. I wanted to create and find my own version of Elizabeth. I started by making note of the differences in storytelling between the screenplay and the original script. I had watched the PBS version more than 50 times. I knew every head tilt and slur and flourish Ms. Rashad choose to do for the character. I wanted to build the character for myself, and not just copy her performance. In doing research about the PBS version I was able to see what ideas I agreed on and wanted to work into my performance, as well as what
choices- if any - I felt did not ring true to the original text. I looked at where the lines seemed the same but were just the tiniest bit different and how those changes could essentially change the character of Elizabeth and lead to different acting choices in certain moments in the script. The result was a different Elizabeth. My own Elizabeth, an Elizabeth with a deep sense of joy, and one who fit the version of the story we were telling.
A HICCUP

On the evening of Sunday August 20th, 2023, two days before we were due to begin rehearsals for *The Old Settler*, an email was sent out notifying the cast that there was a last-minute change. A member of the cast had left their role, and we were now looking for an actress to fill the role of Quilly McGrath. The character Quilly McGrath is Elizabeth's sister, and also critical to much of the conflict in the play. To say I was petrified is a grotesque understatement. I was ready to use my research to help me better understand how and why Elizabeth would react to Quilly. And possibly why Quilly might act a certain way. It gave me a chance to find grace with both characters. What I love so much about the play is are the different relationships that are explored throughout. I was ready to start working together with the actor playing Quilly, to discover the roots of the tumultuous relationship between the two sisters. But now I had no clue who would be playing the role. How on earth were we stepping into the first days of rehearsal missing a cast member in a show of only 4 actors? Unfortunately we had no choice but to proceed. We spent several weeks of a short rehearsal process missing a key ingredient in the show we were building. A call was put out to the current students in the department to step into rehearsals so that we had at the very least had a body in the space as we blocked, while we continued the search for the final cast member. Several students, graduate and undergraduate, stepped into the rehearsal room, and helped move the process along in
this way. Eventually the entire show was blocked. Yet we still did not have the final cast member. Throughout this entire process of searching for the fourth cast member, I continued to work on the creation of my version of Elizabeth.
It was by using the different tools I explain in my process chapter above that I worked towards creating my own three-dimensional character. I explored the Laban efforts to find how Elizabeth moved. I used Alexander Technique exercises I learned in voice classes to help me find not just Elizabeth's normal speaking voice, but also the variations in it. When Elizabeth became emotional, her voice changed, and her movements altered. I wanted to fully find Elizabeth throughout my entire body and inhabit her. I made many choices based on the information given in the text. Then I enhanced her by adding in my knowledge from my dramaturgical work. I read over my notes about the time period. I studied the great migration. Then I thought about how Elizabeth might feel, having left her entire family to move north to work. I thought about how that might affect how she responds to Quilly versus how she responds to Husband. I reminded myself of the fashion of the times and thought about how Elizabeth might walk in a loose dress, versus how she might intentionally strut a little harder once she starts wearing tighter clothes later in the show. I looked over the history of African American church music I had gathered, and I listened to the music over and over. I wanted to get the melodies deep in my body because the way Elizabeth talks about the music in the script, I felt the music was part of her soul.
USE OF THE DRAMATURGICAL WORK IN REHEARSAL

The play begins and ends with sound. On the first page on the script there is a special note on the songs and recordings mentioned in the play. In the Author’s Notes on the last pages of the play Mr. Redwood writes, “The songs that have been scripted work. It is not just the singing of the songs, but the mood and tempo in which they are sung” (68). He then explains this point further with three examples:

➢ “The song in ACT ONE, Scene 2, (SATAN ...”) is sung very slowly and reflectively. ELIZABETH sings it having been transported into another time and place. She is unaware that HUSBAND is there until he joins in, at which time the tempo increases” (Redwood, 68).

➢ “The song at the beginning of ACT TWO (“DIDN’T IT RAIN?”), sung by ELIZABETH, is very up-tempo. However, QUILLY’S “woos” are dead, dry, and without enthusiasm.”

➢ “The song at the very end of the play (again, “DIDN’T IT RAIN?”), this time sung by QUILLY, is very slow. Tempo with a melancholy mood. It is very important that both sisters join to sing the last line of the song” (Redwood, 68).

Redwood ends his statement about the music, saying this, “The songs are to be sung in the style of gospel singing of the time (1943), sans and vocal gymnastics.” He even
offers himself up for help should the actors working on the piece have any confusion in this area. He continues, “If there is no knowledge of the songs and how they should be sung, please contact the playwright or his agent. As of this printing, the author is still living and can answer questions” (Redwood, 68).

The first thing the author found pertinent to inform any potential artists involved in the producing his work, was the importance of the music used. I brought into the rehearsal prior knowledge I had of music of the times from growing up in a predominantly African American Baptist church. I also brought in new information in the form of notes I had from a course I was enrolled in throughout the production, “Music of the Black Church” taught by Professor Jerry Tolson. The course description is as follows, “This course is designed for the upper division students in music and explores the historical and musical development of African American sacred music from slavery to the present, from Spirituals to traditional and contemporary Gospel music. Special emphasis is given to the impact that this music has had on African American culture, and the social political impact in United States history, which represents a synthesis of African and European cultures into a unique hybrid with its own tradition of development” (Tolson 1). Not only did I have to learn the music used in the script, but I also used music as a way of preparation when entering the space. Whether I warmed up at home before coming to rehearsal, or I warmed up in the space, I used the music of the time period. At the very beginning of the process, I listened to the songs used in the show as a way of memorizing them, and finding how the character of Elizabeth sings them in those specific moments. And later in the process once those songs were all memorized, and I had made my own choices on how I sang
them paired with my director’s instruction, I made a playlist of music from the era and listened to it while I stretched my body, and as a tool to help me as I exercised my voice.

When the play begins, even before the lights come up on stage there is sound. The radio is playing music. The play ends with the two sisters singing the same song introduced earlier the show, “Didn’t It Rain”. This is a crucial moment because when the song is first heard, Elizabeth is singing the song herself. She is full of joy at the prospect of being in love. She wants her sister to share in her joy, but Quilly has no interest in joining in. Eventually she does and the two share a sweet albeit short moment, before Quilly breaks the moment of connection to complain. When we hear the song at the end of the play, the tables have turned. Elizabeth is in a state of suffering. Quilly makes the choice to sing the song and uses it to comfort her sister. It is a powerful moment.

Elizabeth changes over the course of the play. One of the ways she changes manifests visually in the way she dresses. At the beginning of the play her clothes are modest. They are dark in color and do not show much of her shape. After she begins her relationship with Husband, you see her choices in clothing and hairstyle start to adapt into a trendier style. Her clothes get tighter and more form fitting. Elizabeth’s clothes also get brighter. I researched the basics of fashion and clothing styles for the time period so I could understand how the fabrics felt, what the undergarments felt like, and how they might change my movement. Having a knowledge of the fashion of the time helped as I built my character physically, and as the character shifted over time. I literally used my research of the fashion of the times to adapt Elizabeth’s physicality.
During my costume fitting, I discovered the cut of the dresses, as well as the undergarments Elizabeth wore restricted some of my movement. For example, because of the style of the dresses, my strides were shorter than my normal everyday steps. Having to take shorter more specific steps was another way Elizabeth manifested in a different way than me. The length of the dresses made me pay attention to how I sat, and if I crossed my legs or not. The binding of the undergarments informed how straight Elizabeth sat up. During rehearsals I leaned into the different physical restrictions. I realized I could choose when it made sense for the character to flow with those physical restrictions and when to fight against them. For example, the moment at the end of the play when I leaned into Candace, who played the role of Quilly, on the couch, it was uncomfortable because of my girdle. But Elizabeth at that moment was so physically and emotionally tired, I had to do it anyway. Another time my research on fashion made me think twice about my movement was when Elizabeth changed into the outfit that consisted of a tight gray skirt, and red dressy blouse. Looking at my compiled research on fashion, I understood that for Elizabeth to even own pieces like that made a statement, because at the time the second world war was going on and most clothes took on practical uses. “Outside of France, fashion during the war was dominated by rationing. Utility clothing and uniforms were the most ubiquitous forms of “fashion” during the war” (Reddy 2-3). For Elizabeth to have clothing items that were flashier and sexier, she might alter her walk a bit to show them off. To read more information on the fashion history of the time, refer to Appendix section Fashions Influence.

All three of the female characters in the play work in white women’s homes doing domestic and maid service work. (To read more information on economic history of the
time, refer to Appendix section *Available Work for the Black Woman.*) Understanding the type of work they had to do combined with their age was something that I used in tandem with my movement work to aid in creating Elizabeth. How someone moves is going to alter over time when they have been doing physical work like cleaning a home, for decades. I researched the domestic work black women often found themselves doing. Then I used that research to figure out how Elizabeth over time might have developed certain aches and pains in her body and how they have manifested in her everyday movement. This work also manifested in emotional connections being made as well. Elizabeth has a monologue in the play during which she explains to her sister that the reason they need the roomer is because she has lost some of her income when one of the women, she worked for moved, as well as the war creating a plunge in the hiring of domestic African American workers:

“I don’t care what they’re saying down there at the church. Ain’t a body down there making my rent, and it keeps going up. I was here by myself. When Mrs. Schivak moved to Florida, I lost three days’ work. That left me with only Mrs. Langbaum and that wasn’t enough money. Even with him here, I’m still going to have to find more work. And you know with the war going on white folks ain’t hiring help like they use to…” (Redwood 15)

After doing my dramaturgical work as well as putting into action my movement and vocal labor, when it came time to do this monologue in the play, the reality of this moment for Elizabeth, physically, mentally, emotionally, and vocally all hit me at once. Of course she is exhausted. She’s been cleaning these houses for much of her life. She has been doing so to support not only herself, but her sister, who at the moment is being
childish and ungrateful. I understand the complexities of this monologue because of the research I had done. Then when pairing that research with the work I do in my process as an actor it created a layered understanding that I was able to put into my body and voice. I continued doing this type of work the entire rehearsal process.
From the conception of the idea to focus my thesis on Dramaturgy, the work I did was always intended for personal use. However, this changed during the rehearsal process. Three weeks into rehearsal there was a moment in a scene that was not working between another actor and me. The actor playing Husband was talking to Elizabeth, but while he was speaking and moving around during the scene he seemed unsure of his actions. The actors hesitation was affecting not only that scene, but also the connection between the two of us in that moment. After working on it for a while we moved on to another scene hoping some time away from the moment might let us recharge and give us time to figure it out. When we came back to it, at the following rehearsal it still would not work. As I listened to my scene partner and tried to respond to what was being given to me, but I was having an extremely difficult time trying to stay in the moment with him. As Professor Booker worked the scene, the question “do we have a clear understanding of everything happening in the scene?” came up. The actor replied saying what they thought one of the words in the stage directions meant. I knew immediately that it was incorrect. However, as an actor I have always been taught that giving another actor instruction or notes is inappropriate, and that job belongs solely to the director. I finally spoke up, asking everyone in the room for permission to offer up the knowledge I had.
The offer was accepted and after referring back to my dramaturgical work, I explained the actual meaning of the word in question. The stage directions in the script had the character entering the scene with a *bundle*. The actor playing Husband thought a bundle, was referring to a bundle of sticks. He could not figure out why Husband would be entering with them, and what significance it might hold in the scene. I explained that in the context of our world in the play, the bundle was making reference to the clothes he had brought in with him and the way they were wrapped for transportation. We did the scene again, the actor changed his movements, and immediately the scene worked!

Later another actor was speaking a line of text during a scene, and stopped to acknowledge she was not one hundred percent sure she understood the meaning behind a phrase in the script she had just said. She was asking about a phrase that we are not likely to use or hear socially nowadays. “One foot in the east one foot in the west and old Husband in the middle, just doing his best” (Redwood 61). I had made note of the phrase when I first heard it when I watched the film version, and again as I began working on my dramaturgical packet and was able to refer to my research once again and give her possible insight into the meaning of the phrase. From what I had been able to find, the words had a sexual connotation to them. Lou Bessie was using them to tell Elizabeth she had previously been sexually active with Husband, to the point of knowing his sexual behavior. The actor spoke the text again with that new information and it changed her choice, and in turn made the scene work. These two moments during the rehearsal process were useful not only because they helped us tell the story, and served the overall process, but because they served as a living reflection of how helpful dramaturgical work can be.
SUCCESSFUL CAST RELATIONSHIPS

The Old Settler only has four characters. It is with these four characters that we tell a complex story that interweaves multiple relationships. The dynamics of the cast was therefore incredibly important. On Monday September 4th, three weeks into the rehearsal process, our fourth cast member arrived in Louisville from out of town. The department arranged to bring in Candace Spencer ’23, a 2023 alumna of the University of Louisville’s Theatre Arts MFA program. The cast was made up of two second year graduate students in the program, Krystal Waller, and Darrin Mosley, Candace Spencer, and me. By the time rehearsals started, I had been in several classes with each of the other members of the cast.

Outside of class, I had previously spoken with Darrin and Krystal about who they feel they are as artists, and what type of art they are committed to creating. As a result, the original members of the cast all had a solid rapport with each other before rehearsals had begun. Once it was confirmed that Candace would be joining us, I began singing her praises to the other cast members and attempted to provide some background information on our incoming cast member based on my personal experiences with her. Which just to name a few, included acting with her in my first production in the MFA program, spending quality time with her and her extended family, and partying with her to celebrate our professional accomplishments. Our relationship was nothing short of
wonderful. 11 days before we began the final technical rehearsal to open the show, we had our first rehearsal with the full cast of the show. When Candace arrived, we began the task of pulling her into our established and cohesive ensemble. It proved an easy task.

The two of us in particular immediately began treating each other like sisters. It seemed as if our previously sisterly relationship, full of teasing, prodding, and supporting each other had never ceased. Her professionalism and cheerful personality helped to quickly build trust and support with the other actors as well. The result was a well-oiled machine, with reviews of our show commenting on the believability of the relationships onstage.

“Bess is the kind of character who might be easily annoyed but is rarely fussed. Her life has been hard, leaving her family and moving from the South to New York, taking care of her mother, learning how to forgive her sister, doing it all alone. The one person who knows exactly how to rile up Bess is Quilly, and you get the sense that Spencer and Martin relish this dynamic. They have a playful antagonism that all real sisters have, it feels lived-in, entirely without danger— until those very specific moments when it’s not” (Waits).

By the end of the production’s run, the very last moment of the show when our characters sing and embrace, became my favorite moment. The critics seemed to agree. “Martin and Spencer have a brilliant, crushing moment as they share a song from their childhood on the couch” (Waits). I was beyond grateful for Candace’s professionalism and the joyous spirit that she brought with her to the work. It was a constant reminder of the power of creating meaningful, real relationships in our craft. Actors need each other.
The first show I was cast in as a graduate student in the MFA program was *Afromemory* by Teshonne Powell produced in the fall of 2021. It was Candace's thesis show. Three years later, Candace completed the cast for my thesis show. What a full circle moment I will forever be grateful for.
CONCLUSION

FAREWELL BESS, HELLO AUNT ESTER

In her book, *Respect for Acting*, Uta Hagen writes, “Essential to a serious actor is the training and perfecting of the outer instrument—comprising his body, his voice and his speech (14). Hagen calls this Process Transference. In the book, *Sanford Meisner On Acting*, Sydney Pollack writes about the process Meisner has created, noting that “Sanford Meisner’s work was, and is, to impart to students an organized approach to the creation of real and truthful behavior within the imaginary circumstances of the theater” (8). In his book The Lee Strasberg Notes, Strasberg attempts to explain what The Method was and how it worked. When speaking of his devised method he says this: “The Method is an amalgam of the work of Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, Meyerhold, and the Group Theater. Observing and analyzing their work is essential in forming a practical comprehension of the theoretical approach of our work, the training, and its use in diverse forms of production” (v). What all three of these acting visionaries have in common is their citing of the use of process. They list steps that actors take to achieve a goal, the goal being the creation of a character, or simply strengthening one's basic acting skills and knowledge. As an actor creating, maintaining, and adapting my process throughout the production of The Old Settler and then going right into the production of August Wilson’s *Gem of the Ocean*, I have come to realize how
important adaptability is. I have also concluded that with the addition of dramaturgy as a method for gaining additional knowledge, I was able to provide myself the opportunity to add a step in my process that benefits me as an actor. This addition also created an opportunity for me to share a wealth of knowledge with others involved in the production. Gaining the basic foundational tools of dramaturgy enabled me to allow myself freedom into looking beyond information given to me, to dive deeper into the work myself as well as realize my personal process doesn’t need to be set in stone.

Even though we did have a dramaturg for *The Old Settler*, doing the work myself is what made my performance successful in my opinion. I had all the information I thought could possibly be vital at my fingertips. During the process, when I came across something I had not thought of before, I did not have to hope our dramaturg had provided that information. I had a tremendous amount of resources I had personally gathered. And if I couldn’t find an answer immediately, I knew where to look. I started by doing basic research into the time period. Then once the show was cast and I learned who the character was I would be playing; I began to do even more specific research. All of that research in combination with the other elements of my process allowed me to create a three-dimensional character that I felt I was able to fully immerse myself in every night on stage.

After the production of *The Old Settler* closed, I immediately stepped into the process for the University of Louisville's production of August Wilson’s *Gem of the Ocean* and had the opportunity to continue this work. The theatre department held auditions, and the director offered me the role of Aunt Ester. I accepted, and immediately began starting my dramaturgical work on the play and the playwright.
August Wilson is often named one of the greatest playwrights of the twentieth century.
I can’t think of another American dramatist since Tennessee Williams who writes with
the generous lyricism of Wilson. It’s almost as much like the tragedies of ancient
Greece as it is like Shakespeare, or perhaps grand opera, even though the characters
belong to another social stratum, altogether, from the usual aristocrats of Verdi, Wilson
found the divine in the down home. (Brantley, awaacc.org)

August is perhaps best known for his ten-play cycle. “August Wilson was an
American playwright best known for his extraordinary cycle of ten plays that chronicle
the 20th century African American experience…Each play is set in a different decade
and collectively became known as the American Century Cycle” (Awaacc.org)

I began conducting research on August Wilson, just as I had John Henry Redwood.
I wanted to see if Wilson’s upbringing could have played a role in his work. I studied his
childhood and looked at the creation of the ten-play cycle. Then I looked up which of
the plays that the character of Aunt Ester is mentioned in, or appears in. While Aunt
Ester only appears physically in Gem of the Ocean, the character is mentioned in Two
Trains Running, King Hedley II, and Radio Golf. None of the rest of Wilson’s
characters that appear in his plays have such a deep presence throughout the cycle. I
immediately realized there was going to be some intense work needed to fully
understand who Aunt Ester is.

Wilson himself has spoken of Aunt Ester as being one of the most important
characters in the entire 10 play cycle. “She was, Mr. Wilson wrote in an essay, “the
most significant persona of the cycle” (Brantley, New York Times). Mary Ann
Snodgrass offers a similar perspective, identifying her as "the eternal mother to Wilson's
black Americans," one who is "the voice of Africa, the culture-keeper" (Snodgrass 2004, 82-3). “Aunt Ester represents and reflects a historical and cultural fact— the rise, out of necessity, of the African American woman as the repository of African American culture, history, hope, and spirituality” (Caywood). The more I researched, I found scholar after scholar writing critical articles and essays about the character of Aunt Ester. There was seemingly a never ending well of information.

Our production of *Gem of the Ocean* was fortunate enough to have a dramaturg. We began rehearsals for the show the last week of November. The first two days of the rehearsal process were spent listening to a presentation from Dr. Khalid Long. He listened to the cast read the play. He spoke to us about August Wilson. Then he discussed each of the characters and the play itself. It was an incredible wealth of knowledge that we were handed. That information along with the research I had conducted myself, set me up to go into the Christmas holiday and continue my process into the creation of Aunt Ester.

Rehearsals were scheduled to resume after the New year. Then I received news that my great aunt passed away. I had to go home. I stayed in Philadelphia and missed the first week back with the rest of the cast. While the loss and coinciding rituals were a painful experience, it was also a chance to be around older members of my family, specifically my grandmother. I listened to her speak. I paid attention to how she told a story. I watched her walk. I looked at the lines in her face. When she smiled, I etched into memory where the wrinkles appeared. I paid attention to how she sat down and how she got up. I held on to her a little longer when we embraced and took note of the warm and spiritual power that I felt radiating off of her body. I took mental notes, and I
brought it all back into the rehearsal room with me when I returned. During opening
night celebrations for the show, three audience members sought me out to tell me they
could see their grandmother, their aunt, their mother in my Aunt Ester. And I was
satisfied. I set out to do what I wanted to do. I used my dramaturgical work, along with
the rest of my process to create another living breathing character. I proved to myself
again, that this work is indeed beneficial. I will continue to use dramaturgy to aid
myself in the process of character building as I move forward in my career as a
professional actor.

In many ways *Gem of the Ocean* was a special way to end my time in the Theatre
Arts department at the University of Louisville. I was able to work with a tremendous
cast, two of whom I shared this experience of graduate school with from day one. The
actors playing Citizen Barlow, and Ceasar Wilkers, Tajleed Hardy, and Nickolas Wils
respectively. We have supported each other, mentally and emotionally since day one in
this program, and it felt right that we would wind up supporting each other as castmates
in our last production. This show was also special because I gained self-confidence.

I enrolled in graduate school for two reasons. One, because I wanted to continue
honning my skills as an actor. During both the production of *The Old Settler* and *Gem of
the Ocean* I felt that growth, and others told me they did as well. And secondly, the
practical side of my brain thought it best to have a degree that said I could work in the
education system if I needed to make money and support myself financially as an actor. I
felt I needed a piece of paper to show that I had a certain worth to anyone looking to hire
me. Doing this work researching, vocally and physically engaging with the text and with
history until I found Elizabeth and then again until I found Aunt Ester within myself,
showed me my own worth. That worth doesn’t lie solely in academia. Like Aunt Ester says, “...I didn't need no piece of paper to tell me that” (Wilson, 77).
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“John Henry Redwood, 60; Stage and Film Actor Wrote Popular Plays about


APPENDIX

The Old Settler PBS Version (pg. 9)

“Combative but loving Elizabeth and Quilly are played impressively by real-life siblings Phylicia Rashad and Debbie Allen, respectively. Allen, best known as a choreographer, also directs, and with assurance, capturing the rhythms and textures of the times while bringing out the best in her co-starring sister” (Perry)

Themes (pg. 19)

LOVE VS. AGE; COUGAR VS. SPINSTER

One moment in the play that stood out to me as being significant occurs, when Quilly makes Elizabeth confront a truth. In the midst of a disagreement over Elizabeth’s relationship with Husband, Quilly asks Elizabeth what she is going to do when Husband expects his carnal needs and desires to be fulfilled? (Redwood 55-56). Quilly continues pressing her sister by reminding her that she is too old to have any children. This idea of age and its relation to marriage and procreation, resonated with me. The idea of not being married or marrying later and subsequently having children later than I originally planned, or worse - not having children at all, is a very real point of anxiety and fear for me. In this way it made it easier for me as an actor to tap into the emotions Elizabeth is feeling as she goes through this journey. Thematically this idea of love and age stood out to me, because this was one of the points where, despite our age difference, I really felt like I understood Elizabeth's desperation for her relationship
with Husband to be rooted in truth and for it to have real substance.

“When Quilly reminds Elizabeth that Husband’s sexual needs may be more than she can accommodate on a regular basis as well as his future desire for children she will be incapable of producing, the double standard for older men with younger women takes on a practical reality that supports the patriarchal perspective of marriage i.e. satisfying the male’s needs for unlimited sexual access and the birthing of heirs. But human relationships are much more complicated than mere reproduction. Redwood’s play reminds us that the human need for companionship and love never diminishes despite increasing years. It also shows that wisdom and dignity are gained at a price which can feel unbearable. That companionship takes many forms, not only between men and women, but also between siblings” (Rashid).

Harlem and other Locations of Importance (pg. 34)

“The Harlem Renaissance was the development of the Harlem neighborhood in New York City as a Black cultural mecca in the early 20th Century and the subsequent social and artistic explosion that resulted. Lasting roughly from the 1910s through the mid-1930s, the period is considered a golden age in African American culture, manifesting in literature, music, stage performance and art” (Library of Congress).

Outside factors led to a population boom: From 1910 to 1920, African American populations migrated in large numbers from the South to the North, with prominent figures like W.E.B. Du Bois leading what became known as the Great Migration. (Harrison).
In his book Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South, Harrison lists several causes for the migration, including, economic survival, the deprived status of the African American through legal segregation, an increase of white job competition as well as other causes. (Harrison)

Lou Bessie does not appear to be a fan of Frogmore. When asked what will happen when she returns to Frogmore, Lou Bessie quickly makes it known she has no intention of returning. Pg. 21 “Go back down where? Uh, uh, I ain’t thinking about going back down to no Frogmore.” Later she tells the two sisters she didn’t marry husband before because it would have been akin to being stuck there. Pg. 22 “I wasn’t going to marry nobody and get stuck down there in Frogmore…” This difference in opinion about Frogmore paints a fundamental difference between the characters Lou Bessie and Elizabeth.

I also found it quite interesting that not much literature can be found about the town of Frogmore. Despite hours of research, the only information available can be found on privately run websites. The websites are tourism websites, designed to give a bit of history on the town and invite any tourism to the mainly debilitated area.

**Fashions Influence (pg. 46)**

“Outside of France, fashion during the war was dominated by rationing. Utility clothing and uniforms were the most ubiquitous forms of “fashion” during the war. Utility clothing could be bought with ration coupons. Both Utility dresses and uniforms adopted similar design elements: “The look was simple but stylish, with good proportion and line. It incorporated padded shoulders, a nipped-in waist, and hems to
just below the knee,” writes James Laver in Costume and Fashion: A Concise History (253). By 1943, even non-Utility clothing, followed these same lines. The suits were quite boxy and had rounded collars. Tweeds and plaid, popular in the 1930s, continued to be used in Utility clothing, as did bright colors and patterns…”

(Reddy)Just as World War II stalled women’s fashion, it also slowed change in men’s fashion. Rationing, of course, affected all ages and genders indiscriminately” (Reddy).

Jobs for the Black Woman (pg. 47)

A crucial part of the conflict of the play is the result of Quilly having an issue with Elizabeth choosing a male boarder to rent a room in their apartment. Although boarders were commonplace at the time, Quilly does not like that her sister has made such an important decision without her knowledge or consent. “You never even talked to me about taking in no roomer… and Elizabeth replies, “Truth be known, I didn’t have to talk to you about him at all. You wasn’t even living here when I promised to rent the room to the man.” She continues saying, “People take in roomers to help with the rent all over Harlem and you know it” (Redwood 14). Elizabeth has a monologue in the play during which she explains to her sister that the reason they need the roomer is because she has lost some of her income when one of the women, she worked for moved, as well as the war creating a plunge in the hiring of domestic African American workers.

“I don’t care what they’re saying down there at the church. Ain’t a body down there making my rent, and it keeps going up. I was here by myself. When Mrs. Schivak moved to Florida, I lost three days’ work. That left me with only Mrs. Langbaum and that wasn’t
enough money. Even with him here, I’m still going to have to find more work. And you know with the war going on white folks ain’t hiring help like they use to…” (Redwood 15).

In the play, both sisters work as maids in the homes of white women. As the actor portraying a character who works as a maid. I decided to look into the economics of the time. I wanted to know why Elizabeth chose domestic work. Or did she not have a choice? Is domestic work all that was available to her at the time?

“The weekly wage gap between black and white female workers narrowed by 15 percentage points during the 1940s” (Bailey).

“…changes in worker characteristics (such as education, occupation and industry, and region of residence) can account for a significant portion of wage convergence between black and white women…” (Bailey).

“…large wage gains in domestic service jobs (where black women were concentrated) relative to clerical jobs (where white women were concentrated) made significant contributions to racial wage convergence” (Bailey).
CURRICULUM VITA

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EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE — MFA, PERFORMANCE; AFRICAN AMERICAN THEATRE CERTIFICATE, 2021-PRESENT *Anticipated Graduation May 2024

BELMONT UNIVERSITY — BFA, THEATRE PERFORMANCE 2012-2016

THE EPISCOPAL ACADEMY — HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA 1998-2012

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of Louisville, Department of Theatre Arts — Louisville, KY

Graduate Instructor of Record

-Introduction to Acting as Communications Fall 2023 and Spring 2024
This course is an introduction to theatre and performance as communication. Students will develop a general performance awareness and practice effective approaches to public speaking they will also demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving by exploring the link between self and partner/audience. Other theatrical communication skills, including ensemble-building and active listening, will be enhanced through acting exercises and creative material development. I instructed the students in the foundation of Meisner Technique. We worked through monologues, scene work and theatre literature.

University of Louisville, Department of Theatre Arts - Louisville, KY
Teaching Assistant

-Acting the Black Experience Spring 2023

This course is focused on the craft of acting through African storytelling, Harlem Renaissance Poetry and Hip-Hop aesthetic. As the teaching assistant I led the class in warmups ranging from yoga practices to meditation executions and dance warmups. I also lead the unit on the Harlem Renaissance and the unit on Dance Styles from the 1940’s and how the art form of dance is a form of storytelling.
University of Louisville, Department of Theatre Arts - Louisville, KY

Teaching Assistant

- Enjoyment of Theatre Fall Online 2021

This course introduced students to the exciting art of theatre by viewing and discussing live performances (or film this semester); by creating projects that provide first-hand experience of how theatre artists work; by participating in theatre games and exercises; and by interacting with guest speakers who are theatre professionals. I did all of the grading for the class. I created the mid-term assignment. I engaged with the online assignments and continued to cultivate conversation between the students.

Camp Shakespeare Teaching Counselor - KY Shakespeare Festival 2022

I cut a Shakespeare play to make it an appropriate length. I taught Monday-Friday 8-5pm. Daily activities consisted of warmups, theatre games, lessons on theatre literature, Shakespearean history, acting direction, and helping students design and create their costumes. And finally directing the students in an end of the session performance of the show.
Primrose School of Nashville - Nashville, Tn

- Education Coach

Duties: Participating in the interviewing and hiring of teaching staff. Coordinating with the other members of the Leadership Team to implement the training plan for new teaching staff. I conducted classroom observations daily in order to support and ensure the implementation of the Primrose curriculum. I was also in charge of purchasing the items needed for the teachers to implement curriculum and ordering the physical curriculum for the teachers to maintain.

Primrose School of Nashville - Nashville, Tn

- Assistant Director

Duties Included: Building, leading our school’s staff in order to achieve a smooth and functional school with high performing staff and students. I was part of the hiring and training team. I was a main source of support for our school parents. Daily I contacted perspective parents/families and gave them information about the Primrose Learning curriculum. I set up the tours and conducted them. I learned all of the health and safety procedures and protocols.

- Preschool Teacher

Duties: Maintaining knowledge about the Primrose curriculum. Weekly plannings to ensure I was prepared to teach each day. Learning all of the health and safety protocols to ensure the safety of all my students.
-Toddler Teacher

Duties: Maintaining knowledge about the Primrose curriculum. Weekly plannings to ensure I was prepared to teach each day. Learning all of the health and safety protocols to ensure the safety of all my students.

PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE

Hermia - Midsummer Night’s Dream - KY Shakespeare Festival - Louisville, KY 2023
Witch #3 - Macbeth - KY Shakespeare Festival - Louisville, KY 2023
Lady Katherine - Loves Labors Lost - KY Shakespeare Festival - Louisville, KY 2023
Karen - August Osage County - Commonwealth Theatre Center - Louisville, KY 2022
Melissa - The Murder Play with Jack and Melissa - Actor’s Bridge Ensemble - Nashville, TN 2021
Florist/Marjory/EMT - KODACHROME - Actor’s Bridge Ensemble - Nashville, TN 2019
Euphronius/Proculeius - Antony and Cleopatra - Nashville Shakespeare Festival - Nashville, TN 2017

PROFESSIONAL OTHER

Stage Manager - Detroit ’67 - Actors Bridge Ensemble - Nashville, TN – 2017
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Aunt Ester - Gem of the Ocean - University of Louisville - 2024
Elizabeth Borny - The Old Settler - University of Louisville — 2023
Beverley - Fairview - University of Louisville - 2023
Ensemble - Blood at the Root - University of Louisville - 2022
Multiple Characters - Spring Shorts (Festival of One Act Plays) - University of Louisville - 2022
Imani Nina - Afromemory - University of Louisville - 2022
Caska - Julius Caesar - Belmont University - 2016
Louise Marie-Therese - Las Meninas - Belmont University -
2016 Beatrice - Servant of Two Masters - Belmont University -
2015 Queen of Hearts - Alice - Belmont University - 2015

ACADEMIC OTHER

Choreographer & Dance Captain - Blood at the Root - University of Louisville –
2022

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

KCACTF - Outstanding Performance & Production Ensemble - Alice – 2016

MEMBERSHIPS

Alpha Psi Omega 2013 – Present
SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION

Teaching Artist for Commonwealth Theatre Center at Smoketown Family Wellness Center

-Led group activities at a wellness center. Brought theatre and drama arts to children who do are not normally exposed to the arts.

SERVICE WORLDWIDE

Guatemala - Mission Trip - 2011

-At a school in Antigua, our group broke the concrete and tore down an unsafe and deteriorated playground. We then mixed new material and installed new equipment. We then painted the inside of the school and mural on the outside.