UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Much Ado About Nothing: A Director's Reflection on Staging Shakespeare for Contemporary Audiences

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an artist's statement that is a cumulative reflection on the process of staging and directing William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing.* This show was produced by the University of Calgary's School of Creative and Performing Arts and was supervised by Professor Christine Brubaker.

The first chapter introduces the play and explores the question "Why Shakespeare, Why Now?". The second chapter explores preparation, artistic research and analysis. The third chapter reflects on collaboration and creativity, with a focus on design and the rehearsal process. The fourth chapter outlines a research study I enfolded into the rehearsal process which investigates consent-based rehearsal processes in university theatre training. The fifth chapter examines my experience of artistic leadership as a woman and outlines my values. The sixth chapter concludes by documenting a synthesis of my learnings and final reflections.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Cali Sproule. The research outlined in Chapter Four was reviewed and approved by the University of Calgary Research Ethics Board for the project “Trauma-Informed Consent Culture for University Theatre Training” under the Ethics Certificate number REB22-0885. Portions of these surveys are published in this chapter. This research was generously funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada CGS-M and supported by the Manitoba Arts Council. All photos by Tim Nguyen have been used with his express permission.

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Lastly, to my cohort: Randi, Cassie, Bonnie, Jared and Gal. I'm glad we got to grow, learn and play together. I wouldn't have wanted to do it with anybody else.

"I thank you. I am not of many words, but I thank you." - Don John, Act I, Scene I.

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A local habitation and a name.

Such tricks hath strong imagination,

That if it would but apprehend some joy,

It comprehends some bringer of that joy.

Or in the night, imagining some fear,

How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

- *William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"O, he's returned; and as pleasant as he ever was" - Margaret, Act 1, Scene 1

In *Shakespeare: A Very Short Introduction*, Germaine Greer notes that "the notices of the life and career of England's greatest poet are not only sparse and brief, but unusually cryptic" (1). Many records that help us chart the life of William Shakespeare are incomplete or have not survived the test of time. And while tracing his linage and history fully and accurately is difficult, there are some accepted facts about his life and work. Born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, William Shakespeare was most likely educated at the Stratford grammar school. He married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children, one of whom died at age eleven. Shakespeare himself died in 1616. (Garber 19-22). He also performed with the Lord Chamberlain's Men, an acting company, before gaining prominence as a poet and playwright (Greer 10). He wrote at least 37 plays and is known for his complex and compelling characters, sweeping narratives and heightened language anchored in both action and imagery.

It Is this heightened language that has drawn me to his work. When I was in the tenth grade, I read and worked on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for the first time. Our summative assignment, a creative performance presentation intended to demonstrate our comprehension, connected me to the beauty of this text when spoken aloud and ignited a desire to explore Shakespeare as it was originally intended, not to be read in a classroom, but to be performed.

When I was contemplating what plays to propose for my thesis production, I considered where I was positioned in my practice. As an emerging artist and director, I was primarily concerned with my development and areas that I hadn't yet tacked on the stage. These areas included pieces that were from Shakespeare's time, the Restoration period, and classic Greek plays; plays that required a large cast; plays with a form that was unfamiliar to me; and finally, comedies. Most works that I had directed were not comedies and I was not entirely confident I knew what would make an audience laugh.

Much Ado About Nothing covered all of these challenges. Written in 1598, it is one of Shakespeare's most well-known comedies. Set in Messina, the story begins when a group of soldiers return home from the war and are invited to stay in the house of Leonato, a wealthy merchant for a month. The primary storyline follows two couples: Claudio and Hero, who quickly fall in love with each other and become engaged; and Beatrice and Benedick, who are perfectly content in their singlehood and not interested in marriage at all. Their friends and family, however, are positive that Beatrice and Benedick are a match and attempt to trick them into falling in love with one another. The central dramatic tangle of the story is focused on the "purity" of Hero which is questioned publicly at her wedding. In the end, the truth of her "innocence" is revealed, she and Claudio reunite, and Beatrice and Benedick admit their love for each other.

Though I had worked on a collection of Shakespeare and Restoration pieces during my undergraduate studies, I had scraped by with only a general understanding of their heightened language and form. By directing this play, I would not only have to expand my knowledge and skills with heightened text, but also guide a young and inexperienced cast through this process as well. The play would also need significant cuts and adaptation for a contemporary audience. I would need to bring a dramaturgical perspective to this process, discerning what would be the 'most important' aspects of the story to retain, and what to let go of. And I would need to understand fully what makes it funny, what are the dynamics and qualities that invite and audience to laugh? *Much Ado About Nothing* would be a worthy challenge for all aspects of my directorial skills.

Marjorie Garber in *Shakespeare After All* states that "Every age creates its own Shakespeare" (3). In this quote, she is speaking to the timelessness and "transcendent qualities for which his plays have been praised around the world". Though *Much Ado About Nothing* was written four centuries ago, the themes of love, jealousy, and deception for me leapt

forward as ideas that remain entirely current. My belief was that performing this complex comedy now could remind a contemporary audience of the many ways people can fall prey to their emotions when they are in love. Jealousy, insecurity, and shame are all inherent to being human. And while there is much hilarity and potential to mine in these common foibles, there was another message inside this play which resonated deeply for me: the pernicious and dangerous constraints of gender, a topic that continues to feel strikingly relevant.

1.1 The Complexities of Contemporary Shakespeare

When I told my MFA cohort of fellow graduate students that my thesis production was going to be *Much Ado About Nothing,* one member quickly retorted: “I kind of hate Shakespeare”. Contrasting this opinion with my admiration of the Bard’s work, these polarizing opinions seem to be a feature when working on his plays. The immediacy of this response speaks to one of the major questions I had while working on this play: “Why this show? Why now?”. It has been centuries since Shakespeare’s plays were first performed and in that time thousands of other playwrights and plays have emerged that don’t feature the blatant sexism and antiquated misogyny that are a feature of his work. And, as such, bringing Shakespeare to our current moment in time also brings complications. Kathleen McLuskie notes that “Shakespeare’s plays are not primarily explorations of ‘the real nature of women’ or even ‘the hidden feelings in the human heart’. They were products of an entertainment industry which, as far as we know, has no women stakeholders, actors, writers, or stagehands” (125). Shakespeare wrote for the masses. When looking at his work through a temporal-societal lens, these plays were not offensive nor insensitive, but, in the context of our current time and place, there are many elements that are. Consequently, in my adaptation and direction of this play, I thought it pertinent to consider both the implications and the “how” of bringing Shakespeare’s work to a modern audience.

The themes and societal values are perhaps not as antiquated as I previously mentioned, especially with regards to women. This past year, June 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States overturned Roe v. Wade, a federal law in effect since 1973 that protected every person's constitutional right to an abortion. When this happened, I thought about how the systems of oppression that have been in place for centuries continually suppress voices and choices. With this at the top of my mind when I was reading and watching *Much Ado About Nothing* over and over again this summer, I wondered deeply about choice. How much choice *do* women have over their own bodies? How much of a choice do the women in *Much Ado About Nothing,* especially Hero, have in determining their own future*?* These inequities are still present in the modern day, sometimes glaringly obvious, and sometimes permeating experiences quietly. *Much Ado About Nothing* dramatizes these dynamics on stage through the story and perhaps less obviously in its production history.

In the First Folio and Quatro[1] of *Much Ado About Nothing,* there is an "extra" character. Her name is Innogen, and she is described as Leonato's wife. She is silent and appears only in the first few scenes. In many subsequent editions of *Much Ado About Nothing,* editors, and most often male ones, removed her from the text. This is explored in-depth in scholar Par Cedric Watts's article "*Much Ado About Nothing:* Save Innogen and Banish the Sentimentalists' Claudio!". Watts refers to Innogen as "killed" and questions the reasoning behind her killing. He offers that perhaps "one reason is that she does not say anything. Various editors believe that Shakespeare introduced her with the intention of giving her a speaking role, [but] found no use for her. Therefore, these editors presume they are helping Shakespeare by doing what *he* should have done: they are tidying the text … by removing a redundant character".

[1] The Folio and Quatro (referring to the size of paper printed on) are the earliest publications of Shakespeare's work.

I do not believe that Shakespeare was *that* forgetful or careless. Supporting Watts's work, I suggest that introducing Innogen as a silent role was intentional and that the deletion of her was what Watts refers to as a “glaring irony”. For my adaptation, I brought her back to life. One of my curiosities going into the play was the dynamic onstage of three tiers of women and how to stage these relationships. On the first tier, you have Innogen, a silent and likely complacent companion: A woman who accepts her role as support to her husband, perhaps only an economic arrangement, necessary in societal acceptance and for childbearing, but not much beyond that. On the second tier, is the young woman, desperate to be married and find her valid position in life. All is lost when Hero is “slut-shamed”, so much so that it is conceivable that she dies of grief when the accusation is made. The stakes of being married are so high that at the altar she is quick to forgive and marry Claudio despite her humiliation. And on the third tier, Beatrice: Single. A spinster. In some productions, I have seen Beatrice played as an “old maid”, bitter and resentful about not having found love. I rejected this interpretation and was more curious about breathing youth and independence into her character, a woman who is simply happy (ish) being alone. In this idea, much of my exploration in this play was centered around these women, their roles and status, and how they navigate these dynamics inside their world. It is also worth noting that there is another woman who doesn’t quite fit within the frames of these three tiers. Margaret, who is of lower class than Innogen, Hero, and Beatrice, seems to sit within her own plane. In our production, we explored the permission of sexuality and freeness that the other characters do not have because of their place with their families and society.

CHAPTER 2: PREPARATION

2.1 Exposure, Reaction & Re-Reaction

I do not remember when I was first exposed to *Much Ado About Nothing* but reading it in early 2022 felt like greeting an old friend. So much was familiar, but there was still so much to catch up on and learn. During my undergraduate degree, I had worked on scenes from this show multiple times, including a segment of 4.1 being one of the first scenes that I had directed. Proposing it as an option for my thesis felt like a full-circle moment to return to a work that had influenced my development so profoundly during my undergraduate degree.

When reading the play again, I began to write down the simple initial thoughts and take note of the themes that bubbled up out of the text. The play is about war, love, jealousy, the societal pressure on woman[2], deception, nothing and everything. I found myself returning to the first theme: war. *Much Ado About Nothing,* or so I thought, hinges on the continuation of a war. Scholars such as Elisabeth Bronfen assert that in *Much Ado About Nothing* "war spills into peacetime … most obviously … the gender battle between Beatrice and Benedick … the continuation of a war between brothers, a civil war brought home in which Claudio's slandered bride takes on the role of collateral" (64). Because the time period I chose would be integral to the design and the ethos of the world I wanted to create, I was interested in choosing a time period that would reflect a war that I was familiar with and could therefore accurately navigate in my direction. I initially thought about placing *Much Ado About Nothing* at the end of World War II, simply, because that is the war with which I am most familiar. A long-time lover of historical fiction revolving around World War II, I felt that a play following this particular period was

[2] Meaning, the role of a particular woman in society. Hero, Beatrice and Innogen for example all exemplify and represent a very particular idea of a woman.

recognizable. It was a *safe* bet, a *safe* time period and a *safe* way to make sure I didn't get the play "wrong". This, of course, was my initial impulse. After pause, I reflected on the past eight months of my graduate studies, my directing classes and my studio exercises. I had been encouraged, even gently pushed into the uncomfortable space of risk and even failure in my directing practice. I had learned much by stepping outside of what I thought was 'right' and making bigger choices, ones that did not feel comfortable. I had to remind myself and ask that important question: is theatre supposed to be safe? Am I not here to learn, to risk, potentially to fail, but ultimately to develop?

Then on Friday, June 24th, 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade. I identified with the collective outrage about what felt like a turning-back-the-clock: an overt attack on women's rights that had been fundamental to our progress over the last 50 years. And this is the moment when it occurred to me: If this is an attack, is this a war? If the definition of war is "a state of armed conflict between…different groups within a nation or state" (Oxford English Dictionary), how do we determine what "armed" means? You can be armed with political goals and whether it is 1945 or 2023, the rights of women are continually under scrutiny and up for debate. I asked myself: Is *Much Ado About Nothing* a play that completely foregrounds and highlights the rights of women as its main theme? No. Ultimately *Much Ado About Nothing* is a romantic comedy that was written to make audiences laugh. However, within its pages, *Much Ado About Nothing* illuminates the oppression that societal confines enact on women. Shakespeare built in a war within a war, and I was far more interested in this former.

Established in 1973, Roe v. Wade was an (imperfect)[3] landmark law that protected the right to abortion access. In 1973, Ruth Bader Ginsburg fought for Frontiero v. Richardson, arguing the existence of gender discrimination. Using these two key historical moments in time I considered the implications they had for women and contemplated the possibility of setting my *Much Ado About Nothing* a few years in future from these events, in the mid-1970s, firmly planted in the midst of second-wave feminism[4]. With the ultimate goal of societal equality, second-wave feminism was largely concerned with reproductive, domestic and workplace rights. I considered the following questions for my production: What does a brief window into this time look like? Can this little window display and foreground how the themes of *Much Ado About Nothing* remain relevant while also following its intended dramatic purpose of being a comedy?

2.2 Research, Analysis & Application

Balancing the technical demands of heightened language and the dramatic needs of Shakespeare was and is a huge challenge. To address this, I took on a directed study in the Spring of 2022 a few months before the rehearsal process began. The course was comprised of two annotated bibliographies and a practical component with a written reflection. My goals, post the completion of the directed study were to: have an understanding of various textual approaches to Shakespeare's texts; develop a preliminary personal theory and approach to textual analysis; design a preparation process for directing Shakespeare productions; create a rehearsal process for directing Shakespeare productions; apply all the above to my directorial

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[3] It is impossible to recognise the monumental strides forward of this legal case without also acknowledging how it primarily protected higher class white women while access was still disproportionately restricted for IBPOC women and the transgender community.

[4] As above, in recognition of the impacts of second-wave feminism, it does injustice to not note issues of "white-feminism", diversity, inclusion and a lack of intersectionality that are characteristic of this early movement.

practice that are responsive to the unique needs of the production; and finally, develop and enact a personalized approach to adapting *Much Ado About Nothing.* The two annotated bibliographies housed the bulk of my non-practical research. These bibliographies aided in shaping the direction of what a feminist retelling of *Much Ado About Nothing* looked like.

Colleen Etman's Master's thesis examined adapting Shakespeare for modern audiences. Etman discusses Linda Hutcheon's proposition in *A Theory of Adaptation* that an adaptation is "second without being secondary" (4). To me, this meant that in my adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing,* when cutting the text, I could and should mold the story in ways that supported the vision I wanted to convey without negating the integrity of the piece. This guided me while I consciously rejected fidelity to the traditional genders in the play, which I chose to do in order to create additional strong non-binary and feminine roles and disrupt the pervasive cis-maleness in the play. This also guided me while I chose characters to queer. I approached the queering of aspects of the play not to center the story or struggles around being queer, but to simply integrate queerness and representation into the world I was creating. During auditions, I was delighted that the actor who was most interested in playing Don John enthusiastically came to the audition and shared their thoughts that echoed the same considerations that I had for the character, that Don John was *clearly* gay and most likely, a little bit in love with Claudio.

I also explored University of New Orleans's MFA alumni, Beau Brather's thesis, on directing *Much Ado About Nothing.* Bratcher's reflection on their rehearsal process interested me as it leaned into the realm of psychological realism. In my previous experience working on Shakespeare and Restoration pieces, speech and language were heavily emphasized. As a performer (and carrying the responsibility of characterization), I noted that there was a lack of time dedicated to exploring world-building or interrogating our characterization. Rather, it took a backseat to the rightly placed importance of language and text. As a performer, I noted that this

created a rich vocality, but felt that the storytelling sometimes lacked continuity and depth, especially with over a dozen young, undergraduate performers on stage.

For the practical component of this course, Professor Jane MacFarlane and Theatre Calgary generously allowed me to assistant direct under MacFarlane while she directed *Merry Wives of Windsor.* This was a three-week process that I hoped would assist me with the preparation of my own production. My main goals were to observe MacFarlane as she worked, and experience and learn from her expertise with the language. What I learned most from her and found most pertinent to my piece was the art of adaptation, harmonizing comedy and farce, and the dance of heightened language.

Theatre Calgary's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was unique in that MacFarlane adapted it to be 75 minutes in length and the acting company was comprised of just six performers, necessitating that most actors play multiple roles. MacFarlane, in making this adaptation, had to place the key storytelling elements at the forefront of her mind begging the question: "What is the most important element of the story that needs to be told?" I reflected on this deeply while I made cuts to my own script. As such, I focused on cuts that highlighted the story I was envisioning and that helped make the text more accessible to a university audience.

MacFarlane's directing style of *Merry Wives of Windsor* blended farce and comedy. This inspired me to think deeply about whether there was room and where for farcical elements (or as MacFarlane calls it: a complete lack of subtlety) in *Much Ado About Nothing.* While observing rehearsals, I noted that MacFarlane encouraged her cast to lean into the over-the-top, coarseness of comedy. She called this "gross storytelling".

While rehearsing for *Much Ado About Nothing,* I chose several places to lean into this 'gross storytelling'. After watching this in several performances, I have noted that integrating farcical elements enabled the audience to understand the text more clearly. For example, in Act

Three, Scene One, Margaret and Hero plan to discuss Beatrice and the two of them *clearly* understand that Beatrice is hearing everything that they are saying. By integrating farcical elements and over-the-top acting, this subtext clearly translates to the audience as well.

Lastly, the heightened and complex language that comes with creatively interacting with Shakespeare requires a kind of dance. I note here that this dance involves a precarious balance of sense-making of the text and communicating this to the audience. Witnessing MacFarlane's dance allowed me to engage in the following takeaways throughout my rehearsal process. First, she stressed lifting the energy of the thoughts, keeping vocal energy *through* the text-enabled clarity of the text. We also explored different ways of understanding the text; to paraphrase or not to paraphrase? That is the question.

Figure 1: Beatrice, Margaret and Hero in Act 3 Scene 1. Photo by Tim Nguyen.

While many directors and scholars debate the usefulness of paraphrasing Shakespeare in rehearsal and whether it connects or disconnects performers to/from the text, I had in the past found paraphrasing as a rehearsal tool extremely helpful as a performer. I expand on this as a tool throughout rehearsals in Chapter Three. At the beginning of rehearsals, MacFarlane's actors were allowed a lot of play within the text. This enabled them to find emotion and intention and let that be expressed through their voices and bodies. As we got closer to opening, she began to place focus on squeezing out the excess air and pauses. From my perspective, this highlighted the play and discovery while tightening and letting the text carry this work. MacFarlane also stressed the importance of identifying qualifiers; qualifiers are words or phrases that are used to attribute a quality to another word (adjectives, nouns). Lifting the energy of qualifiers helps the meaning of the text come through clearer.

I quickly realized I had work to do in the realm of studying prose and verse. Weeks following my placement with Theatre Calgary and prefacing my rehearsal start date, I had a conversation with MacFarlane that simplified the many intricate elements of these two text forms that are integrated and switch seamlessly through *Much Ado About Nothing.* I believe that verse and prose were indicators of status, but MacFarlane also introduced to me how they could be indicators of states of mind. Speaking in verse can indicate a character working through a thought or describing a plan. It can also indicate a sounder state of mind, thoughtfulness, and intellect. An example of this is below, where Don Pedro comes up with a plan and carefully outlines for Claudio how he will help the two of them fall in love:

DON PEDRO What need the bridge much broader than the flood?
The fairest grant is the necessity
Look, what will serve is fit: 'tis once, thou lovest,
And I will fit thee with the remedy.
I know we shall have revelling tonight:

I will assume thy part in some disguise
And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,
And in her bosom i'll unclasp my heart
And take her hearing pris'ner with the force
And strong encounter of my amourous tale:
Then after to her father will I break;
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine
In practice let us put it presently.

In comparison, a character like Benedick, who usually speaks in prose, indicates a "messier" state of mind, "word vomit", and a window into their reactionary soul. For example, when Benedick overhears that Beatrice is madly in love with him:

BENEDICK *(Coming forward)* This can be no trick: the conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady: it seems her affections have their full bent. Love me! Why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured: they say I will bear myself proudly, if I perceive the love come from her; they say too that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I did never think to marry: They say the lady is fair; 'tis a truth, I can bear them witness; and virtuous; 'tis so, I cannot reprove it; and wise, but for loving me; by my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor no great argument of her folly, for will I be horrible in love with her. I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have railed so long against marriage: but doth not the appetite alter? Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humour? No, the world must

be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married. Here comes Beatrice. By this day! She's a fair lady: I do spy some marks of love in her.

2.3 Critical Tools for Directing Shakespeare

While I used a number of resources in my preparation and rehearsal, the following resources were critical for my understanding of the text and bringing this understanding as directorial tools throughout the rehearsal process.

Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary (Schmidt 1971)

In bringing Shakespeare's text to a modern-day audience and translating the text for a contemporary audience, Schmidt's two volumes are invaluable tools to use when directing, acting, or adapting. The two volumes are a collection of every single word ever used in Shakespeare's collection and their unique definitions. These dictionaries were pulled out routinely throughout both my preparation process and rehearsals.

Using these dictionaries was exceptionally helpful in assisting the creative team and myself in understanding that the words and metaphors could have a completely different meaning than modern-day definitions. This helped us identify areas in the script where there was extra work that needed to be done to translate or clarify intention for the audiences who didn't have access to the resources that we did. For a simple example, in Act I Scene I, Don Pedro says to Benedick "well as time shall try: In time the savage bear doth bear the yoke". In a modern translation, this means that "as time and time again we see even the most uncontrollable bull is put into a harness in the end". This can then be understood to mean that even though Benedick swears against women and marriage and would rather live as a bachelor casually dating, in time, he too will get married. It is essential that this metaphor is understood

by the audience. It's a critical plot moment that Benedick's attitude towards marriage is well known amongst his friends. The performer playing Don Pedro came up with the idea of mockingly grabbing Benedick's left hand as if proposing to him on "bear the yoke" making this meaning crystal clear behind two veiled layers of metaphor and language.

Acting Shakespeare's Language (Hinds 2015)

Armed with countless exercises and examples, Andy Hinds aims to bring a full understanding of the text to readers, performers and directors. This book was particularly useful throughout my rehearsal process aiding me in activating my cast in not just speaking the text but understanding what they were saying and furthermore, *listening* and understanding to what their castmates were saying as well. In Chapter Three, I outline some exercises that I used from this book with the cast and discuss the effects.

The Directors Lab (Tsitsias 2019)

The Directors Lab is a compilation of countless artists and directors sharing their learnings and practices over their years of experience. While I found every single page of this book offered concrete, real-life examples of how to tackle directing challenges, the first chapter is an excerpt from Jeanette Lambermont-Morey's Masterclass "Heightened Language and the Art of Listening: Director as Guide" (17-47). I found this chapter particularly useful for my preparation process before rehearsals began as well as several activities to guide the performers inside the rehearsal process.

2.4 Preparation

In The Director's Lab (Tsitsias 17-22), Jeanette Lambermont-Morey outlines her process in preparation for directing heightened text. Within her preparation process and after her first initial reads, she types out the whole script within a document. As she notes, and as I

experienced, the words became tangible to me as I typed out each letter of the script. This exercise was incredibly useful as I encountered and digested the play word by word, and its form through the revisiting of the grammatical structure. I learned the text from the inside out. It also aided the process of cutting and adaptation. I will be carrying this practice forward in all future projects.

In retrospect, I acknowledge that the challenge with this process is that my relationship between spelling and typing is not strong. With the addition of heightened language and unfamiliar words, typos were being discovered well within the rehearsal process. While this was not an insurmountable setback, there was definitely time wasted in the rehearsal room having to amend our scripts. To mitigate this in the future, I think that I will combine this practice with speaking the entire text outloud to myself before offering it to the company.

After Lambermont-Morey types out the script, she proceeds to mark all the scene ends and sub-scenes. I found it useful to do this while initially typing out the script. I would then go back and re-read the entire scene and name all the sub-scenes. While this meant it took several weeks until I had a completed script, as Lambermont-Morey suggests, it was useful in "identifying the climax of every scene and its relationship to the climax of the play" (19).

As I marked all the sub-scenes, I also integrated a practice that my supervisor, Christine Brubaker introduced to me, tracking the script. Though script-tracking could be modified to fit the unique needs of a production, the basics are that it is a spreadsheet that labels each scene/sub-scene, and the characters on stage and off stage. There is also space to make notes below, where I chose to include music and lighting ideas that came to me. This was useful during initial preparation and throughout rehearsals as we discovered more about the script and its needs. It can also be colour-coded to indicate quick changes, fights, intimacy, and so on. I used the top line to mark the trajectory of time passing and the time of the day for my designers. I provided this tracking to stage management, all the designers, and the production team. This

enabled us to all be on the same page and have a source document to return to. Outside of practicality, this practice and map of the play helped me grow a very close relationship to the text, its world, and the characters. It is also helpful in casting as it helps identify characters that can be doubled. Below is an example of what it looks like, though I have modified the tracking sheet to see how it might look before auditions.

	1	1A	1B	1C	1D	2	3	3A
ACT 1	**The Merry War**	**The Return To Messina**	**Such a Jewel**	**Benedick, The Not Married Man**	**Claud-Pedro**	**I heard...**	**Bitter Don John**	**The Plan**
TIME FRAME	*first day*	*same*	*same*	*same*	*same*	*few hours later*	*soon after*	*same*
ACTOR ONE - (F) - BEATRICE	BEATRICE	BEATRICE						
ACTOR TWO - (F) - HERO	HERO	HERO						
ACTOR THREE - (M) - BENEDICK		BENEDICK	BENEDICK	BENEDICK				
ACTOR FOR - (M) - CLAUDIO		CLAUDIO	CLAUDIO	CLAUDIO	CLAUDIO			
ACTOR FIVE - (M/F/NB) - LEONATO	LEONATO	LEONATO				LEONATO		
ACTOR SIX - (F) DOGBERRY, INNOGEN	INNOGEN (S)	INNOGEN (S)				INNOGEN(S)		
ACTOR SEVEN - (M) DON PEDRO		DON PEDRO		DON PEDRO	DON PEDRO			
ACTOR EIGHT (F) - MARGARET	MARGARET	MARGARET						
ACTOR NINE - (M/F/NB) - DON JOHN		DON JOHN					DON JOHN	DON JOHN
ACTOR TEN - (M/F/NB) WATCH 1, EXTRA								
ACTOR ELEVEN - (M) - ANTONIO						ANTONIO		
ACTOR TWELVE (M/F/NB) - CONRADE							CONRADE	CONRADE
ACTOR THIRTEEN (M/F/NB) - BORACHIO					BORACHIO			BORACHIO
ACTOR FOURTEEN - (M/F/NB) FRIAR, VERGES								
ACTOR FIFTEEN - (M/F/NB) - FRIAR, EXTRA								
Notes:	Intro music - TC - FM						***World building music for DJ***	
COLOUR LEGEND								
Double Cast								
HIDING								
In Disguise								
Quick Change								
Super Duper Duper Quick Change								

Figure 2: Tracking Sheet for Much Ado About Nothing

Lambermont-Morey also suggests making an image-based script (19) to express her visual representation of the script. She asserts that this aids in her seeing themes that she might not have identified otherwise. She provided the example of the motif of water. I did begin making an image-based script with every *intention* of finishing it and presenting it to the cast, but as I progressed it became less of a priority. Looking back, I think that I may have found it more

useful had I done this practice physically rather than digitally as it would have engaged me through a tactile, creative path.

After completing the script and its subsequent tracking, I engaged with a fascinating practice suggested by Robert Scanlan in “Principles of Dramaturgy”. Scanlan presents what is called a plot-bead diagram to create a manifestation of time for a dramatic piece. “The book begins with form, which is the central mystery of the art of the drama. In all performance arts, *time* is the difficult media …” (3). Scanlan suggests that while spatial form may be analogous to time, space and temporality are distinct. Likening drama to the visual arts, wherein there is a composition of relation, Scanlan suggests the same can be done for drama in relation to “when the parts occur in relation to each other, and how long each part lasts, and at what tempo (3)”. Thus, he introduces a visual representation of time, called a plot-bead diagram, separating distinct events and time within any performance with “event beads” representing units of duration. These are what he calls “formal units of composition in the artifact we call a play” that make a “formal map of the play so that the mind can grasp it as ‘one thing,’ a formal whole” (3-4).

Previously, I had created a plot-bead diagram when devising a piece and found it interesting and useful in discovering the form of the piece. Because Shakespeare follows a more traditional Aristotelian structure[5], the structure is less of a concern, and it is perhaps therefore more predictable. I had a curiosity about how a plot-bead diagram may assist and inform blocking.

[5] A traditional three or five act structure of drama with a clear protasis (beginning), epitasis (middle) and catastrophe (end).

Though he discussed the principles in length, Scanlan does not provide a step-by-step, “one size fits all” manual on how to discern the specificity of the shape and form of each individual bead. He does identify the following principles and guidelines: that “one can’t draw the plot-bead diagram of a play until one had analyzed the play … to isolate the individual beads for the diagram” (25); that “the beads appear in the drawing in the same *sequence* as the events they represent; they chart the course of the performance through time” (3-4); and that “act and scene divisions are a natural starting point” (25). Using these principles, I chose to do a plot-bead diagram for each individual act, using the sub-scenes I created as the individual beads. Allowing a mixture of duration, emotional temperature and relationality I let my impulses guide how I felt the shape, size and composition of what my version of a plot-bead diagram looked like.

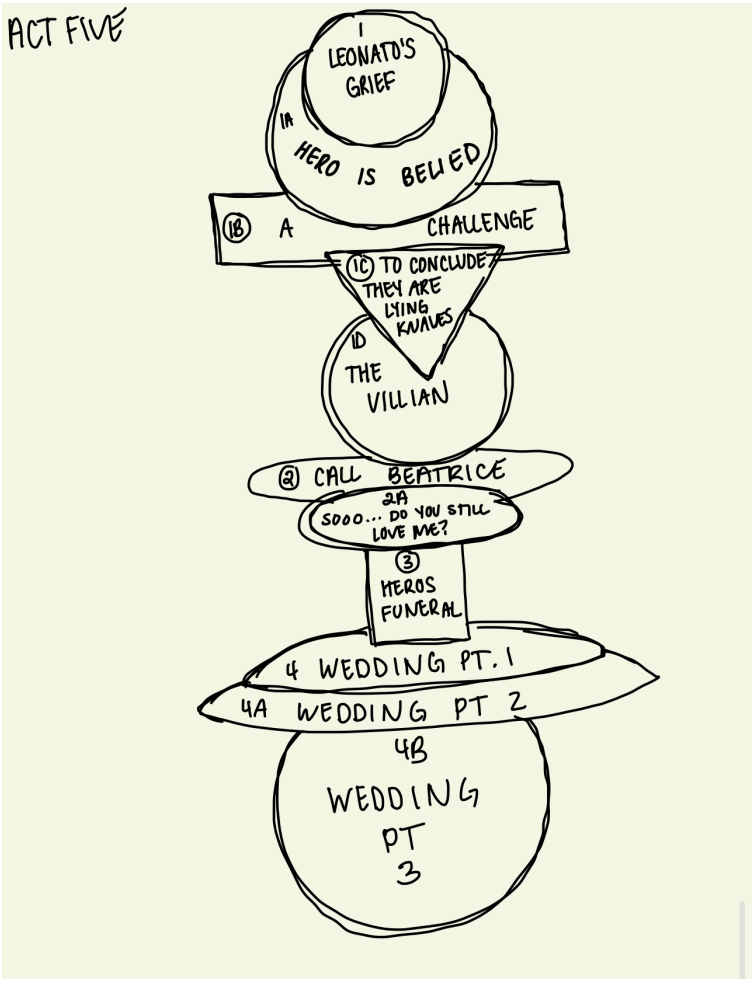

Figure 3: Plot-Bead Diagram for Act 5

I considered how the sub-scenes affected the other: Was there a disruption that suggests they were interlocked? Did one need to exist to reasonably lead into the other and suggest that they ballooned out of each other? I used a digital notebook so that I could edit and revise as I discovered more throughout the rehearsal process. I brought these plot-bead diagrams into rehearsal on the first day for the actors and designers to look at. Admittedly, they did not seem as excited as I was about how this would influence our show, but in Chapter 3.3 I will reflect on how the plot-bead diagram guided our blocking process.

CHAPTER 3: COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY

3.1 The Design Process

I worked with three designers for *Much Ado About Nothing:* Bonnie Garland (costume), Jared Raschke (set, lighting, and props) and Anton De Groot (sound). Design is not an element that I have worked with much and as such, it was a significant area of learning for me. The process ended up being very positive and I consider myself privileged to have worked with these three collaborators.

In the early summer of 2022, I began preliminary design meetings with Garland and Raschke. We initiated this process by talking about where the play was situated in time. By this point, I had begun to attach myself to the idea of the 70s and was curious about this political environment as outlined earlier in this thesis. Both Garland and Raschke seemed excited by this as well. I knew several things coming into this meeting: a time frame of the mid-'70s *after* 1973, I knew that the design had to reflect the affluence of the families, there was no war and instead, I wanted the "soldiers" (the guests) to come from a city environment, rather than an army. They were coming to a family's cabin to relax, positioning the play at a vacation home.

I was still pondering the genders of all the characters. I recognized this as a challenge for the costume designer, Garland as I wanted to reserve the right to assign gender based on who I would be casting. This casting would not happen until early September. I already knew that I needed to see how people fit into the roles rather than having a set gender breakdown. In these early conversations, I did not have a specific geographical location for the play. I knew it was a vacation home in Alberta rather than Italy. My choice to take it outside of Italy was to integrate the themes of the play in a way that I hoped would feel closer to the audience.

When I told set designer Raschke I wanted it to be in a fictional Messina, Alberta, he offered up the idea of a fictional Banff-inspired cabin. This moment resonated with me so deeply.

Figure 4: Leonato ruminating outside the family cabin. Act 5 Scene 1. Photo by Tim Nguyen.

and it felt perfect. It placed our show in a world that was close to the audiences that would be coming and enabled Raschke to create a set that was fluid and worked with his lighting design to create several different locations: a “prison”, a courtyard, a garden, a church, a party room, and allowed lots of hidey-holes for our characters in the garden scenes where over-hearing conversations without being seen is critical to the story. Raschke created a cabin that, with its A-frame and wrap-around deck, had such a magnitude of size that audience members couldn’t

help but reflect on the affluence of both the world and the hosting family. This concept was perfect for our show.

One of the opportunities when working with Garland is that they carry a wealth of knowledge about history and clothing. We needed many costumes for *Much Ado About Nothing*, base looks for all the characters, party outfits, wedding outfits, etc. One of my main struggles with the costume design was the logic of the masquerade party. I considered both a costume party and a decade's party. When I brought these ideas to Garland, they brought up that a costume party could be interesting in speaking to the internalization of who the characters are or who they want to be. She also brought up that in the 70s, establishments in Banff would actually rent out costumes from the University of Calgary for masquerade events. This idea resonated more for me than a costume party, as it would again, speak to the affluence of these families. And, because of that historical information that she brought to the table, the authenticity of the costume design, along with its beauty, was much of the feedback I heard once the show opened.

Figure 5: Borachio and Margaret at the Masquerade Party. Act 2 Scene 1.

Figure 6: Garland's costume design for Innogen.

Figure 7: Garland's costume design for Claudio.

I had my initial meeting with Anton deGroot in September to begin discussing his sound design. I pitched my concept of the time frame, highlighted the story elements that were important to me, and showed him a playlist I had created on Spotify, *Much Ado About the 70s*. One of the most energizing things about working with deGroot was his willingness to fall into the world we had begun creating, and he began adding songs to the playlist. Where I brought Fleetwood Mac and Disco, he brought folk tones with Joni Mitchell and Gladys Knight & The Pips.

I felt as if deGroot and I worked very well together. When I showed him my tracking sheet, I had made notes of a few song ideas, where transition music might be needed, and some more obvious sounds like rain or bells. DeGroot absorbed that information and brought offers to me for all the above, but also helped build the worlds and the time frame by using the information I had provided about the time of day and whether the scene was inside or outside.

Once we began using these sounds in rehearsals there were additions and places we needed to strip back, but in my opinion, the sound worked seamlessly with the show and was a huge element in establishing the world of this production.

3.2 Dramaturging Shakespeare

Though adapting and dramaturging Shakespeare is done all the time, it still felt very bold of me to be taking one of the most prolific writers of the Elizabethan/Jacobean Era, and one of his most popular plays and choose what stays and what goes. This was a necessity as one of the requirements given to me by the production team was to get the show under two hours, including a fifteen-minute intermission. The majority of my cuts were done over the summer. I watched other productions to see where they made cuts and thought about why, and I cut the parts of the script that I felt didn't contribute to the plot or were particularly wordy and therefore challenging for a contemporary university audience.

After auditions, I held workshops with some of the cast to hear the script aloud and further dramaturg my adaptation. This allowed me time to envision the transitions with bodies, space and time, and ensure that my adaptation fell within the time constraints given as well as address issues with the adaptation (such as plot holes, or key information missed).

My initial goal was to hear the text outloud for the first time. I did fear that by having a "first read" outside of typical rehearsals, the cast might try to make character choices before we began that kind of creative discovery. To me, this was an issue because I feared that they may become attached to those elements during the workshops, which could be a hard habit to break once we got into rehearsals. I stressed to them the importance of letting the text work for them and resist locking into character decisions. The show ran at one hour and fifty minutes, which meant that I still had to cut about five minutes. I felt, and as my supervisor later pointed out to

me, that many of Leonato's speeches in Acts 4 and 5 were still running too long, so as we got into the rehearsal process, I began cutting away more and more.

There was also a plot hole that I hadn't noticed that Garland pointed out to me in the first week of rehearsal. Margaret's character was actually comprised of three characters, Margaret, the Messenger, and Ursula. Because these characters appear in scenes together, it took some creative work to bend lines to meld them into one, unified character. However, there was a point in Act 3 where the adaptation suggested that Margaret was in two places at once, which necessitated an additional cut.

3.3 "*Enter 15 Actors, Stage Right"*

Before every rehearsal process, I get the "first-day jitters". I worry about not having all the answers and not asking the right questions. I worry about being underqualified. I worry about being inexperienced. I worry about being liked. I worry. Welcoming a large company of actors into the space was new for me. At our first read-through, I sat and fidgeted as the performers and members from production wandered in. The first word I spoke to the company relaxed me and with each word after, it the tightness I had felt loosened more and more. It's always that first word that softens me.

Our first read-through ran at 95 minutes including stumbles over the language and giggles as the performers heard jokes for the first time. I felt confident that with cuts, and the addition of blocking I would be running at the proper time when the run-for-production[6] came two weeks later.

As part of my practice, I begin every rehearsal process by outlining the expectations of the room alongside community agreements. To me, these are separate but related activities, but

[6] A Run-For-Production is when the production team comes into rehearsal to see a full run of the play for the first time. This helps support the process and identify any areas of concern in preparation for bringing the play to the stage.

both are integral to my process. Whereas expectations are the “non-negotiables” that I (and the room) need such as respect, timeliness, communication and creative buy-in (their willingness to engage fully with the creative vision of the show), community agreements are a collective agreement. I find that a community agreement is an essential, critical step that both creates room for the performers in the room and tailors the space to the unique energies of that particular company at that particular time. I begin by outlining my requests. First, I ask for an “apology-free zone”, an agreement that we don’t apologize unless we cause harm. This is important for several reasons. First, unnecessary apologies suck up the precious rehearsing time we have. I have also found that the inherent nature of apologies that implies “wrongfulness” creates a creative barrier, a block in the process. By removing it from the rehearsal room there is more risk-taking which can lead to incredible discoveries. I then invite the team to make offers for what they need in the rehearsal space. I have been asked for surgical specificity in feedback and direction, space for exploration, to be “allowed to be wrong before [they] can be right”, and to ask them questions to guide them towards answers. A collective room agreement differs and shifts from process to process.

Lastly, I always begin with a check-in before every rehearsal. This is based on my expectation that we work from where we are and meet others where they are. There are two primary warm-ups that I do to help establish where people are. The first was introduced to me by an undergraduate student called “Worry/Joy” where everyone states a worry they have that day and something that brings them joy. The other one I like is everyone simply states what colour they feel that day. Though these are quick, bite-sized check-ins, the creative team is generally able to leave the day behind and immerse themselves in the discovery of the play.

Directing Shakespeare as a solo director was completely new to me. To address the nervousness inherent in this challenge, I broke my goals into smaller, more manageable chunks. To do this, I listed the “pillar” dates. Pillar date are what I call the main goals I must

achieve by a certain date. Looking at the allocated rehearsal time, I marked six pillar dates in my rehearsal calendar starting with the opening night and working back to the first day of rehearsal. I then worked from the beginning to see how I would meet each of the deliverables. I like to discover these deliverables through this backwards approach as it helps me conceptualize and allocate the time needed. Within the windows that are created by creating pillar dates, I know what the main goals are within that time. For example, between pillar date five and six, the ultimate goal was to accomplish table work[7] for the entire play and engage the cast in creative questions about the play, guiding them towards the unified vision that had been created for the play.

Much Ado About Nothing Pillar Dates from Opening to First Day Rehearsal

1. Opening - November 26th
2. Rehearsal Hall to Theatre - November 15th
3. Hard Off-Book - November 1st
4. Run for Production - October 26th.
5. Blocking Begins - October 14th.
6. Rehearsals & Table Work begins - October 11th.

My main concern was learning how to use the time I would usually allocate for a contemporary work (devised or scripted) to Shakespeare. Shakespeare has so many other hurdles such as language and comprehension along with everything else we need to discover. With this in mind, I added some “wiggle” room, unallocated time, so that I was setting up myself for success. I had four weeks of rehearsal to get from the first rehearsal until we began technical rehearsals in the theatre where the focus is on the integration of design elements and less room

[7] Table work is the process of guiding the creative team through your artistic vision of the piece, teasing out other ideas in the room. It is the initial period for script discovery. Despite what the name suggests, table work can take the form of many exercises including physical exploration but lacks the burden of staging demands.

for acting direction. The first few days were going to be entirely table work and dedicated to exploring the language, introducing the cast to the adaptation and the scenes, and generating a deep understanding of the major themes. The next chunk was dedicated to blocking the entire show to create a shape for the production team. After that, it was my goal to disrupt, create, explore, get highly detailed with moments and hone our show so that we could arrive at technical rehearsals with a deep understanding of the play and characters.

As much as I sometimes wish there was, there is no fail-safe manual for directing, no one methodology or secret to the flawless rehearsal process. The lack of clear direction on how to direct used to be a source of anxiety for me. But now it is permission: to experiment, to play, to fail, to be responsive to the creative partners, and to allow breath into the process.

I have an intimate relationship with table work that not all actors share. Some actors revel in it as I do, and some are like horses in the gate desperate to get on their feet and running. Usually, I facilitate table work as a hybrid between some physical exploration and at-the-table analysis. In working with Shakespeare, my major concern was that with the text as the emphatic element[8]; it was critical that the language and text were clear, so for the first time I led table work entirely at the table. I would introduce the sub-scene and its name to the cast and have them read it aloud. After that, I would lead a discussion about what was happening, identifying big-picture themes and ideas. After hearing what their thoughts were, I provided my own insight and guided them through my thoughts on the text and meaning. After answering any remaining questions, we'd read that sub-scene again, and move on to the next. After the third day of table work, we had made it through the script with extra time to spare before the end of rehearsal. I asked the actors to move away from the table and we began exploring the play on

[8] The emphatic element is the foundation, core, and heart of the work. This could be an aesthetic vision, the language, or an element.

its feet with the text. The energy in the room rose immediately and the next few weeks of exploration were an excellent conduit to harness that new energy.

The next period of rehearsal time was dedicated to creating a shape for the show. I provided the performers with my plot-bead diagram to show them what the composition of *Much Ado About Nothing* looked like inside my head. It was very clear that they did not find the diagram nearly as exciting as I did, though some tried to pretend they did. I personally found the use of the diagram helpful as it gave me a visual representation of the composition which informed my blocking and transitions. For example, was the next sub-scene charted as an interruption? Perhaps the performers for that sub-scene come barreling in with no regard for what's happening before? Is the next building off the previous shape? Then, the transition should be smooth and build on and highlight the previous scene.

I quickly learned that blocking and exploring the script at the same time was different from previous pieces I had worked on. I found myself trying to dismantle and challenge my internal sense of urgency while battling the feeling that I was racing the clock before I had to show the production team that our show had a shape at the top of the third week of rehearsals. Because of this, much of our character work began to take a backseat to blocking.

Now, months later, I am reflecting on the sense of urgency I felt and how I could have navigated the balancing act of trying to get a "product" for the production team and allowing more exploration and play. I think that it would have been okay to loosen the shape we created, allow more ambiguity, and that I could have led the cast through more playful explorations.

Conversely, after the production run, there was a release of that urgent feeling. We were positioned in a place to build on the work we had done and focus primarily on characterization, storytelling, and world-building and let that inform our blocking changes. I led the actors through various exercises to help this process. One major concern I had early on was that it might be

possible that the actors were focusing so hard on understanding their lines that they didn't seem to be fully reacting and *listening* to their scene counterparts. During rehearsals, I led them through a series of exercises to strengthen these areas.

3.4 Leading Through Creativity: Exercises and Exploration

The first exercise is outlined in *Acting Shakespeare's Language* and is called "Question, Explanation, Order" (Q/E/O). The author proposes that (almost) everything we say is one of those three. Prior to bringing this exercise to rehearsal, I identified several areas in the script where I felt the performers needed to strengthen the connection to their text. Some actors worked by themselves, and some worked in pairs or groups, and I instructed them to engage in a pass of the scene, and then discuss with each other and reflect on what was happening. Next, I asked them to go through the same scene again identifying the Q/E/O's. Then, to do another pass and verbally say Q/E/O before the line. The goal of this is to remind themselves of the intention of the coming text and allow it to influence them. Below is an example of what this would look like.

BEATRICE *[Question]* What fire is in mine ears? *[Question]* Can this be true?

[Question] Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?

[Order] Contempt, farewell! *[Order]*And maiden pride, adieu!

[Explanation] No glory lives behind the back of such.

[Order] And, Benedick, love on; *[Explanation]* I will requite thee,

Taming my wild hard to thy loving hand:

[Explanation] If thou dost love, *[Order]* my kindness shall incite thee

To bind our loves up in a holy band;

[Explanation] For others say thou dost deserve, and I

Believe it better than reportedly.

After completing that, they were to do a third pass of the scene without stating Q/E/O and reflect on the changes it made. During this reflection, we discovered that by specifically stating the motive triggered the response/motive of the scene. It also allowed them to consider the line *before* they spoke which in turn helped them translate that into thinking *on* the line after finishing the exercise. We also discovered that it revealed power dynamics in scenes and aided in discovering the intricacies of relationships. For example, when Borachio and Conrade are in a scene together, Borachio often orders. When Borachio is with Don John, they don't order and they question and explain more.

To guide the performers in listening to what their scene counterparts were saying, I led them in an exercise proposed in the third chapter of *The Directors Lab* (Tsitsias). Lambermont-Moray outlines her exercise "Do I Understand You To Mean" (DIUYTM). The goal of this exercise was to establish how important it is to listen and understand (or, misunderstand) to react. Similarly, to the previous exercise, I paired and grouped the performers in areas in the script where I thought this could be strengthened. I explained to them that after taking a pass at the scene and discussing what it meant, they were to go through and take the scene much slower. Before saying their line, they would attempt to summarize what the other person had just said, process how this impacted and affected them, and then respond with their line. We then reflected on how this impacted their responses and deepened their understanding of the text. An example of what this exercise looks like is below.

CLAUDIO Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?

BENEDICK *[Do I Understand You To Mean that you are asking me if I noticed Leonato's daughter?]* I noted her not; but I looked on her.

CLAUDIO *[DIUYTM that you looked at her but didn't find anything worth noting about her?]* Is she not a modest young lady?

BENEDICK *[DIUYTM that you think she looks kind and well mannered?]* Do you Question me, as an honest man should do, for my simple true judgement; or would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?

At the conclusion of this exercise, we reflected on how it worked in the rehearsal room. Outside of general clarity and understanding, we established that this exercise helps identify WHO you are talking to (and is it different than who you are reacting to?) when there are multiple people in scenes. It also aided in understanding where there are misunderstandings, and what this might mean to all characters in the scene. It also helped identify other characters' true motives and the stakes for that character. Finally, these exercises connected the fluidity between thoughts and onstage reactions.

In every play I do, I like to lead the actors through a "speed-dating" exercise. I created this exercise to be used in the rehearsal room when working on a play that needed extensive relationship building and have found that it is incredibly useful on any piece. I have all performers put two lines of chairs facing each other and take a seat. I assign or ask them to choose somewhere within the play to "play" inside (before or during). For ambiance, I play jazz music and for five minutes they talk to another character, asking questions, and learning more about each other, themselves, and the relationships on stage. Once the timer goes off, they

switch to the next character. While I encourage them to allow organic conversation and exploration to happen, I also gave them several prompt questions such as: What do you want to know about the other person? What do you want them to know about you? What do you have in common? What do you not have in common? Do you remember how you met?

I have found that this exercise allows exponential discovery. They may learn about a character that they only speak about and not to; or it might impact how they approach a character on stage. For example, is their body language open? Confrontational? Standoffish? This exercise helps them solidify their opinions of others and understand how other characters view them. It brings up questions that they might not have considered about their character and illuminates where their character's impulses and interests live. Overall, it is a fun, interactive way to lead actors through their characters and I find it very effective, especially for younger performers who are still learning to do this work.

In *Much Ado About Nothing,* status is a fundamental part of the dynamics of the play. To help the actors understand how their status changes through the play, and how it affects their physicality, I led them through a status walk exercise. These are the instructions I give the performers: *"Walk around the room and ground yourself in the space. Take a few breaths as just yourself. We're going to explore status on a scale from 1-10. Ten would be the absolute highest such as royalty, celebrities. A one would be the absolute lowest status. Let's start at a ten, so, begin to allow yourself to live in this space as a ten. You might feel your shoulders go back or lower, perhaps you are leading more with your hips. Take a few moments to walk as a ten. Now find your one… (and so on). Now, begin the play. At the very beginning of the play, what number are you? Or what number do you perceive yourself to be? Find that number and start walking as that number."*

I guide them through various parts of the play and encourage them to discover if their status number changes and explore how it lives in their bodies. After that, I ask them to choose particular parts in the play, find their status number, and then speak their lines while continuing to walk on the stage. I found that this exercise was very helpful in affecting their body language on stage. In a play like *Much Ado About Nothing,* where affluence and status affects the relationality on stage, status and perceived status is integral to performance.

As we approached our technical rehearsals, there were still a few spaces where I needed the performers to open up the blocking and trust their creative impulses. To aid this, we did some impulse work as a warm-up. The first is called Riverwork[9]. This was introduced to me by a student on another project. This exercise connects the performers with their impulses by asking them to simply exist in the space for a timed period, usually 5-10 minutes. For the duration of the exercise, there are (almost) no rules and they engage with the space and themselves however they need. It may look like crawling underneath a bench or making sounds. I always find that after this exercise, the actors seem to have a fuller sense of trust in themselves to play in the space and it translates into the production as well.

Second, I led them through flocking[10], another similar impulse exercise. Introduced to me by fellow MFA Directing Candidate Randi Edmundson, and adapted to fit my practice, I have all of the actors stand in the middle of the rehearsal space, clumped together and facing one way. They start motionless and are then prompted to follow the impulses of *the group* and moving *together.* They may sway, walk, or make sounds that become uniform. Again, in my experience, this has always translated to them trusting their scene partners to follow and respond to impulses and intent within the room.

[9] Originating from Jerzy Grotowski's Plastiques work.
[10] Originating from Anne Bogart's Viewpoints work.

3.5 Technical Rehearsals, Crises of Confidence and Making Friends

We began our first rehearsals on the stage on November 15th. We had one rehearsal on the stage prior to our technical rehearsals beginning. Up until this day, I had felt confident in the piece I had created with my team. Once I saw the piece on its actual stage, a crisis of confidence began to seep in. While all the design aspects were either great or on their way to becoming it, the problem was with my staging. While the new space created beautiful levels and openings, there were also new obstacles. There was a huge porch in the way of some major moments. While Raschke had taken care to specifically warn me of the sightline issues that the porch and angles might reveal in a deep-thrust audience, I hadn't grasped the reality or magnitude of it until getting into the theatre itself.

At this moment, I was convinced that the entire show had just crumbled in on itself. I called in my supervisor to look at what my concerns were, and thankfully she assured me that all was not lost. While I tried to tell her all the reasons that the show was broken beyond repair, she suggested I do something that I hadn't even considered which was to make friends with the space. I had to make friends with the set and get to know it again. I had to know how it felt to exist on it now that it existed on a large scale. While I had encouraged my cast to do this, I hadn't considered doing it myself.

After this, before each cue-to-cue rehearsal, I went in early. I walked the set, I sat on it, I laid down on it, I followed the blocking trajectory of moments I was stuck on, and I even rolled on it. I learned the relationship that each space of the stage had with the audience. I also had to rely on my actors (and my designers) to make friends with change. During cue to cue, I was getting up at every spare moment we had to adjust the performers slightly, to open them up. I

encouraged them to make choices during our technical runs, to acknowledge that changes had to be made, and to feel free to make them and if it didn't work, we would adjust it more.

This was the most stressful part of our rehearsal process for me. I worried about the audience's reception of the play, sightlines, and storytelling. I found, in this moment, that releasing myself from the sense of urgency that I felt to make the show "perfect", and taking these moments to tweak, adjust, and encourage play, ensured that those elements were not lost. When I look back, there are still moments I worry about. For example. I know that each night, the one audience member that chose to sit at the bottom of the stage right bank had moments that they missed out on. I also know that in these moments, I allowed myself to accept failure (or what I perceived as such) into my heart and in the space and used it as a learning experience. What did I learn? Stage decks are big and not transparent, and it is imperative to anticipate as many of the needs of the set in the rehearsal hall as you can. I know now that this will come with experience and time. In future productions I will begin making friends with the stage as it begins to be built. I will observe its bones grow and stretch into the world our team created. I will learn its sightlines and pathways and bring that knowledge more clearly to the rehearsal room.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH STUDY ON CONSENT-INFORMED REHEARSAL SPACES FOR UNIVERSITY THEATRE TRAINING

This chapter outlines my research on consent-informed rehearsal practices for university theatre processes. I had originally come into my graduate studies with the intent of researching the psychological effects of university theatre rehearsals in students with an interest in consent culture. When I determined that I wanted to investigate a more practice-based approach to my MFA, this work blended seamlessly with my study of rehearsal culture and my approach to directing. This research was approved by the University of Calgary Ethics Board under certificate number REB22-0885 as part of my thesis production.

There is significant evidence of sexual violence (SV) and rape culture at Canadian universities. In 2019, 71% of students experienced unwanted sexualized attention on campus (Statistics Canada). This chapter considers the increased risk of SV and the hindrance of creating and learning for students resulting from the collaboration and vulnerability required in studying performance and how directorial practices can mitigate this.[11] The study of theatre in post-secondary and the professional theatre community is not immune to this critical problem. Since 2018, there have been numerous instances of SV/abuses of power reported in the Canadian theatre industry (Fauler; McLaren). SV is a prevalent concern for young actors joining the industry (CBC). Given the considerable crossover of professional artists working as sessional instructors without adequate training (Brubaker and Wigmore), and that consent practices are largely voluntary in post-secondary, harm, abuse and SV still occur (Salvino et al. 12). Evidence-based work suggests that having an actionable prevention plan can reduce rape culture (CDC 5; Orchowski et al. 812; Senn et al.) and result in improved policies at institutions.

[11] Note that while I acknowledge and stress the incredible importance of the increased risk of SV for different genders, sexualities, races, etc., such demographics are not within the scope of this particular study - this study places a primary focus on first, addressing the major thematic concerns.

For example, Students for Consent Culture Canada provided their SV action plan to universities. Within the following year, there was an increase in consent culture training, improved university policies, and many Student Unions signed their action plans.

To conduct this research, I recruited volunteers from the cast of *Much Ado About Nothing.* They first completed an initial survey that aimed to collect a general and overarching view of their experiences navigating consent in university theatre spaces. Further, the survey sought to explore if their unique experiences with (or without) the presence of consent culture affected their abilities to be fully engaged in the creation process. A total of eight students participated in the research study. I preface my findings and work with the acknowledgement that the sample size of this study is small and that to gather an accurate and diverse perspective a larger group would be needed. After conducting a thematic analysis of the results from the first survey, I have extracted five key, critical concerns in university theatre[12] and have developed recommendations from my data extraction.

4.1 Concerns in University Theatre Consent Culture.

1. Understanding & Obtaining Consent
    a. 50% of participants had been in a situation where they were directed, without being asked consent, to engage in an act that they felt warranted consent. Over half of these participants felt that this negatively affected their ability to be in the creative process.
    b. Several participants discussed the desire for the recognition of the fluidity of consent.
2. Education and Knowledge

[12]Please note that these reflections were strictly on their experiences in a university theatre context.

a. 75% of participants felt that there was a lack of adequate education about consent in university spaces. One participant said that there was an “extremely worrying lack of education regarding [consent] in university [theatre].”

3. Actionable Prevention Plan
    a. 87.5% of participants noted that they had never been taught nor provided with an actionable prevention plan to mitigate the culture of sexual violence in theatre spaces.
4. Unwanted Sexualized Attention and Behaviour from Peers
    a. 62.5% of the participants reported receiving unwanted sexualized behaviours and attention towards them while inside university theatre spaces.
5. Power
    a. It is impossible to discuss consent and not acknowledge power dynamics. Numerous participants reflected on experiences where there was implicit power dynamics, a sense of obligation, or the presence of peers that affected their ability to effectively consider consent.

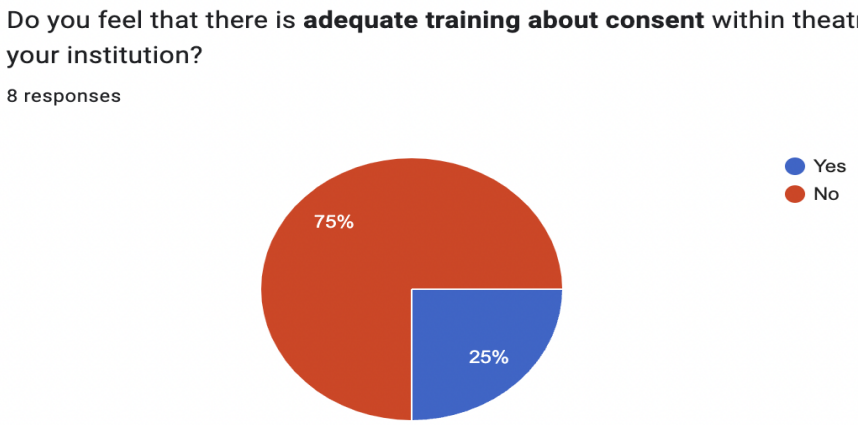

Figure 8: Pie chart from participant survey

4.2 A Proposed Framework

After conducting this thematic analysis, I developed a proposed framework to address these concerns. I enfolded these practices into my rehearsal process for *Much Ado About Nothing.* Below, I outline this framework as well as my personal surmising's on the effectiveness of these methods.

1. Consent
    a. Acknowledge Power Dynamics
    b. Reduce Obtaining Consent with Spectators
    c. Recognize The Fluidity of Consent & Plan B

I propose a framework that considers the complexity of consent. First, in asking for consent it is imperative that power dynamics are acknowledged, not ignored. It does not do justice to students to pretend that there is no power dynamic between them and a professor, staff member or a director. While this power dynamic cannot be erased, by acknowledging it we can recognize how they play formally, informally, and culturally and be aware of our individual responsibilities in the space.

To reduce external pressures, consent should be obtained with the least amount of peer spectators as possible. Asking students for consent, especially for intimate scenes and in front of their peers, places undue peer pressure on them. By asking them semi-privately (pulling them aside or sending an advance email) you allow students to maintain this agency.

Consent is water. It ebbs and flows. To recognize consent is to recognize its fluidity. When staging a scene, it is inevitable that touch and exploration will happen organically. To combat overstepping a boundary or trigger, implement a daily check-in that not only establishes where each cast member is coming from that day, but if any have any boundaries that day (new or old). Maybe they've been exposed to a new negative experience that created a new boundary or perhaps they have a sore neck that can't be touched. For scenes of intimacy in

scenes, establish a Plan B that still conveys the dramatic function of the intimacy, but recognizes their boundaries may change throughout the show.

2. Education

The initial survey suggested that students felt there was a lack of adequate, industry specific, consent-focused education. I believe that there should be a comprehensive consent focused curriculum delivered to the students on a yearly basis *before* they begin extensive course work. This sets the expectations clearly and concisely right at the beginning of the year.

3. Actionable Prevention Plan

In 2017, after conducting extensive and thorough research, Students for Consent Culture Canada provided evidence-based Sexual Violence Action Plans to university student unions. This was done "with the intention to give student unions the tools they need to end campus sexual violence through evidence-based programs and effective action." (SFCC). In their report, they outline the three basic pillars of their action plan: prevention, support, and advocacy, alongside twenty actionable steps for student groups to adopt.

- PREVENT sexual violence and eliminate rape culture on our campuses.
- SUPPORT survivors and create a culture of survivor-centrism at our institutions.
- ADVOCATE for policy and legislative reforms at the campus, provincial and national levels (Salvino, Gilchrist and Cooligan-Pang 5)[13].

In their "One Year Later Report", SFCC reports that in the year following the initial release of the action plan 42 student groups signed onto the action plan, affecting 650 000 students and reaching eight provinces (12). As a result, there was an increase in consent culture training with more than 1500 students taking part in said training (8). Because of this, I suggest that university theatre and drama programs should be adapting the SFCC action plan

[13] These three pillars are outlined in depth on page 7-11 of the Our Turn Action Plan.

until more research can be conducted on how to implement an action plan that incorporates theatre's unique curriculum.

4.3 Application

While in my role as director, it was not within the scope of my study nor am I qualified to tackle the role of educator for the students, nor did I integrate SFCC's Action Plan. The primary focus was to integrate directorial consent-focused strategies. I implemented[14] a number of strategies outlined below. Further, I sent out a closing survey to participants to reflect on their rehearsal experience.

First, I implemented a daily practice that sought to give students an opportunity to state any boundaries they had that day. In rehearsal, this practice was met with a resounding appreciation. In the closing survey, 71.4% of participants said that this practice allowed them to engage more fully in creation and positively contributed to their mental well-being, while the remainder said this practice neutrally affected their creation and mental well-being. All survey participants reflected that they felt it was a good practice and 71.4% stated it was necessary. However, I note, and several of the participants note that this practice happens publicly and in front of peers and one participant reflected that they *suspect* that it's also possible that this practice could be restrictive and that it's possible for participants to not state a boundary due to it being a public and collaborative practice.

While I implemented a formal, daily check-in to address the intersection of organic touching that may happen during blocking and the fluidity of consent, I have spent the months following our rehearsal period reflecting on its effectiveness. I am curious about a further

[14]Because not all of the cast agreed to partake in this research, I am restricted by the Research and Ethics Board from reflecting on my surmising's on integrating a Plan B for scenes of intimacy.

exploration of methodologies[15] that accomplishes addressing the fluidity of consent, creating a structure that lets students know they are supported, and notifying the collective of individual boundaries without putting a spotlight on the individual. I admit, this is a large feat and will require further study and research on my part.

Also outlined as a critical concern, this directly affects pressures to say "yes" during the check-in. The daily practice was implemented with the knowledge that this may be an issue. When I anticipated that a particular moment in the play would require a more private and less public space, I reduced spectators while asking for consent, and asked performers privately. 71.4% of participants said that being asked for consent privately was a good practice that allowed them to be fully engaged in the creative process, while the remainder of the participants took a neutral stance.

Though I could not implement my proposed framework regarding education and an action plan, I thought it would be valuable to engage students in the other areas of my proposed feedback and asked them to reflect on it in the second survey. 85.7% of survey participants felt that conducting research to implement a University Theatre Consent Culture Action Plan (in accordance with SFCC) would be useful in university theatre departments, while 14.3% were unsure.

Because our preliminary research suggested that there should be more consent-based education for students in drama, I proposed annual workshops for students and educators that focus on the foundations of consent culture and intimacy within theatre spaces. 71.4% of participants feel that the implementation of these workshops should be mandatory with the rest

[15] Recently, I was in a puppetry workshop, and we were talking about rituals in art practices. I brought up the ritual of check-ins, and one participant mentioned a practice that they had learned from another artist and had recently implemented into their practice. To begin, there is a two-minute, personal silent reflection. After this, the individuals of the group may offer a desire or a boundary they have that day if they so wish, however, no one is "encouraged" to offer these unless it is necessary. While I can only theorize, I am curious about if this would impact the group mentality of "yes, and" that I noticed in a "required" check-in.

of the participants being unsure, although, there was one participant who wondered if this would be most useful for all classes, or just university performances.

4.4 Reflection

Ultimately the findings of this study suggest that there is much work to do with consent in university theatre and that the practices implemented were largely effective. It is very much worth noting that participation in this study was voluntary and not all cast members chose to partake in the research study. This begs the question of why some participants chose to participate and some did not. It is possible that those who chose to participate did so because they were part of a population of students that had had poor experiences in the past and wanted the chance to speak up and share the impact. These factors, in conjunction with the small sample size led me to conclude that while there is a strong suggestion of the concerns I outlined and that there is a service and advocacy gap that needs to be addressed for students, there is a definite need for more research with a much larger population size to effectively conclude and theorize on this content.

CHAPTER FIVE: VALUES: WOMAN AS DIRECTOR

To be a director is to be a leader. In the Harvard Business Review, an article on women and leadership asserts that “integrating leadership into one’s core identity is particularly challenging for women, who must establish credibility in a culture that is deeply conflicted about whether, when, and how they should exercise authority.” (Ibarra, Ely & Kolb). This chapter will articulate my core artistic and leadership values, and my experience of working at the intersection of ‘woman’ and ‘director’ and navigating emotion, language, care, and fear while honoring the creative process.

My whole life I have been a “crybaby”. When I’m sad, angry, or happy, it manifests in tears. And, consequently, my whole life, I have been told that this is a fault in my personality, and I have believed it fiercely. When I began the MFA program, my supervisor led our directing cohort through a creation exercise. My insecurities about being watched in conjunction with the events of my day began overwhelming me which manifested in tears while presenting my work. Though my gut reaction was to stop and leave the space, my supervisor encouraged me to stay in the work and permit myself to cry throughout this exercise. I remember sitting on a chair and her telling me to keep engaging with the exercise, but to “do it [the exercise] at 1%... now try 5%” while the tears flowed.

I tell this story to set the stage for my (ongoing) journey of accepting my whole self into my creative process. Though I burned deeply with embarrassment that day, there have been few moments in my life where I have been *encouraged* to submit to my emotionality. It is not a coincidence that this happened in a room surrounded by two other women. I went home that day contemplating femininity and leadership and began to consume articles about women in leadership spaces and women directors.

I began reflecting on my fear of femininity in spaces of leadership and have since consciously resisted the outside, inherently misogynistic pressures to “direct like a man”. Janine

Jeanson, wrote a book titled “You’re Probably Not Crazy: A Book For Emotional Women, Written By An Emotional Woman”. While reflecting on the societal acceptance of public male anger (e.g., men in a bar when their sports team loses the Super Bowl), she also says that “women can’t win. If they cry, they’re too emotional; if they get angry, they’re still too emotional … There have been countless times where I have wanted to cry, but I didn’t” (28-29). After reflecting on these words, my experiences, and the support shown to me in October, I decided that I was going to accept my emotionality as a part of my process. Thirteen months later, overwhelmed in a *Much Ado About Nothing* production meeting with a blocking issue in which I needed the lighting designer to help with, I felt the tears coming and told the production team “I’m going to start crying. It’s just going to happen, it’s a part of my process, so we’re going to carry on. Anyways, about this scene…”.

In my journey to bring myself authentically to spaces and thinking about demonstrating effective leadership in rehearsal spaces, I thought deeply about language and semantics in the rehearsal room, both the language that I use and its implications when it comes from my mouth. I stumbled across Jess K. Smith’s essay “Women Directors: Language Worth Repeating” where she articulates very clearly how the language that is socially conditioned in women dilutes our power and leadership. First speaking about observing one of her brightest directing students in rehearsal she says:

> a list of apologies that had fallen out of her mouth without hesitation … clear direction, diluted by, “is that alright?” … clear direction, undermined by something as simple as … “sorry” … [this takes] away any power she had established in her vision ... it felt overwhelmingly familiar … this type of language plagues rehearsal rooms everywhere and it’s not just in the rooms of young directors. However, it seems to seep into rooms led by women directors far more frequently … It’s a language of fear, a language of accommodation, and a language of insecurity. So why is it such a common language for

> women directors? … Why must we apologize for asserting an idea or feel like we're somehow imposing on actors with our direction? Why is this our language?

As she continues her essay, Smith interrogates how women have been taught accommodation, filtering and absorption and how they shrink themselves in spaces by diluting their language. Smith calls for a movement of "editing [our] power" and "a revolution of language" and rejects "the notion that [her] options for how to be in a creative process are either nice and accommodating or manipulative and renowned". I concur and further surmise the need to consciously strive for clarity and boldness. Throughout my directing process for this show, I was on a journey to do just this while owning my femininity, learn to walk the tightrope of being a woman and director and developing my personal framework of leadership. I attempted to honor, Smith and all the women before me by continuing to be fearlessly clear in my direction, being both "bold and flexible … [articulating] big, huge messy ideas that aren't yet perfected … [allowing] them to take up space … without asking for permission first or excusing them after" (Smith).

My supervisor has said countless times about directing that "the *learning* is in the doing". I know that research and analysis are crucial to my directing process. I also know that ensuring that my creative team has this information is crucial too. Many times, I have fallen into the trap of *talking* about research, *talking* about the scene/show, and *talking* about possible solutions to the problem that we are encountering in rehearsal. I have learned that especially in theatre-making, all the research in the world cannot make up for a lack of doing. You have to get on your feet. I have learned that I find the best solutions when everyone is on their feet and I experiment with possibilities that pop into my head, even if they are wildly incorrect. In exploration, I find inspiration and find my way through creating. When I am making, I am doing.

To complicate this assertion, or rather add to what 'doing' might entail, I have also discovered that sometimes the creating happens in silence. I have always been someone who has felt like I have a plethora of thoughts inside my brain. Some of these thoughts are loud and some are quieter, and I cannot always quite capture and articulate the one I want. In my first year, I was working on a project for a class that resisted a traditional text performance and instead focused on using bodies to articulate a central image. I found with the lack of text I had clear visuals of the story we were telling. Further, I noticed that I was able to articulate what I needed from my creative partners when I ceased all conversation in the room, asking the performers to stand still and not move, and above all, not make a sound while I stare at them. This silence allowed me to think deeper and visualize the next steps on stage.

Another expression of this 'doing' is "thinking in draft" - that is, that sometimes I am thinking out loud and developing the thought as I am talking. I have integrated this into my art making. I might think "in draft" or move performers around the stage "in draft". I have found that establishing the right to operate like this, indeed, stating it aloud for my creative team, is another way of 'learning by doing', and allows me to exhaust all the options, and see how to best build the world of the play.

Finally, another value for me that has emerged was inspired by an analysis of Felicia Chavez's book and methodology *Anti-Racist Writing Workshop.* Scholar Lisa Marie Patzer talks about how Chavez asserts that anti-racist teaching is a form of mothering and categorizes this as "facing fears". Though this is a reference to an exercise of Chavez, I thought it pertinent to releasing the fear of allowing nurturing into my directing practice. To Chavez, mothering is an "ungendered act that a person of any identity of status is capable of performing … Mothering our students … is an act of humility, it's an act of conspiring towards mutual learning" (52). I have always had an inclination towards nurturing those in my rehearsal room; I think a lot about how to ensure their safety, and that they feel cared for in the space, all the while honoring their

experience as adults and pushing for creativity. When I was reading about being a woman director, I read sentences like “I’m your director, not your mother” countless times. I believe this stems from demanding respect in the space, but I also believe that by being nurturing, you gain more respect and that through this reciprocal exchange, there is the potential for more creative investment from your collaborators.

CHAPTER SIX: REFLECTIONS & CONCLUSIONS

It has been many months since the (theoretical) curtain closed on our production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. During this period, I have had the opportunity to step back and think about the production as a whole. This last chapter outlines the last of my cumulative reflections on the process and my development as a director and leader.

6.1 The Beauty of Failure & Sitting in the Audience

I am not so sure that breaking down the elements of this process is as simple as success or failure. Instead, I look at it with the question of "Would I change anything about the process?" The answer to that, is a resounding "no". I am aware that my production was far from perfect, there were sightline issues, scenes that could have used more attention and time, and little moments that I hated but didn't know how to solve. Consequently, with every obstacle that I hit and everyone that my team and I were able to overcome, I learned. For example, during the production run in the rehearsal hall, I had created a functional trajectory of blocking. Movement was largely practical; t told the story and got us from one scene to another. When we arrived on the stage, it was clear sight lines were an issue, actors were too close to each other and that the blocking needed to change. As mentioned earlier in the paper, this was a moment of high stress and tension for me, but with support from my supervisor, I used that limited time as we integrated tech, to adjust our staging. It became an opportunity to continue to build the world. I had more dimensions to play with and a physical set to help us tell the story, rather than tape marks on a floor. Though this adjustment was the hardest part of the process, it was also the part that demanded the most creativity and flexibility. Two months ago, I wouldn't have thought I would be thankful for a big, angular deck blocking an audience member from seeing a pivotal moment on stage. Today, I am because it demanded that I adjust and learn.

During the rehearsal process, I thought a lot about world-building that centered around the text. Text and how the actors interpret and play with it is critical to the audience's understanding of the play as a whole. I am immensely proud of the textual analysis and application that I did and the dedication that the performers had to letting the text live inside their voices, bodies and movement to convey meaning for the audience.

As we got closer to the actual stage, and especially once we got on it, it was clear to me that there were major gaps in our world-building. There had already been extensive work done in helping the performers not only understand their individual text and letting it live inside their bodies, but adding to that an understanding of *other's* text and letting those reactions play in their bodies as well (as discussed in Chapter 3.4) With the addition of the stage world however, I noted that we had not built those playable realities into our exploration. For example, visualizing the world outside the 'cabin' and taking a pause to see the mountains of our fictional Messina, Alberta, taking a moment to put a hand on the railing while walking down the stairs, exploring what it feels like to *feel* rain while not really feeling it, but most of all, resisting simply tracking blocking and instead *responding* to the world, chasing *real* reactions, movements, and moments. In the future, I will become mindful of exploring and rehearsing reactions and responses throughout the whole process.

While I can never fully experience *Much Ado About Nothing* from the audience's perspective (i.e., it's impossible to not see it without my director's perspective), I have attempted to understand it through thinking deeply about their point of view and, also listening to how they responded to the production. When audience members entered the theatre the first thing they saw was a beautiful A-frame cabin. The first thing they heard was a carefully curated playlist from the early to mid-70s. I received feedback from various audience members on the effectiveness of this placing them in both the era and location. When the show began,

audiences seemed to find delight and joy in Garland's beautifully detailed and effective costume design.

As a comedy, there is a clear dramatic function and need for the audience to find the script and performances humorous. This was something that I was very concerned about: what if the show wasn't funny to anybody else beyond the creative team and actors? On opening night and the other shows I attended, I was pleased (and relieved) to hear lots of laughter from the audience. While sometimes I think the laughter was coming from the performer's peers being delighted with their costumes, wigs or performance, it was also clear that the audience was responding to the comedic circumstances.

This experience was not universal across all audiences. Some of the shows, especially ones with a smaller audience, were noted in the performance report as less reactive. I can't know why. Did a smaller audience not feel that they had permission to laugh? Or, was there a lack of transferring the comedic value to the audience? My dad and sister flew to Calgary to attend the show. One of the things my sister said to me after watching the show was: "I got some of the jokes! But sometimes people were laughing, and I wanted to know what I missed." I have also reflected on the questions of comedy and the audience in regard to my casting choices. For example, I made a deliberate choice to both swap gender and include explicitly queer characters. A major factor in this decision was two-fold I wanted to implement more roles for women and non-binary performers. Another factor was to create a reflection of the diversity of our world. At the beginning of the rehearsal process, we had a lengthy discussion about queerness. We discussed the ways where queerness permeated the play, where that was explicit in characters such as Don John or possibly implicit in characters like Beatrice or Conrade. Don John was the one character where our characterization clearly implied that he was not simply heterosexual. This also opened other questions, such as "How do you perform queerness"? The performer playing Don John, also a queer man, made many incredible offers

that helped this development and threaded his queerness into the storyline of the character. I only had one concern about this during performances, which was the function of comedy. Don John is a character with many layers. He introduces much of the darkness in the show but also brings many moments of comedy, especially in our characterization of him. There were moments in performances when the audience laughed at Don John on lines that arguably, don't function as comedy. For example, this exchange below:

BORACHIO Marry, it is your brother's right hand.

DON JOHN Who? The most exquisite Claudio?

BORACHIO Even he.

Almost every night, on this line of Don John's, there was laughter. The performer made it clear that they had a romantic interest in Claudio. I wondered a lot about if there would be laughter on this line if we didn't read his character as queer. Was the audience laughing at queerness? At Borachio's oblivion of the subtext? Or, were they laughing to express their joy in the performer's clarity of character? Or, is it all three?

As a performer myself, I know that closing night for a university show is usually comprised of some "shenanigans". These are things that performers want to embellish, or silly things they want to try and will give free reign to for this final event. Going into this final show, this was something that I expected and indeed, there were moments that I truly found delightful. There were also moments where some performers made choices that, unfortunately, diverged from the integrity of the show we had spent weeks building.

I cannot talk about this experience without also taking the moment to reflect on whether the fault might lie with me. While talking to a performer who had an idea of a specific action they wanted to try on stage for closing night[16] I told them that I thought it was a great idea, and that

[16] Note that the action they wanted to integrate fit in with their character and the work we had done.

something I loved as a performer were discoveries just like that. Unfortunately though, this performer made other some new choices as well on the final performance that from my perspective weakened the story. I've spent time wondering if this earlier conversation had somehow conveyed that it was okay to make *any* new choice on stage, and that discussing these with me in advance was not necessary.

From my perspective, watching choices that compromised the story we had set weeks building was, of course, disappointing. When I look back at this moment, I remember feeling a lot of emotions at a couple of the choices made; I felt angry, tears sprung to my eyes, and I wanted to stand up at the end of the show and yell "THAT WASN'T MY CHOICE!!!!!! I DIDN'T DO THAT!!!!" As I take this experience into the future, I am not entirely clear as to what measures I can take to avoid this, especially as I suspect that closing night "shenanigans" are more of a product of a university environment than in the professional world.

At the beginning of this thesis, I outlined the following challenges. I had anticipated a steep learning curve for myself of being able to fully understand Shakespeare's heightened language and form, and successfully realize the play to its dramatic potential. I was also anticipating the challenge of simultaneously leading a cast of younger performers through this learning process at the same time. I can confidently say that I now have a firm grasp on not just understanding the language but having an appreciation of its complex form and my ability to navigate it by utilizing the resources and processes I have developed. It was also important to me that the themes of jealousy and constraints on women inside the societal norms of the time came through to audiences while still functioning as a comedy. I feel as though this resonated with audience members. When sitting in the audience, I heard many laughs throughout the play, but there were also many solemn moments of silence.

6.2 Onwards

As a student production that primarily served the purpose of a learning experience, I know that it was a successful show. This was an exponential learning opportunity for me as well as for much of the creative team, performers and technical crew. This show was a huge undertaking with so many elements. I juggled directing, teaching, creating, tackling complex text, technical demands, working with designers, my first comedy and a large cast, all the while trying to focus on building and creating a world that audiences would remember.

Anne Bogart says that “if theatre were a verb, it would be ‘to remember’” (22). Performers are the “conduit of human memory”, and we place questions on stage that grapple at what it means to be human. At the beginning of this artist statement, I said that during this process, I wanted to create a window in time that foregrounded how the themes of *Much Ado About Nothing* remained relevant to a contemporary audience. In my director’s note, I invited audiences to remember these echoes of their memory - what it means to fall in love, what it means for women to live inside the tyranny of gender constraints. As we go onward, I hope this was what happened. I hope we all remembered.

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