WRITTEN RECORD

FOR AN MFA SHOWCASE PRODUCTION IN ACTING

PRESENTED AS PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
A MASTERS OF FINE ARTS IN ACTING
FOR THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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May 22, 1996

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Introduction

Focusing all force on a single point is the prerequisite for all mythical thinking and formulation - when the entire self is given up to a single impression - is possessed by it, and there is the utmost tension between subject and object - the outer world - ; when external reality is not merely viewed and contemplated but overcomes man in sheer immediacy, with emotions of fear or hope, terror or wish fulfillment, then the spark jumps somehow across, the tension finds release, as the subjective excitement becomes objectified, and confronts the mind as a god or demon.

--Ernst Cassirer

During the summer of 1994, while conducting research for the play Panick\(^1\), I came across this quote in an otherwise dry academic tome. The quote struck me as being somehow salient in reference to the process of creating a piece of theatre. I jotted this complex sentence down amidst my rehearsal notes. In writing Panick I consistently came upon this quote, and it invariably made me pause. As Panick was based primarily in a mythical world, this quote had particular resonance, but as the "focus of all my forces" moved on to the "single point" of the creation of my MFA showcase, it became particularly cogent.

The creation of a piece of theatre, particularly the creation of a one-person show for which the artist is sole proprietor, is indeed the creation of a myth. It is at once storytelling and a personal investigation of the human condition. In speaking about myths with Bill Myers in The Power of Myth, Joseph Campbell says:

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning of life. I don't think

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\(^1\) Panick was an ensemble generated work based on J. M. Barrie's character, Peter Pan. For this piece I directed improvisations and rehearsals, wrote the finished script, choreographed both movement and combat, and participated as a cast member. The cast included D. Chase Angier, Bradlee J. Fryman, David A. Hyland, Nathan Leventhal, Molly Piper, Rebecca Stone and Katie Teuchter. The project was overseen by Dr. Rex McGraw. Panick premiered at the Chelsea Arts Center in New York City on Aug. 10, 1994.

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that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That's what it's all finally about, and that's what these clues help us to find within ourselves (5).

And so it is no wonder that possession by an idea is an integral component in the creation of art. What we are dealing with in the storytelling in the theatre is a subjective analysis of some aspect of our external reality with the effect of illuminating an objective truth about our being. So Cassirer is correct in his elevating these discoveries to the level of "god" or "demon" (in lower case letters as they refer to that which is relevant to the collective zeitgeist).

These thoughts were foremost in my mind as I approached the task of creating a one-person show. It was a project that I approached with a sincere sense of responsibility, not out of a complete need to excel for the purposes of the completion of my degree program, but with a sense of responsibility to the art to which I have devoted the better portion of my life.

I am reminded of the greatest compliment I have received as an acting teacher. One of my students in the Autumn of 1995 told me that he had held doubts about my class at the beginning of the term because he felt that I had removed the fun from acting. He was amazed to realize after some weeks that that sense of fun and game-playing had been replaced by something much deeper: a sense that with every act onstage, he was actually responsible for the creation of a piece of art. With this realization, the fun returned, but with the added element of reward connected to it. I think of this as a wonderful reference to my own belief in theatre as a most noble expression of the concern inherent in living.

Much of Nietzsche's early work dealt with questions of value, primarily the
value of self-perfection and the value of art and of life itself. He wrote:

Regarding truths, the artist has a weaker morality than the thinker. He definitely does not want to be deprived of the splendid and profound interpretations of life, and he resists sober, simple methods and results. Apparently he fights for the higher dignity and significance of man; in truth, he does not want to give up the most effective presuppositions of his art: the fantastical, mythical, uncertain, extreme, the sense for the symbolic, the overestimation of the person, the faith in some miraculous element in the genius (53).²

Clearly, the strength of the theatre as an art is in its inherent presumption to echo, even heighten, reality. So it is with this grand mandate that we must approach the creation of a theatrical event.

Now, in fulfilling the requirements of the project at hand, I chose not to search out a one-person play already written, but to create an original work. Time and energy constraints then led me to act more as coordinator of other peoples writings to illuminate the varied aspects of the human condition than to act as auteur myself. It might be wise at this time to confirm that, though my regard for the art of theatre is high, I do not wish to suggest that my creative aim was overly lofty. Given my basic belief in the nobility of the art and profession of theatre, my goal was to put together an entertaining showcase for my abilities as an actor. I do not consider this a light aim, however. As Joseph Campbell said:

You've got to distinguish between the myths that have to do with the serious matter of living life in term, of the order of society and of nature, and stories with some of those same motifs that are told for

² From *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann.

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entertainment. But even though there's a happy ending for most fairy tales, on the way to the happy ending, typical mythological motifs occur - for example, the motif of being in deep trouble and then hearing a voice or having somebody come to help you out (138).

My belief is that I effectively approached transcendent motifs of life without aiming for the high-brow. So ends my veiled apology for myself as hack.

Eric Bentley, in The Playwright As Thinker and other writings, made the case that the very act of thinking in art is the process of bringing raw emotion into relation with the mind, or consciousness, and exploring that in relation to experience and imagination. Bentley's own famous, and infamous introduction to The Playwright As Thinker is a treatise on the state of the modern theatre, and in relation to the creation of the art in any form he writes:

This book is concerned with art. But it can be admitted at the outset that the relation of art to commodity is seldom simple and that, particularly in the theatre, art has seldom or never flourished in absolute independence of commodity. Indeed, it is well known that dramatic art has most often had to exist in the commodity theatre or not at all... It has appealed to the connoisseur and the amateur, the critic and the public. It has functioned as mere entertainment for some and as the highest art for others (5-6).

I make no claim to the creation of high art. But, in the pursuit of a commodity, I hope I managed to create a work relevant to my training as a professional actor. I not only felt the "spark" and the "tension", but, on a personal level, I found much in the course of this project that confronted "the mind as a god or demon".

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The Initial Project

My initial concept for a show (see Appendix A) centered on my affinity for the works of William Shakespeare. Clearly, Shakespeare wrote with a brilliance of art and spirit transcendent in the world of theatre. If my show was to address the ability to play a wide range of characters, communicate complex thoughts and images with ease and clarity, and explore the essence of theatricality, then the idea of approaching Shakespeare seemed to me both logical and appealing.

Shakespeare created characters of great depth and variety, and the opportunity to play so many in one show proved a temptation too great to resist. Even as the idea of playing only Shakespeare began to form the pull of playing Iago, Brutus, Hal and Puck in one evening started my "actor-ego" panting. Indeed, finding a balance within the piece as a whole was the first difficulty I faced, and I faced it none too successful.

The draw of the epic characters was understandably stronger than those of smaller scale. Hate, love, great heroism, each sparked visions of emoting my way to great success with this project. But I knew I needed to be mindful of creating a play with moments of intensity off-set with humor, intrigue balanced with playfulness, and both moments of complexity and simplicity. I wanted to establish a roller-coaster ride for the intellect and the emotions. With the whole cannon of Shakespeare's work to explore, however, I felt that I had more than enough material from which to pick and choose. If anything, paring my choice to fit into a thirty-minute time slot was the real challenge, not availability of material. Indeed the scope of the potential material provided such a plethora of ideas, that narrowing the field proved difficult.

It was exciting, though, to look at Shakespeare's Plays with a fresh eye. If I
meant to take bits and pieces of complex works and link them together to form a single and complete show, I needed to look at not only character, but also theme, and subject. I also needed to be aware of how each piece related to each other within the whole.

Creating a single play of disparate parts also led me to focus on the topicality and worth of such a project for a modern audience. Once again this brings up the question of responsible artistry, but I was struck anew by the modernity of Shakespeare’s work. In Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice Kristin Linklater assets:

Not until the twentieth century were the plays respected as what they are rather than what someone wished they were, but more than the restoration of literary integrity, it seems to me significant that not until the present time has society been in tune with Elizabethans on a fundamental human plane, allowing today’s actors to enter Shakespeare’s world with a real chance of representing its essence accurately.

In brief, I would like to suggest the following areas of similarity between them and us: openness of expression, lack of false prudery, sexual explicitness, belief in astrology, fascination with the “dark side”, determination to push the boundaries of science and human knowledge as far as they can go, and, in inverse ratio, the balance of the male and female principle, Jung’s animus and anima. Whereas the Elizabethan man balanced a vigorous, athletic, outdoor existence with cultivation of the “feminine” arts of music, dance, poetry, and singing, today’s women combine their sensitivity and affective values with vigorous authority in hitherto male arenas. Men and women can now understand and experience androgynous mind while retaining biological difference. If we can dust off some misconceptions and banish false reverence, Shakespeare’s poetry and with it the life of his characters have more of a chance now of being really spoken and heard than for four hundred years (190).

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For the initial showing of the project in the spring of 1995, I did narrow the field of characters and monologues, as reflected in Appendix A. It was still winter, and I was memorizing and analyzing the soliloquies and monologues I had chosen for the showing (I will discuss the analysis further when I examine my discoveries toward the playing of Shakespearean text later on), when I realized that the notion of “theatricality” in the formulation of a dramatic work was a problem that needed my attention. In discussing what the theatre should accomplish, Paul Sills is quoted in Jeffrey Sweet’s *Something Wonderful Right Away*:

I’m interested in the establishment of these free spaces where people can do their own work, and I’m interested in the forms which begin to emerge in these free spaces. My concern with form is what leads me on. You could call it “the eternal feminine,” like at the end of *Faust*. Finding the forms involves a combination between the spiritual and the earthly. It’s an exploration into the unknown, into a world that one can’t enter alone... some statement of reality between people... it’s something that happens between us that’s a discovery (19).

The first problem that presented itself was the question of “style”. The question foremost in my mind concerning the theatricality of the piece was, “To whom am I talking?” For the most part, the texts are clear in answering this question: Caliban is talking to Stephano and Cassio is talking to Brutus, and Iago is talking to... well, himself, or the audience... or, even, the evil force that is possessing him.

Although I did not choose to play this soliloquy “as if” Iago were addressing an actual demon, I did toy with the idea. Iago is possessed by an angry fury. His anger has it’s roots in jealousy and envy and pride, but clearly the manifestation of his anger in acts of such extreme evil poses the philosophical question for the actor, “what it evil?” Playing it as a kind of madness brought on by actual possession does
give the actor a solid image with which to play. Whether or not this choice is made clear to the audience is irrelevant, it is the kind of choice that can prove useful for the actor. But in reference to my actual performance, I had to grapple with the question of address and how it related to the overall style of the piece. The style remained a mystery to me, an enigma wrapped in the two fold question of period and the inexorable march toward a production for which I had no solid vision.

Finding the style and, therefore, defining my vision for the piece was an important step. I understood the elements I was interested in combining and exploring, but the how was still vague.

In particular, I did know that I wanted to explore the realm of movement theatre more directly. I feel strongly that movement theatre is the vehicle with which to reach a new generation of theatre goers. I have no intention of launching into a discussion of the age old and consistently reoccurring arguments that the theatre is, in fact, decaying. But, it is my opinion that it is in the nature of the beast, of the world of art, the work of theatre in particular, something that necessitates reinvention. As the world changes, so must the voice that echoes it, and so it is not simply a choice for theatre artists, but a mandate to push the boundaries of the form. The result of this mandate is a living art, an art in constant flux. For this reason, the study of the theatre as history is important in so far as it lays a foundation for the understanding of the universal elements of theatre as an art, leads to a sense of responsibility to the legacy of those artists who have pushed the envelope before us, and, of course, it is important in finding the tools with which to approach the work of the past. Certainly my interest, from the start of inventing this show, was to approach works of the past, but it is worth repeating that the mandate of the theatre practitioner as artist is to find what is new and relevant for a modern audience. Thus my interest with the realm of movement theatre.

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I believe it was Mark Twain who acknowledged that the trouble with creating anything original is that “the ancients stole all of our best ideas.” This certainly makes “creativity” suspect, but it also points an artist in the right direction for the kind of study that allows a forward momentum. All great ideas start with the challenge of thought, and there has been quite a bit of thought in the world of movement theatre.

In her book, *The Tail of the Dragon*, Marcia Siegel calls the realm of movement theatre as:

...a stage where many theatre disciplines can come together, an unformed universe that shapes itself according to each new combination of creative circumstances (9).

It is a world in which creative arts and artists come together. It is a world, this world of movement theatre, that makes sense in an era that sees more of a blurring of distinction between class, borders and disciplines of all kinds.

Movement theatre begs the question, “what is appropriate movement for the dance stage?” In movement theatre the academic strictures, that had defined the aspects in the world of dance, lose their sanctity. Movement theatre allows mime, acrobatics and plain horseplay to combine with common gesture, poses and props. There is continuity in storytelling and there is irony, a dramatic and literary element, inherent in the work.

Other cultures have mixed these elements for many years. The dance theatre of India, Japan and Bali is centuries old and a distinct aspect of the culture. In the western world it took the innovations of Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Tanya Holy and Anna Sakolov who stirred excitement and changed the face of the arts. Today we recognize the works of Bill Irwin, Robert Wilson and Bill T. Jones as carrying the form further. These names are joined with many others in stretching definitions and form. As Walter Terry writes in, *The Dance in America*,

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This theatre dance with its vast range of material and with its ability to amuse or challenge or disturb, lives and thrives not only as an independent art but also as a contributor to other forms of theatrical face.

Not only is this ever changing art form ingrained as a discipline in itself, this mixing of artistic elements is ingrained in the human animal. In *Dance: A Creative Art Experience*, Margaret H'Doubler writes:

> ...man needs to realize his dream of life in some form outside himself. This necessity is one of the most important keys to his history. We may observe its working in all that he does in speech, in dress, in manner, and in fact, in all his inventions. As he reaches higher planes of thought, this desire for expression demands, of course, more appropriate means. Thus, from the beginning, there gradually evolved what are termed fine arts... they all have a common source in the fundamental human need of revealing the inner life in an external pattern... all the arts are one- the expression of man’s emotional experience, transformed by thought and intentionally given form in some medium perceptible to the mind (8).

And this need for creation with all the forms of arts go deeper. H'Doubler contends:

> The sensations of the varying intensities and stresses and speeds and irregularities of man’s powers of locomotion and body exertion must have always delighted and satisfied his inborn sense of rhythm. The agitations of the muscles under strong emotional pressure stimulated the activity of his other natural means of expression. He used his voice; he shouted and yelled and cried. He uttered sounds of joy, sorrow, fear and pain: the first music. In this stage, music was little more than tone and rhythm. Its rise and fall of pitch, its intensities and accents and tempo, existed as the tenal accompaniment to dance, enhancing and also revealing its emotional expression. Later, man became aware of the power that the sound of his voice had over his emotions, and discovered he could use his voice not only as the language of his feelings but also to arouse an answering state in others,
and thus incite to action (153).

It is the action, this art, that then leads to the creation and recreation of myth in our time. But having examined the background of movement theatre, I was still faced with the problems of applying techniques of choreography that were new to me. Before I launched into the creation of my MFA showcase I did explore the world of movement theatre as a director and choreographer. This exploration was an aspect of the process in developing the show Panick.

In putting Panick together, I was exploring the ideals of movement theatre directly. I approached the project with the idea of having fifty percent of the show as written text and fifty percent of the script a communication of thoughts through choreographed pieces.

I was pleased with the stage combat choreography. The three fights had visual interest and a clear progression of thought and dynamics relative to the forward momentum of the piece. Each fight was distinctive in its style as well. There was a progression from the vaudevillian slapstick of the first fight to the dangerous, fury-edged combat of the third. But this is a medium in which I have a trained and, now, innate sensibility.

The problem of storytelling through styles of dance with which I have only a cursory understanding was one which was difficult to transcend. In many ways, Panick was intended as a testing ground for projected aspects of my showcase. As such, it proved a useful project. It was successful in helping me create more dynamic choices and communicate more complexity of thought and emotion through choreographic choices. As Doris Humphrey states in The Art Of Making Dances:

Having scrutinized in detail all the elements of a dance, thoroughly dismembering the body, as it were, the creation must then know how to put the parts together again and make a dance a whole; even a

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knowledgeable awareness of the broken fragments will be useless if there is no technique for sewing them together. Perhaps over-all form is the hardest part of choreography to grasp; there are so many pitfalls. The mind must be firmly disciplined to cut, shape and fit to a pattern, resisting discursiveness, the swelling of ego, the wavering emphasis, the tendency not to think it through to the end. Not only must the attitude be as objective as possible, but the choreographer must stand away from his work spatially as well - first in the literal sense... but also psychologically (149).

The distance as well as the third, or critical eye with which to evaluate successes and shortcomings in these areas with Panic existed in two forms. First, I videotaped both rehearsals and performances. Looking at the rehearsals, in particular, allowed me to evaluate the efficacy of the ways in which I communicated my ideas as a director. These tapes also helped me see the strength and weaknesses in my artistic vision. Of course my own judgment in reviewing this work was not based in any kind of objectivity. Although I did get help and vision towards a finished project from the other members of the ensemble, the more objective help came from Rex McGraw.

Dr. McGraw was instrumental in directing my energies through perceptive questioning and helpful advice early in the formulation of the project. He then brought himself to New York. He attended our final dress, and he shared his notes, insights and encouragement with me afterwards. Dr. McGraw was very positive in his feedback; and he directed his comments to those aspects of the production that could be tightened and changed before the next night's opening (which he also attended). It was in the following months, after I acknowledged that I did not meet all of my expectations and aspirations with the project, that Dr. McGraw encouraged me to look more deeply into the process of creating pictures for the stage, with a more mindful eye to changes in tempo and rhythm.

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To this end I was delighted to be able to arrange a series of independent studies in choreography with Jeanine Thompson. The focus of our first quarter’s study was the exploration of the basic elements of choreography: floor plan, phrasing, form, and motivation. In the next quarter, Winter 1995, I began to focus more directly on specific choreography for characters and monologues that I would use in my spring showing.

The fantastical characters, Puck and Caliban, seemed natural choices for choreographic studies. Finding a physical life for creatures of another world seemed to lead to helpful actor choices as well as create interesting and varied works within the piece as a whole.

My first project was to layer text onto an established movement pattern. The physical text, if you will, was created initially as a final solo performance for movement class in the autumn quarter of 1994. The structure of that piece was dictated, to inclusion of specific elements explored in that class.

Different rhythm and meter were explored with the piece with particular attention paid to the downbeats. These were brought out kinesthetically to clarify the utilization of the tempo toward actor choices.

The piece, as a study, included moments of both bound-flow and free-flow. As the terms indicate, these components deal with the amount of release and/or resistance within the body in relation to the scope, energy, and focus of motion and gesture.

Attention was paid to the inclusion of our own pedestrian facial and physical gestures, and the way those gestures relate to heightened moments on stage. In the original piece, all of this was combined to color a “slice-of-life” scene from our everyday existence.

As a next step, the form of this project was revisited and integrated with
character and text. As one of the chosen gestures for the original piece was a summoning of my cat, Caliban, I chose to synthesize the character of Caliban from *The Tempest* and some of his dialogue into the existing body of work. What resulted was a retention of the essence of the original form, in its structure and progression, but a metamorphosis of style and sense in the creation of a surprisingly linear and logical interpretation of the scene, with, I hope, increased physical expression and communication of the ideas contained within the story of the play. Without the skills of clinical analysis, a proper notation of the piece is difficult, I will provide the bare bones of the monologue as created:

Caliban enters in a dive, from off stage left, to a stillness in a push-up position at center stage.

[The intent of this: to grab the attention of the audience, as well as to begin to introduce the possibility that this is a creature of a physical and magical nature.]

As the monologue which proceeds the chosen text speaks of the torments that Prospero inflicts upon Caliban, I decided to allow the initial moments of this piece to be a silent witnessing of these invisible afflictions and the effects on the character.

He looks about wildly; expecting threats from all directions. He avoids the dive-bombing harpy he sees flying at him.

Then Caliban discovers, for the purposes of this monologue, his audience, Stephano, watching him.

He confides, "I am subject to a tyrant."

Having spoken these words out loud, he leaps aside, lest another torturous bedevilment should befall him.

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When he finds himself safe, he continues, "A sorcerer, that by his cunning hath cheated me of this island. I say by sorcery he got this isle; from me he got it."

[At this point, in the text, Caliban is attacked by Prospero's servant, Ariel.]

In the piece he stumbles upon a rope, and he takes it to be a serpent sent to attack him. He battles it valiantly, until he realizes his mistake, and considers how his actions must appear to his audience. He is embarrassed, as he wants to convince Stephano to help him. He coils the rope under him; both to hide it and be in a position to control it if it should come to life magically.

He begins his manipulation.

"If thy greatness would revenge it on him, as I know thou darest, though this thing dare not, all of this would be thine, and I would serve thee."

In the middle of this Caliban rolls towards his audience in an attempt to gain intimacy and be in a position to prostrate himself, as he begs, "I do beseech thy greatness, give him blows and take his bottle from him."

He indicates the bottle physically.

"When that's gone, he shall drink nought but brine."

He moves back and beckons Stephano to look.

"For I'll not show him where the quick freshes are. Beat him enough: after a little time, I'll beat him too."

He smiles, "hopefully", as the piece ends.

Another exploration of movement theatre toward the inclusion of varied works in the MFA Showcase had a different origin. It was my intent to integrate

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elements of multi-media production into a monologue for performance in my showcase production. As budgetary and time constraints became clear, I was content to scale down this original idea. I decided to storyboard images that would serve as a video backdrop during the presentation of the character of Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The concept of the character influenced the choice of the intended video images, as well as the movement choices. In scoring the text physically, I employed a much more linear process toward a finished product.

The idea of setting the play in an urban environment is contrary to the intention of the playwright. The play details an escape from civilized urbanity into the wild wood, but for the purposes of exploration, replacing the wild wood with the wild city proved an exciting concept. The character of Puck becomes a magic, urban elf, and, in this case, he traces the concrete jungle of New York.

The basic structure of this piece in theory was:

A city street is projected. It is night. Demetrius (Freeman), pursues Helena (Ziegler) through the streets. Lysander (Kuhn) and Hermia (Perry) enter and retire on opposite sides of the stage.

Puck runs on.

He attempts to address the audience directly, but, in his exhausted state, he is unable to do so. He pants, doubles over, and, finally, collapses with the effort.

From the ground he says, "Through the forest have I gone, but Athenian found I none on who's eyes I might approve this flower's power in stirring love."

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3 This piece was never fully integrated with video imagery though Freeman, Kuhn, Perry and Ziegler were added for the showing.
He stands.

"Night and silence."

He turns, and, in the video image, a taxi cab races at him. He screams and dives clear; only to find himself straddling Lysander’s body.

He stares at him.

“What have we here?”

He traces the body with his eyes, and, delighted, he turns to the audience.

“Weeds of Athens does he wear.”

He stands and begins to back away in his excitement.

“This is he, my master said, despised the Athenian maid.”

His foot catches Hermia’s body, he jumps in terror, and he whirls to see the cause. He laughs, and, in his embarrassment, confides, “And here the maid, sleeping sound upon the dank and dirty ground.”

He goes to her.

“Pretty creature. She durst not lie near this lack-love, this kill-courtesy.”

He moves back to Lysander.

“Churl, upon thy eyes I throw all the power this charm doth owe. And when thou wakest let love forbid sleep his seat on thy eyelid.”

He becomes enamored with the idea of eating the flower and finding out what it might do to him, as he is attracted to Hermia, but he thinks better of it.

“And, so, awake when I am gone; for I must now to Oberon.”

He runs off.

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A third exploration proved to be an employment of the two previous techniques. It integrated the distinct patterns toward the creation of an original piece. Again, the physical score was created for a final solo performance for a studio class in movement for the actor.

This time, however, though the elements of the piece were decided upon before the text was introduced to it, those individual elements were not strung together.

The requirements of the final project in class necessitated the combining of the work of the quarter into a unified whole. The first elements explored, in the chronological development of the class, were Decroux’s isolations and designs. Second, were Marceau’s character stances. As part of the exploration of Marceau’s techniques we explored the idea of coloration and “decolorization” between, and within, the stances. Then came Stefan Niedzialkowski’s mime technique; combining bound-flow with breath initiation for the creation of three-dimensional, living forms and ideas in space. As part of the exploration of Niedzialkowski’s technique we included the concepts of “growing” and “degrowing” forms.4

Such an order of succession created a fine structure to begin building a piece. I knew I wanted to explore some kind of Decroux based “triple design”, and I knew that I wanted to have that form travel.

Second, I wanted to explore Marceau’s character stances. As I have enjoyed Marceau’s David and Goliath in performance, and, as it was a topic of discussion in class, I wanted, for the sake of humor and tribute, to utilize the basic tenets of that piece.

Then, I wanted to explore the Polish mime techniques by presenting some kind of “degrowth”, the creation of a living statue, and then a playing with the style

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4 As the ideas of such explorations are integral to the movement training in this theatre program, I am assuming a knowledge of this work that does not necessitate further explanation here.

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by making it travel and imposing various tempos to the physical text. In an attempt to gain continuity within my showcase production I felt that having one character resurface at intervals within the show might balance it aesthetically. As I enjoyed the concept of an urban elf, as a kind of “master of ceremonies” for the piece, I decided that Puck would be a good candidate to fill that need.

I began sewing the established order of physical examinations into the fabric of the chosen text. The resulting construction was an amalgamation; linear in design and abstract in imagery. The piece as created was driven by character and utilized the textual and physical elements equally:

Puck enters.

He is tilted back in the pelvis and chest, the neck is tilted forward, and the head is rotated towards the audience.

He addresses one of Titania’s fairies.

“How now spirit, whither wander you?”

He disappears behind the up-center flat. He reemerges in the character stance of vanity (he is mimicking Oberon).

“The king keeps his revels here tonight. Take heed the queen come not within his sight.”

He strikes the pose for fear.

“For Oberon is passing fell and wrath...”

He strikes the pose for anger.

“Because that she, as her attendant, hath a lovely boy - stolen from an Indian king...”

He begins a “degrowth”. He sinks into a pose of holding a baby.

“She never had so sweet a changeling.”

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He rises, and he strikes the pose for pity.

"And Oberon would have the child knight of his train..."

He begins to play with bound-flow and breath initiation and tempo.

He creates forest images: trees, brooks, snakes, birds, bear, deer, flowers. He stops.

"To trace the forest wild."

He comes to a standing neutral and begins to play with Decroux isolations.

"But she perforce withholds the loved boy, crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy."

He strikes the pose for fear.

He begins to mimic Marceau’s *David and Goliath*, as he plays Oberon stage left and Titania stage right of the flat.

"And now they never meet in grove or green, by fountain clear or spangled star light sheen, but they do square."

He strikes the pose for fear.

He begins a "degrowth", as he says, "That all their elves, for fear, creep into acorn cups..."

He peeks out of his curled position.

"And hide them there."

I worked to clarify the ideas and images presented throughout each piece. Clarification of the timing and the physical techniques utilized aided in the readying of these monologues for performance.

Indeed, it is important to note that an integration of these techniques into the rehearsal and preparation of any role toward performance is useful in its
exploration of a variety in the delivery of ideas. This provides "texture" and interest while achieving specificity and clarity for an audience. I made many personal discoveries with this work as well.

First, in relation to all character work, was an aspect of making moment to moment discoveries. Professor J. Thompson stressed the importance of keeping a sense of closure to thoughts while making the point that having beats within thoughts distinguished the acts from the mover. Being conscious of the ends of moments and clarifying those endings is an interesting consideration in relation to existing in the moment on stage. Clarity in terms of the beginnings of moments is a point to stress to my students in beginning acting classes. It is imperative that we, as actors, have a clear idea of the origin of any new thought. But the flaw of the piece, its inherent tempo, and playing the super objective or end of the entire play can be a temptation for the actor. It is a classic trap - playing the end of the monologue, scene, or play at the start. So after the character's journey through the piece is denied. And, sometimes, the playing of all the subtle levels of thought and action can sap a performance of truth and believability because the simplicity of moment to moment work is lost.

So, the trick to avoiding these traps, is to avoid arriving in the next moment too soon. So, while the beginning of any thoughts are important to the playing of the thought, the ending or closure to each moment is necessary for the clarification of each moment. It is a helpful distinction as it relates directly to finding the moments of transition between thoughts or actions. Transitions are the soul of our work as actors.

Another discovery related more to the mind of our work. The value of clarifying compositional concentration on distilling physical design and body placement actually frees a wealth of expression that focusing on playing the

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psychology of a character cannot allow.

Michael Chekov believed in the worth of psychological gesture. This is a term often misunderstood by theatre artists. Michael Chekov’s emphasis in character work was also based in moment to moment improvisation. His point was that the mind cannot be free to improvise and invest real ideas in the moment, if the groundwork or spine of the character is not well developed. Stanislavski is said to have considered Chekov the actor most successful in utilizing and understanding his system of actor training. So, understanding Chekov’s sense of what that work is becomes terribly valuable in interpreting a reliable system of achieving life and truth onstage. In To The Actor, Michael Chekov writes:

...we cannot directly command our feelings, but we can entice, provoke and coax them by certain indirect means. The same should be said about our wants, wishes, desires, longings, lusts, yearning or cravings, all of which, although always mixed with feelings, generate in the sphere of our will power... is there such a key to our will power? Yes, and we find it in the movement (action, gesture) (63).

This helps define what Stanislavski intended when he wrote:

Of significance to us is: the reality of the inner life of a human spirit in a part and a belief in that reality. We are not concerned with the actual naturalistic existence of what surrounds us on the stage, the reality of the material world... Truth on the stage is whatever we can believe in with sincerity whether in ourselves or in our colleagues. Truth cannot be separated from belief, nor belief from other and without both of them it is impossible to live your part, or to create anything (129).

He admonishes the actor to:

... avoid the habit of falsifying. Do not let the reeds choke the tender flow of truth. Be merciless in rooting out of yourself all tendency to exaggerated, mechanical acting...(162).

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These thoughts are relevant to the creation of all art. In her book, *Elements of Performance*, Pauline Koner admits to having found "many important clues from *An Actor Prepares*." As a dancer, she writes:

We must live the life of the character in the piece. We have to become that character and believe in that life on the stage. ...Not believing becomes playacting and is transparent. If we make the character real for ourselves, it will be real for others (31).

All of this relates directly to the idea that we, as actors, are responsible for establishing ownership of the character. We are responsible for making the role our own by filling the form (the text) with integrity (the acting). We must, therefore, not rely on the lines we speak, but we must use those lines as support for what we do.

The brilliance of the playwright (and the designers and the director...) and the choice of style, all support the work of the actor. Much of my work as a student of acting has been the search for avenues to clear the way for good work as an actor. Most of my work (vocal, physical, and mental) seems to be the work of finding a freedom from tension and a free and ready accessibility to fresh ideas and invention moment to moment.

Early in my course work at The Ohio State University, Professor Phil Thompson suggested that I attach tiny flags to my cheeks so that when I smiled and added unnecessary tension to my face, these little warning signs would make themselves visible to me. This problem of facial tension came into question again during my work with Professor J. Thompson. "Turn down the ampage", she said to me. A projected smile, in fact projection in general, was getting in the way of honesty and vulnerability onstage.

This is a constant grapple for me. I can remember Dr. McGraw's comment at my first "Rep" review: "Don't show me anything. I want you to trust being, not

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doing anything.” My inner response was, “Well, yes. But, how?” The “how” brings up the question of address once again. If the focus is on the audience and the “presentation” of the work then believability is in jeopardy. But this is the double-edged sword that the actor faces. In An Actor Prepares Stanislavski reminds the actor to:

Never lose yourself on the stage. Always act in your own person, as an artist. You can never get away from yourself. The moment you lose yourself on the stage marks the departure from truly living your part... You must play yourself. But it will be in an infinite variety of combinations of objectives, and given circumstances which you have prepared for your part, and which have been smelted in the furnace of your emotion memory (177).

Clearly it is the balance that is important. Fortunately, it has never been a problem for me to admit that I was slightly unbalanced. The job for me in doing this showcase then became the adjustment of actor focus. This will be discussed in an investigation of the actual performance in later pages.

The disparate elements of this intended showcase were becoming more clarified, but the way in which they would be joined was not. Dr. McGraw suggested that I find a connecting theme, and as I was planning both Iago and Othello, Cassio and Brutus, and two creatures of fantasy in Puck and Caliban, he suggested that the pairings might be a through line enough. I began building a script accordingly. I was becoming happier with the chosen material, although the play still needed to be trimmed and more balance between characterizations found. Still, I was unsatisfied in my search for a unifying style for the piece.

I began to picture the work in more abstract ways. It occurred to me that the movement theatre elements on which I had been working might prove to be the unifying theme. My vision began to take the shape of a sweeping overview of
Shakespeare's works as danced by Ken Elston. There was a kernel of something worthwhile in this; however, I was still unclear as to "how".

The next consideration seemed to be the breakthrough. I knew I would need helpers to spot a trampoline for Caliban's entrance, help Ferdinand divest himself of his burden of logs, and move set pieces. It became an exciting possibility to form a small company that would do all this in the course of the show. These choreographed transitions would add to the dramatic sweep I was after, define a unifying style, and give me a chance to work as a director for others. This last aspect giving me some respite from the fearful task of self-monitoring.

I set about planning large, choreographed transitions between monologues, and I decided to use members of cast as scene partners. This solved the focus and address problems. I rehearsed with four dedicated and talented individuals: Mark J. Freeman (Demetrius, soldier), John Kuhn (Lysander, soldier), Naomi Perry (Hermia, Desdemona, soldier), and Cassie Ziegler (Helena, Isabella, soldier). Their commitment and enthusiasm allowed us to solve a great many problems and create a rough draft of the piece in two lengthy rehearsals.

As an ensemble we were able to show a technical draft or study of what was to be the finished project for the autumn of 1995. While I was pleased with the direction the show was taking and the speed with which we were moving as a cast, I saw quickly that the scope of the piece I was trying to build was too grand for the project at hand. The concept excited me, and it still holds a good deal of interest for me. The purpose of the showcase, however, is not necessarily to explore the kind of theatre we want to create, but it is certainly to showcase versatility and range as an actor.

The project on which I had been working necessitated a good deal more work with choreography, it required directing in terms of actor partnering, and it

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demanded a tremendous amount of text analysis on my part. This latter needed to be the main focus of my work.

None of this swayed me to abandon the project on which I continued to work well into the summer. But my mind was distracted by the problems of the piece. Primarily I was still worried about creating an enjoyable piece of theatre for an audience. With the stress of these considerations and the continuous reshaping of the piece, I found it difficult to find a fresh angle to begin the work with a new eye. Part of me felt that I had already created and performed the piece, to a certain extent, and that required the creation of a whole new show. That is just what I decided to do.

While I did not want to abandon my work with Shakespearean text, I wanted to create a comedy. I have worked with comedy for years, and, if this project was to be a reflection of my work, it had to focus on comedy. I also felt that I needed to limit the scope of the piece to fulfill the requirements of the project. It was time to work moment to moment in the creation of the piece.

The result was a much different show, but, given the time frame and other demands on my time, I am convinced now, as I was confident then: it was the best choice.
The Idea of The New Show

As stated, I did not want to abandon my work with Shakespearean texts. I had been considering adding soliloquies from *Hamlet* into the piece, and it occurred to me that tackling that role was quite enough of a challenge for any actor.

As I began to consider that task- an actor preparing to play the role of Hamlet- a plot began to reveal itself. I began to consider the idea of creating a one-act based on the actor's process. I searched modern texts for references to *Hamlet*, and it was not long before I had a new script from which to work (see Appendix B).

As the MFA Showcase was meant to reflect my work at The Ohio State University, it struck me well to put the actor's process onstage. I am reminded of Joseph Chaiken's forward to *The Presence of the Actor* in which he writes:

The question I raise with the reader, and with myself, having to do with acting, disguises, presence, and production are ones which have made up my work. With each new stage of my own training and experience, I have learned that to study or to talk about the theatre is to come face to face with assumptions beyond those which I could see at first (xc).

The question raised in examining the process of creating a role are the very ones I wanted to address in the creation of a one-person show. It is a personal exploration, and the show could not help but be a piece close to me. This is true of all acting, but this piece, in particular, demanded my signature. Chaikin writes:

Acting is a demonstration of the self with or without a disguise. Because we live on a level drastically reduced from what we can imagine, acting promises to represent a dynamic expression of the intense life. It is a way of making testimony to what we have witnessed - a declaration of what we know and what we can imagine (2).

This idea is seminal to the acting process. It is reflected in the quotes I chose for the

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program (see Appendix C). It is the basis of all our work. It is, to use an overworked phrase, “basic Stanislavski”. In An Actor Prepares it says:

When a real artist is speaking the soliloquy “to be or not to be”... he puts into the lines much of his own conception of life... He speaks in his own right as one placed in the circumstances created by the play. The thoughts, feelings, conceptions, reasoning of the author are transformed into his own (248).

The title of my piece came out of this reasoning. “To Be” is the basic question of living, of creating and of Hamlet. The contemporary twist, “or what?” , reflects the spirit of the piece, but also asks us to look at the alternatives. There are certainly many alternatives to the simplicity of “being” practiced in life and on the stage. “Questioning Answers” is a nod to the reason I came back to graduate school; to reexamine my process as an actor. “To Be or What?... Questioning Answers” was formed as a script. The concept for me was simple and direct: reflect the passion I have for the nobility of the actor’s art. I can put it in words no better than Robert Edmund Jones in The Dramatic Imagination:

I wish to see actors in whom I can believe-- thoroughbreds, people who are “all there”. Every play is a living dream: your dream, my dream and that dream must not be blurred or darkened. The actors must be transparent to it. They may not exhibit. Their task is to reveal... To move in the pattern of a great drama, to let it’s reality whine through. There is no greater art than this... when an actor moves before us at last with the strange freedom and calm of one possessed by the real, we are stirred as only the theatre can stir us (28-29).

This is what I believe, this is why I strive to be an actor. This is why I believe that being an actor is a process and not a product. So I wanted “To Be or What?...” to be a reflection of a place in time in the course of my process.

So it became my intention to create a play reflective of an evening in an actor’s room, in an actor’s life. This was to be a play. A dramatic work; not a

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reflection of my life, necessarily.
On Approaching The Role of Hamlet

Any actor who chooses the mighty task of playing Hamlet, or even a portion of Hamlet as I did, has an absolute wealth of research, theory and analysis from which to extract enough information to sculpt each breath taken in the course of the show. Just as Hamlet may be the greatest play ever written, it probably sparked more consideration than any other play in history.

It is even possible to examine the real life model for the character of Hamlet in as much detail as industrious scholars have been able to salvage. But, as Branch Cabell wonders in the introduction to his work of fiction, Hamlet Had an Uncle, is it profitable to consider the Viking and the historic background that sparked the play?

With a text as dense and rich with possibility as Hamlet, all the particulars are given for consideration. This task of pulling apart the text is monumental enough for any actor without clouding the waters. It is, however, important to answer several questions about the play in order to understand the character. In preparing to play the role, the questions and contradictions raised by the script can trip an actor before an attempt is made at performance. So I tried to answer some of these questions for myself. Of course, there are as many theories as there are books. In David Zesmer's Guide to Shakespeare, he quite aptly asserts:

E.E. Stoll explains Hamlet's delay as a common convention of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy.  
(A choice unplayable and unproductive for the actor.)

But most critics have sought psychological explanations. It may be helpful to touch upon some representative theories - with the caution that, where Hamlet's personality is concerned no bona fide student of literature, including the author and reader of this book, should be

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satisfied with any opinion but his own (188).

I will attempt to detail my opinions of the characters motivations. I will admit, however, that my study of the part was not exhaustive and that, though my interest took me into deep exploration of the play, the needs of the showcase called for other considerations in determining how the moments should be approached. Still I do not theorize lightly. I agree with G.F. Bradby’s insight, in The Problems of Hamlet, that “It is easy to theorize about Hamlet - especially if we ignore the text” (5). Hamlet is a universal character. He is an Everyman, William Hazlitt wrote:

It is we who are Hamlet. This play has a prophetic truth, which is above that of history. Whoever has become thoughtful and melancholy through his own mishaps or those of others, whoever has borne about with him the clouded brow of reflection, and thought himself ‘too much in the sun’; whoever has seen the golden lamp of day dimmed by envious mists rising in his own breast, and could find in the world before him only a dull blank with nothing left remarkable in it; whoever has know ‘the pangs of despised love, the insolence of office, or the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes’, he who has felt his mind sink within him, and sadness cling to his heart like a malady, who has had his hopes blighted and his youth staggered by the apparitions of strange things; who cannot be well at ease, while he sees evil hovering near him like a spectre; whose powers of action have been eaten up by thought, he to whom the universe seems infinite, and himself nothing whose bitterness of soul makes him careless of consequences, and who goes to a play as his best resource to shove off, to a second remove, the evils of life by a mock representative of them - this is the true Hamlet.5

Steven Berkoff agrees. In his book, I am Hamlet, Berkoff traces the creation of his production of Hamlet. In his introduction he writes:

...Hamlet is the accumulation of all our values and beliefs. In him are

5 From Hamlet: An Authoritative Text, Intellectual Backgrounds, Extracts From the Sources, Essays In Criticism, Edited by Cyrus Hay.
set out the rules for the perfect human, the perfect rationalist, plus the adventurer, all rolled in one. No other play gives an actor such words of compassion, charm, wisdom, wit, moral force, insight and philosophy (vii).

If these discourses are not enough to paralyze any actor, there are thousands more superlative laden treatises to freeze artistic tendencies. So consideration needs to be paid to the specifics of the character.

First of all, Hamlet is a man. He is an educated man of the sixteenth century. This makes him a humanist; a man of his world. This is important in understanding Hamlet's intellectual nature and his approach to life and friendship. This became extremely important as we see Hamlet discarding the tenants of humanism piece by piece. Hamlet's age is place by the grave digger in Act V, Scene I, Line 15, as thirty years:

HAMLET: How absolute the knave is! we must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us. By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken a note of it; the age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier, he gaffs his kibe. How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

First Clown: Of all the days i' the year, I came to't that day that our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

HAMLET: How long is that since?

First Clown: Cannot you tell that? every fool can tell that: it was the very day that young Hamlet was born; he that is mad, and sent into England.

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HAMLET: Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?

First Clown: Why, because he was mad: he shall recover his wits there; or, if he do not, it's no great matter there.

HAMLET: Why?

First Clown: Twill, a not be seen in him there; there the men are as mad as he.

HAMLET: How came he mad?

First Clown: Very strangely, they say.

HAMLET: How strangely?

First Clown: Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

HAMLET: Upon what ground?

First Clown: Why, here in Denmark: I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.

It is true that both Laertes and Polonius refer to Hamlet's youth, but this is more of a clue to their relationships than Hamlet’s character. The real trick in playing Hamlet, though, is to figure out the basis for his actions. Is he mad? He says he is by the end of the play.

HAMLET: Give me your pardon, sir: I've done you wrong; But pardon't, as you are a gentleman.
This presence knows,
And you must needs have heard, how I am punish'd With sore distraction. What I have done,
That might your nature, honor and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet:
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it, then? His madness: if't be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd;
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.
Sir, in this audience,
Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts,
That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house,
And hurt my brother.

Or is he only feigning madness?

HAMLET: Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed;
Pinch wanton on your cheek; call you his mouse;
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers,
Make you to ravel all this matter out,
That I essentially am not in madness,
But mad in craft. 'Twere good you let him know;
For who, that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,
Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,
Such dear concernings hide? who would do so?
No, in despite of sense and secrecy,
Unpeg the basket on the house's top.
Let the birds fly, and, like the famous ape,
To try conclusions, in the basket creep,
And break your own neck down. (III, iv)
I believe that there is a natural progressive in his madness. In this way Hamlet can be approached quite naturalistically, and the superlatives can be put aside. The road to finding the truth behind Hamlet’s action can be enjoined.

For me, the root of Hamlet’s action lies in his relationship to his late father. Again, from Hay’s authoritative text, William Richards wrote:

The triumph and inward joy of a son, on account of the fame and high desert of a parent, is of a nature very sublime and tender. His sorrow is no less acute and overwhelming, if those, united to him by a connection so intimate, have acted unbecomingly, and have incurred disgrace. Such is the condition of Hamlet (149).

It is in Hamlet’s melancholy, in the face of his father’s death and his mother’s speedy remarriage, that we find our first image of Hamlet’s character, his psyche, and his soul. In discussing Hamlet’s first soliloquy, in The Soliloquies of Hamlet, Alex Newell writes:

Hamlet’s acute melancholia caused by bereavement, his religious consciousness, his sense of a corrupt world, his classical learning, his penchant for making generalizations, his traumatic disappointment with his mother, his disillusionment with woman kind, his sexual nausea, his idealization of his father, and his contempt for Claudius are among the more familiar matters that project from his first soliloquy into the subsequent action of the play. His intense mental activity... is a symptom of his melancholy as well as his great intelligence. Since Hamlet’s superior mind is of major importance in Shakespeare’s conception of the prince, the hypercerebration caused by melancholy serves to draw attention to it, making Shakespeare’s use of the malady of special interest as an ingenious technique in rendering the brilliance of the character (32).

Hamlet is a complex man. There is an ambiguity to his actions. Why, if the ghost is real to him (and, eventually, it is) does Hamlet not act to avenge his death?
Once, with the mousetrap, he has his proof of Claudius’ guilt, why does he not act? Clearly Hamlet is also funny and able to utilize his clever mind outside of his melancholia. So what is the nature of his mercurial personality?

My answer comes out of my research for the play, Panick. In writing Panick, I was considering the character of Pan as an archetype of the trickster character, and as such, an aspect of Wendy’s psyche. I researched the trickster character in many aspects.

For Carl Jung, the trickster is an archetype of human nature. The trickster is the remembrance or reminder of man’s bestial origins. Giving way to the trickster is giving way to the dangerous dark side of the personality.

If we plug Hamlet’s machinations into the archetype of the trickster, we have a starting point to finding a handle on the character and, more importantly, on the playing of this character. I was able to find support for this theory in Haldan Bradby’s book, Hamlet’s Wounded Name. He writes:

In a meaningful way Hamlet as the refined descendent of Danish legend partakes of a genre which Karl Kerenyi, in other connections, has labeled “picaresque mythology”; the literature of tricksters. Appreciation of this neglected fact could help toward explaining certain contradictions, disorder, ebb, and flow - the inesseble coming-apart that “steady” Hamlet’s experiences in his course (v-vi). It was Kerenyi’s theory of ”picaresque mythology” that brought me to Bradby’s work. This allows the humanists’ connection to the primitive blood-avenger. This allows an inroad into his feigned madness, his remorseless dealing with Rosencrantz and Guildernstern, his dealings with Laertes after Ophilia’s suicide, the murder of Polonius and his cold-natured disposal of the body. I am particularly fond of the way this explains Hamlet’s dealings with different people in such extremely
different ways. And explains the Ghost as being of Hamlet’s own conjuring.

To carry this further, if his soliloquies are discussions with his own mind, then his soliloquies become a dialogue between his rational or “old” self and his dark or demon side. This rational allows the possibility that the “To be or not to be” speech is not just about suicide, but it could be his musings on the coming murder of Claudius. I find this an exciting acting choice.

As “To be or not to be” was followed in my showcase by a consideration of personal endings, in a monologue from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, this interpretation will have to wait until I actually play the role.

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Speaking the Text

Shakespearean text offers a great many challenges to the modern actor in rehearsal and, for each challenge, a benefit toward performance. Understanding and mastering these challenges is not so much a matter of mastering Shakespearean text as it is a matter of allowing the genius of Shakespeare’s creativity to work as an aid for the actor. What follows is a brief summary of some of the major issues I examined before and during my approach to this work. I will save the text analysis of Hamlet’s speeches for later chapters. I will also save exhaustive analysis of the acting of Shakespeare to those who have already written extensively and expertly on the subject. It is important to note that, although I examined several sources, the books I found most helpful in work with understanding finding the joy in acting Shakespeare were; John Barton’s Playing Shakespeare, Cicely Berry’s The Actor and His Text, Bertram Joseph’s Acting Shakespeare, and Kristin Linklater’s Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice.

In approaching Hamlet, I examined several texts of the play. Indeed, this was a research technique that I found most helpful in preparing for the initial project. With so many editions of the works of Shakespeare, an actor can find a great many clues towards the meaning of a passage by examining various editor’s interpretations and attempts to clarify meaning.

There are Yale, Cambridge, and Oxford University Press editions of the plays, as well as Arden, Pelican, Signet, and Riverside Publications (just to name a few). Each editor’s attempts to clarify and correct the texts, based on whatever quarto or folio they think most accurate, leads to as many variations in interpretation. For example, in Doug Moston’s introduction, the Applause Books’ edition of The First Folio of Shakespeare, he writes:

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...in page-by-page comparisons with these editions many more changes appear than one might expect, not only in typography and spelling, but in punctuation, verse lineage, and words. According to Patrick Tuckers, founder and Artistic Director of London's Original Shakespeare Company, out of 3,014 lines of the text of Antony and Cleopatra the Arden editors made 1,466 changes in punctuation (including the addition of 217 exclamation points, and taking just one away); there were also 224 changes in lineation and 49 changes of words (xiii).

While such changes take us away from Shakespeare's original script, they do provide actors with playable actor choices. For instance, while looking at Malvolio's "letter speech" from Twelfth Night for inclusion in the initial project, I was surprised at the amount of difference between several sources. In considering the poem within the letters - most of the verse in this scene- editors have attempted to lift it into its own verse line. This is not how it appears in the First Folio.

In the First Folio, this part of the scene appears:

Mal.: Love knows I love, but who, lips do not move, no man must know. No man must know. What follows? The numbers altered: No man must know, If this should be the Malvolio.

While the Cambridge edition text prints this as:

Jove knows I love:
  But who?
Lips, do not move;
No man must know.

'No man must know.' What follows? the numbers altered!

'No man must know:' if this should be thee, Malvolio.

And the Avenel Books edition prints this as:

Jove knows I love:
  But who?

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Lips do not move,
No man must know.

No man must know.-- What follows? the numbers altered! -- No man must know: -- If this should be thee, Malvolio?

The First Folio seems to indicate that Malvolio's reading of the text of the letter is, to this point, matter of fact. The next two lines of the poem are the only two that are set apart as a poem in the text. These are set apart as a poem in the text. These are set apart after Malvolio considers, "If this should be the Malvolio..."

In the other versions, the earlier parts of the poem are set apart. This implies a different reading of the poem. With this format, Malvolio is already interested in the poem as a poem. They give different versions of the poem, with different editing choices. The Cambridge edition gives an interesting and active possibility for the delivery of the text. With, "Lips, do not move", the lips become the focus of the line as they are being addressed directly. While the Avenel Books editions keeps his speech in prose.

Such discoveries offer the actor varied intentions that may not have occurred with the examination of one text. (In general, the First Folio is considered, in the academic and artistic worlds, as the most complete and authentic version of Shakespeare's texts available. The consensus being that the first quarto's generally stem from incomplete transcripts of a performance, or performances, or from members of the company who sold their services to publishing houses and recounted the play in its entirety as best they could.)

In examining the first and second quartos and the First Folio of Hamlet, the differences in the three scripts are remarkably apparent. The first quarto seems, to us, a ridiculously shallow version of the text we know so well. As case in point,

6 AMS Press offers the book The Three Text Hamlet as a comparative study of these three works. It is in a parallel format that allows immediate comparison of a given part.

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here is the AMS edition of the first quarto version of the “To be or not to be” speech:

To be, or not to be, I there's the point,
To Die, to sleepe, is that all? I all:
No, to sleepe, to dreame, I may there it goes,
For in that dreame of death, when wee awake,
And borne before an everlasting Judge,
From whence no passenger ever retur'nd,
The undiscovered country, at whose sight
The happy smile, and the accursed damn'd.
But for this, the joyful hope of this,
Who'd beare the scornes and flattery of the world,
Scorned by the right rich, the rich curssed of the poore?
The widow being oppressed, the orphan wrong'd,
The taste of hunger, or a tirants raigne,
And thousand more calamities besides,
To grunt and sweate under this weary life,
When that he may his full Quietus make,
With a bare bodkin, who would this indure,
But for a hope of something after death?
Which pulses the braine, and doth confound the sence,
Which makes us rather beare those evilles we have,
Than flie to others that we know not of.
I that, O this conscience makes cowards of us all...

(123-125)

It does seem possible that someone with a passing relationship with the speech might mangle it to this point. Harley Granville-Barker, in Preface To Hamlet, makes the argument that this may actually be an earlier version of the play. Perhaps one taken from Shakespeare’s notes. He points out that some of the names are changed from the first quarto; Coambis becomes Polonius. He writes:

From the First Quarto the positive harvest is a few interesting stage directions and a way of reducing the action to such a “two hours’
traffic” (or less) as would be passable on the Elizabethan stage (172-173).

This discussion is not simply an intriguing side-note. Even the “purest” form of the text may not offer all the clues and possibilities that may be available toward the performance for any given speech or character. But, the important thing remains the performance of the work. As Granville-Barker writes, “... the speaking of the verse must be the foundation of all study” (12). And an actor’s job is to speak the verse, or prose in such a way that the character’s psychology, intent and ideas are conveyed to an audience.

Whatever the state of the text we choose, the state of acting has changed considerably. Of this, J.C. Trevis writes, in Five and Eights Hamlet:

Speech has moved from sonorous declaration to a rapid naturalism. New audiences say that the verse does not suffer. Such a listener as John Mortimer says it does... he regrets the throwing away of “To be, or not to be” in a furtive and tuneless monotone, as though the greatest danger... were to allow the audience to recognize a familiar quotation! (xi).

This, of course is from the point of acting. Any such approach denies the verse. Again from Granville-Barker comes the question:

...the speaking of the verse must be the foundation of all study. How far, apart from the shifting of accents and the recoloring of vowels, has not the whole habit of English speech changed in these three hundred years? ... Elizabethan drama was built upon vigor and beauty of speech... Some of the actors no doubt were robustious periwig-pated fellows, but, equally, it was no empty ideal of acting he put into Hamlet’s mouth- and Burbage’s. We may suppose that at it’s best, the mere speaking of the plays was a very brilliant thing, comparable to bel canto, or to a pianists’ virtuosity. The emotional appeal of our modern music was in it, and it could be tested by ears trained to the rich and delicate fretwork of the music of that day (12-14).

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It is the beauty of the verse that it contains both the symphony of masterful poetry and the primal rhythms of the human animal. The deeper the actor delves into the text, the clearer the character becomes and the easier it becomes to relate that to an audience. E.S. Brubaker concurs with this in *Shakespeare Aloud*:

Everywhere he sees artifice, the works of an enormously resourceful poet creating and arranging, and yet, the more the studies and works with the dialogue, the less artificial it feels. The human voice colored with human emotion finds its way out of the strange phrases and sentence structures. The play of wit is as natural as it is clever. And when performance time comes around, he discovers that Shakespeare’s dialogue supports him at every turn, giving him the stuff he needs to sustain character an action, command attention and interest, and bring an audience to vibrant life (1).

It is my opinion that Shakespeare must have been an amazing actor. There is historical evidence to support this, but it is a position not needing defense. As a playwright, Shakespeare speaks from the souls of his characters. He was able to capture the pain, anger and confusion of Hamlet as he confronts his mother in her chamber with great accuracy. Hamlet’s caustic tongue is evident in the sharp sounds and relentless barrage:

A murderer and a villain,
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from the shelf the precious diadem stole
And put it in his pocket--

(III, iv, line97 et seq.)

Even more miraculously, Shakespeare was able to do this with characters in rapid exchange. The playwright leaping agilely from one character’s soul to another to embody the rigors of the moment. Having mentioned the sounds Shakespeare

Elston 44
has put into Hamlet's mouth, I am reminded of a recent discussion of scenes from *The third Part of King Henry the Sixth*. In acting class, with Gus Kaikonen, we were working with the First Folio. We were flipping the book open to a page, choosing a section, and determining - through clues in the verse - what was the playable action of the moment. We arrived at the first scene of Act IV of *Henry VI Part III*. No one was familiar with the scene, although I remembered enough to know that Edward gives a title to Elizabeth's son, and Clarence and Richard are upset:

**CLARENCE:** In choosing for yourself, you show'd your judgment,
Which being shallow, you give me leave
To play the broker in mine own behalf;
And to that end I shortly mind to leave you.

**KING EDWARD IV:** Leave me, or tarry, Edward will be king,
And not be tied unto his brother's will.

**QUEEN ELIZABETH:** My lords, before it pleased his majesty
To raise my state to title of a queen,
Do me but right, and you must all confess
That I was not ignoble of descent;
And meaner than myself have had like fortune.
But as this title honors me and mine,
So your dislike, to whom I would be pleasing,
Doth cloud my joys with danger and with sorrow.

**KING EDWARD IV:** My love, forbear to fawn upon their frowns:
What danger or what sorrow can befall thee,
So long as Edward is thy constant friend,
And their true sovereign, whom they must obey?
Nay, whom they shall obey, and love thee too,
Unless they seek for hatred at my hands;

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Which if they do, yet will I keep thee safe,
And they shall feel the vengeance of my wrath.

GLOUCESTER: [Aside] I hear, yet say not much, but think the more.

Looking only at the sounds, the alliterations, we hear an angry Clarence saying, “Sh... sh...sh...sh,” to which an insulted and frightened Elizabeth replies, “mm...mm...mm...mm,” and a clam and dismissive Edward replies, “fe...fe...fe.” The truth is that this captures the moods of each character in the scene. Shakespeare’s genius had to be only semi-conscious to account for the amount of work he created. He was an instinctual actor.

Alliteration and assonance are only two aspects of the verse that an actor needs to consider. The rhythm, generally iambic pentameter, offers many riches for the actor to mine. Often the verse shows us what words need to be stressed, thus the meaning is conveyed as much through the verse as anything the actor can manufacture. And, as with most rules, it is where the iambic pentameter is broken that we are given clues to the nature of the rule. Where the feeling is too great, or the emotion is too large, to be communicated with ease, the verse breaks its rhythm and attracts our attention.

Punctuation also gives us many clues to the sense of a speech. Punctuation has already been discussed, but so much more is offered in it. From the punctuation we learn where the thought ends, where the pauses are (although the verse helps us here too). This gives us clues to the meaning of a sentence, but also the emotional state of the speaker.

The basic rhythm of iambic pentameter leads to a finishing or pausing at the ends of the lines, but, again, at moments of great excitement or agitation,
Shakespeare will allow a thought to spill into the next line. This gives an indication to an actor that the character is off kilter.

Of course, not all of Shakespeare's characters speak in verse. He employs prose to give us clues to his characters as well. Commoners speak in prose, but so do many of his more educated characters. Iago speaks in prose when he speaks to others, and when he is alone, and speaking the working of his mind, he falls into verse.

Hamlet speaks primarily in verse. Why then, does he speak in prose when he is cruel to Ophelia? I will discuss this with my text analysis, but surely it requires the actor's attention to find reasons for this change.

Shakespeare employed a great many rhetorical tools in his work. Many speeches in Shakespeare are filled with opposition. The real meaning of a character's speech appears in the use of opposing images. A famous example of this is in Antony's speech to the people of Rome in *Julius Caesar*.

ANTONY: Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
    I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
    The evil that men do lives after them;
    The good is oft interred with their bones;
    So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
    Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
    If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
    And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.
    Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest--
    For Brutus is an honorable man;
    So are they all, all honorable men--
    Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
    He was my friend, faithful and just to me:
    But Brutus says he was ambitious;
    And Brutus is an honorable man.

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He hath brought many captives home to Rome
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious? 90
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And, sure, he is an honorable man.
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke, 100
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cause:
What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?
O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me;
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me. (III, ii)

He used repetition, lists and imagery as no other playwright. He could achieve masterfully constructed irony and insight. It is interesting to consider the breadth in which Shakespeare worked. Doug Moston writes:

The King James Bible makes use of nearly 8,000 words. An educated person in our lifetime uses about 17,000 words. Contrast these figures with the number in Shakespeare’s vocabulary - some 34,000. He used words in ingenious ways, employing nouns as verbs and inventing new words, not just as a means of being clever, but for precision. He actually invented over 17,000 words which appear for the first time in his writing (x).

There is such a richness and energy to his writing, that Shakespeare’s works
are transcendent through the ages. They are sources of excitement and interest unsurpassed by any other artist.

Of the books I examined towards gaining a greater understanding of Shakespeare’s works, I was particularly taken by John Barton’s *Playing Shakespeare*. Each book has its strengths, and Barton’s is by no means the easiest to use as a reference resource, as it is chatty and the gems of information he offers are scattered throughout the book. But Barton’s insight flows consistently, and the book is filled with the passion and insight of several of this centuries greatest actors.
To Be, Or What?... Questioning Answers

The World of the Show

The set for the show was meant to represent an actor's apartment. The actor is a New York actor in type and goal. He, like me, is planning to move to New York and work on his career. He is already the epitome of a New York actor. He is high-strung, expressive, and most at home in a dark turtleneck, jeans, and boots. He is a working actor.

The set is meant to echo a large rent-controlled space on the lower west-side (The Village). The apartment has a desk at up-center stage, an oversized chair up-left, a couch (with many pillows) center-right, there is a table with a stereo-recorder on it down-left, and an upright mirror down-right. A sketch of the set will offer a reference for visualizing the shape of the blocking:
More character analysis and given circumstances will be described in the course of discussing the monologues that make up the show. Otherwise, in many ways, the actor is a lot like me.

The question of address was solved with the decision to maintain the integrity of the fourth wall. As the play was meant as a personal odyssey, I decided to share the moment with my best friend, Nathan Leventhal. I installed a cassette recorder down-right, and played much of the speeches toward the recorder (except where noted otherwise). The concept being that the actor is recording a “letter” to his best friend; sharing thoughts, feelings, and discoveries of the moment.

The idea of playing the monologues to a trusted friend and doing that in the privacy of the home supports the desire to make the play a meaningful personal journey for the actor. Every organism creates a personal space for security and survival. We find the actor in his territory, free to be himself.

The music for the pre-show and the introduction are meant to set the stage for dreams focused on a move to New York. Each song mentions New York: Billie Holiday’s Autumn in New York, Fred Astaire’s Bojangles of Harlem, Ani DeFranco’s Lullabye, Blues Traveler Droppin’ Some NYC, Paul Simon’s Gumboots, and the finale, that introduces The Actor to the stage, a duet between Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett sing New York, New York. The actor is dubbing these songs to a tape for his friend. This leads to his entrance, singing along with Frank and Tony, and his explanation to Nathan that he is making the tape for him, getting ready to move to New York and getting ready to play Hamlet. This leads into a monologue from Paul Rudnick’s I Hate Hamlet.
Andrew

The first monologue of the show comes from Paul Rudnick's *I Hate Hamlet*, seemed an obvious choice. In the original, Andrew is a Los Angeles soap opera star whose public appeal handed him the most demanding role in the world for New York's Shakespeare in the park.

The part I chose for the opening is not a monologue in the original; it is half of a dialogue between Andrew and the ghost of John Barrymore. The original text is:

Andrew: Oh, come on! That audience has changed! Don't you think that if Shakespeare were around now, he'd be writing normally?
Barrymore: I beg you pardon?
Andrew: You know, wouldn't the characters say, how are you, instead of how dost thou, my liege? What is a liege, anyway? And what's a farde? In "To be or not to be, " there's this line; Hamlet is thinking about suicide, right? And he tells about how awful life is, the whips and scorns of time.
Barrymore: Correct.
Andrew: And he says, why sould anyone put up with all this "when he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin." Quietus? Bodkin?
Barrymore: Quietus means death; a bodkin is a dagger.
Andrew: And this next sentence, "Who would fardels bear..."
Barrymore: A farde is a burden. Any burden.
Andrew: So why can't we change it? Why can't I just say, so with all this garbage in the world, why not just stab yourself? Instead of dragging your fardels around? Then it would be clear, then people would get it!

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I simply eliminated Barrymore's lines for To Be, or What?... The only problem this editing created was in the pronunciation of the word "quietus". In terms of comedy of the scene, Andrew does not have the savvy to know the correct pronunciation is "quietus" (kwe' ə' tus) and Barrymore corrects him, pronouncing it (kwe'aɪtəs). The choice for the actor in To Be, or What? needed to have a continuity in pronunciation from this monologue to Hamlet's considerations. Either choice would have worked, but the decision had to be based on what would be best for the show as a whole.

The corrected pronunciation would present an actor more ready to tackle the role that later monologues (particularly Gary, from I Hate Hamlet). In terms of the monologues, the meaning is clear. In any case, my decision was to allow The Actor a certain ignorance for both monologues. It is a small point, but that is what good theatre and, more importantly, good comedy is all about. I believe it was Groucho Marx who said, "Dying is easy. Comedy is hard." He may have been quoting some hero of his own, as I am here, but the point remains. Comedy is the hardest work we approach because it serves as a comment on the outside world. This role of commentary requires an observer's position one step away from reality. It still requires the same sense of truth and believability that must fill any realistic work.

Clearly, Andrew's words are a comment on a vision of Shakespearean text as unapproachable and unintelligible. This is a vision shared by many who have only heard the name spoken with awe and reverence, or have heard enough of the language, read badly, to know that it is dense and complex.

This speech also serves as an inside joke within its world, as Rudnick is writing about aspects of the theatre world and the entertainment business from an insiders vantage. In To Be, or What? the speech serves as a comment on The Actor as a character and as a comment on the project itself.

Elston 53
This ironic sense of self-commentary carries on throughout the piece. It was important, I felt, to build this monologue in such a way that it opened the door into the piece, establish an ease and comfort within the space, and set the stage for the kinds of actor explorations that were to follow.

What follows is an example of the kind of text analysis I employed for all the pieces in To Be, or What... Questioning Answers. As this work was meant to be evident in performance, not as published material, I offer this one sample as a cue into the actor's process.

Don't you think, if Shakespeare were around now, he'd be writing normally?

Subtext: These words are beyond me.

Objective: To bring Nathan into my world.

Tactic: Amuse - Make him laugh at this inside joke.

Frustrate - Make him understand my dilemma.

Impress - Make him see what I do.

Environment: Early evening.

coming from dinner with friends to finish making this tape and rehearse. On my couch, recording onto a machine across the room. It is warm for autumn.

Action: Hugging a pillow

Emotional Text(images and textures): Opening up

Glimpsing dark fears,

The burden of saying words everyone should know,

Lightening with humor

Elsion 54
Frustration as Archie Bunker (whine).

Mood/Intensity: Frustrated
Able to laugh at myself and situation
Word games.

Tempo/Rhythm: It is a one-liner
Made-up on the spot
This is a shift from previous thought.

Question/Notes: First words by another author.
This must be clear in articulation, though the character does not change, I shift to a new mode of discussion. Why the though change? Motivated by fear? Need to share? Am I quoting someone else?

You know, wouldn't the characters say, how are you, instead of how dost thou, my liege?

Subtext: This archaic stuff is ridiculous.

Objective: Make him agree.

Tactic: Smile - Point up irony with the opposition.
Annoy - Find the sarcasm.
Knock-out - make my point.

Emotional Text: Sight of myself being foolish onstage.
Defenses of humor against this alien gargantuan.

Mood/Intensity: Extension of the joke, showing a little desperation.
At a loss with how to deal.

Tempo/Rhythm: The one-liner set the pace, this can chug along as it builds

Elston 55
the joke.

Questions/Notes: Hamlet hear “how dost thou” from many people. “Liege” sets-up the next question.

What is a liege, anyhow?

Subtext: I’m supposed to be one, and I don’t know what it is.

Objective: To get him to tell me.

Tactic: Punch - add an exclamation point.

Big - Make him help me find myself.

Action: Get rid of the pillow.

Put pillow on the other side of the couch.

Emotional Text: Getting to the heart of the frustration. “Liege” is a prickling, damnable word.

Mood/Intensity: Still a joke, but the frustration is real.

Really asking the question.

Tempo/Rhythm: Build to next important question.

Questions/Notes: How is Hamlet “liege”, and how does that effect him? Do I see myself as “liege” of my dominion? How long before I have to perform the role of Hamlet?

And what’s a fardel?

Subtext: What’s a fardel?

Objective: Clarify this word.

Action: Lean forward.

Elston 56
Emotional Text: “Fardel” is a ridiculous word. “Fardel” is a burden to say, but it does not sound as if it might mean “burden”.

Mood/Intensity: Urgency

Tempo/Rhythm: Height of speed is coming. This begins the comedic race through Shakespearean text.

In “To be or not to be” there’s this line;

Subtext: The hardest line in the hardest speech.

Objective: To get an answer.

Tactic: Charm - Share how foolish this is.

Intrigue - Pull him into the speech.

Repel - Prove how impossible this role is.

Environment: From the soft, warm couch to the hard, cold floor.

Action: Move from the couch to lying on my belly on the floor. I have my torso and head up to talk to the recorder.

Mood/Intensity: This is the heart of why I am having trouble with the role. I cannot understand it, it is silly, it is frightening.

Tempo/Rhythm: along with the move to the floor, the voice must set up the lines to come.

Hamlet is thinking about suicide, right? And he tells about how awful life is, the whips and scorns of time. And he says, why would anyone put up with all this “when he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin.”

Subtext: So here is the story so far.

Elston 57
Objective: To bring him up to speed.

Tactic: Speed - hit all the major points.

Irreverence - mangling the most famous soliloquy.

Deliver - really making this my serious exploration of the text.

Action: Reach to desk and grab stage knife for stabbing myself.

Emotional Text: Roller coaster - hit all the major points of "to be or not to be"

Mood/Intensity: Humor in simplification of images of text.

Tempo/Rhythm: Describing roller coaster feel. Pitch must crescendo for next joke.

Questions/Notes: "To be or not to be" is following this piece, set up the images for the lines.

Quietus? Bodkin?

Subtext: Can you believe this?

Objective: Ridicule

Tactic: Hit the syllables of the words for comic effect.

Exasperation.

Action: Use the spring-loaded stage knife as a phallus, for the "philly wave"

(a show of masturbation).

Emotional Text: I can't believe this stuff. Wrinkled brow. Sneer.

Mood/Intensity: Fed-up, but the humor is heightened. Physical action for visual joke.

Tempo/Rhythm: Hit each syllable. Punch line.

Questions/Notes: Pronunciation? Have I been complaining about these words for days?

Elston 58
And this next sentence, “Who would fardels bear...”

**Subtext:** This is the capper.

**Objective:** Prove the inanity of such language for a modern audience.

**Tactics:** Explode - this is the worst.
Slide - Can you believe this.
Give him the win - you know this makes no sense.

**Environment:** It is getting later, and I know I need to rehearse.

**Action:** Start to rise to turn off recorder and practice while these words and questions are fresh in my head.

**Emotional Text:** Getting it out. Flushing the frustration.

**Mood/Intensity:** The frustration apex and the point at which I laugh at myself are close together.

**Tempo/Rhythm:** A musical slide and stop. The ellipses is the frustration apex.

**Questions/Notes:** Do I figure anything out about the actual speech? At highest point of frustration must come action. Change will occur to approach the soliloquy.

Why can’t we change it?

**Subtext:** Here’s an idea.

**Objective:** escape having to say the line in front of people.

**Tactic:** Seduce - Get him to agree
Invent - It is an original and grand idea

**Elston 59**
Environment: Standing in the middle of the room.

Action: Standing up to make a point.

Emotional Action: The solution. It's simple, but I won't be allowed.

Mood/Intensity: Fed up... it is such a good idea, but...

Tempo/Rhythm: The point

Questions/Notes: It sets-up the delivery of the joke that must follow. It
needs a pause for the audience to fill in the rest of the thought.

Why can't I just say, so with all this garbage in the world, why not just stab yourself? Instead of dragging your fardles around?

Subtext: Isn't this better and more understandable?

Objective: To solve the dilemma of my frustration.

Tactic: Display - open and reveal this idea.

Action: Place the stage dagger on the desk and cross to recorder.

Tempo/Rhythm: The build to the final denouement.

Questions/Notes: How do you point it, to make “fardels” funny again?

Then it would be clear, then people would get it.

Subtext: Then I would be off the hook.

Objective: To close the case.

Tactic: To cut off argument.

To raise idea to pinnacle.

To give up the argument.

Action: After finish, the recorder is turned off.

Elston 60
Emotional Text: Punch-line. Incriminate the whole audience.

Tempo/Rhythm: Punch-line. End.

Questions/Notes: Finish the idea. Take the pause, stop the recorder. Then let idea of the piece carry me into further exploration. Do not play the transition too soon.

This is the version of the text analysis that was the last on which I worked in any written form. Of course, in the act of putting the flesh of acting onto the skeletal bones of the analysis, some decisions were made on the spot and in the moment. Still, this remains an accurate record of my approach to the monologue.
Hamlet

The transition into The Actor's exploration of Hamlet took real work. I continued to trouble over making the transition work, and each showing brought comments towards the clarification of the transition. Of course, that act of approaching a speech like "To be or not to be", one that everyone knows and has an opinion about, engenders its own difficulties. Surprisingly, in the first showing of the work, the "To be or not to be" soliloquy got the best response. Professor Phil Thompson expressed a kind of surprised delight with what he called "the ease and sense" of the piece.

The transition remained a problem quite late into the process. It was not until a showing for Jeanine Thompson and Dennis Parker that the problem was solved. The transition from The Actor to that actor playing Hamlet needed to be crisp in order for the distinction of the heightened language to work. Professor Parker's suggestion that I "feel" the costume worked wonders in achieving a differentiation. He suggested the image of a waistcoat or doublet and a sword. Professor Jeanine Thompson then suggested greater asymmetry in the body. The combination of these physical adjustments allowed me as The Actor to find an inroad into the character of Hamlet.

The perching on the top of the chair and the lighting change completed the transition well. 7 Once the transition was complete, I had the task of speaking the most famous speech in the world of theatre. I meditated on every possibilities for the soliloquy. I thought of avoiding the first line altogether. I considered writing or spray painting the words "to be or not to be" and then referring to them with "that is the question". I considered the approach that Hamlet is not only considering his death but the murder of Claudius. Indeed, the speech went through a great many

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7 The lighting design by Michael Steinberg beautified the piece and clarified transitions. The gradual darkening of the stage toward night, and the changes to "spot light" Hamlet supported my acting choices.

Elston 62
transmutations. I wrote a great many scores for what Robert Edmund Jones calls “nothing more nor less than a great spoken aria” (56).

The concept of the showcase, however, required me to come at the soliloquy from The Actor’s point of view, and I recalled what Stanislavski wrote of the speech in *An Actor Prepares*:

> When a real artist is speaking the soliloquy “to be or not to be,”...he puts into the lines much of his own conception of life... He speaks in his own right as one placed in the circumstances created by the play. The thoughts, feeling, conceptions, reasoning of the author are transformed into his own... For him it is necessary that the spectators feel his inner relationship to what he is saying. They must follow his own creative will and desires (248-49).

This effected the blocking and the delivery of this moment in the show. I decided to remain stationary and explore the moments of the piece as simply and honestly as possible, putting myself into the dual role of The Actor and Hamlet.

First, I looked at the speech in a technical way. This married to the kind of text analysis I have already shown gave me the bones of the piece. What follows is the kind of work I did with all of the Shakespearean text. I will not bore the reader with all of the work done, as I have discussed my approach to these texts previously, but I will try to illuminate my process.

First I looked at the meter and rhythm of the piece, I scored the text for its basic pentameter:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{To be, or not to be: that is the question:} \\
\text{Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer} \\
\text{The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,} \\
\text{Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,} \\
\text{And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;} \\
\end{align*}\]

Elston 63
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;

(III, i)

The text is filled with repeated words that must be stressed in sequence to find the sense. The first line contains the repeated phrase, “to be”, in an antithetical relationship. It is also not strictly iambic pentameter. There is an unstressed ending. There is the question, too, of whether to stress the “that” or the “is”.

While that is up to the individual actor’s discretion in such an uneven line, I have good reason for choosing “is”. It is the verb. It is echoed in the next line with “tis”. The “s” sound is shared in “question”, “suffer”, and “slings” as well. Another phrase of antithesis follows, and the “s” sounds keep coming. The “ar” is repeated in “arms” after “arrows”. “Arms” gets a stress in the line in any case, but with the alliteration it becomes a key word.

An “epanalepsis” is set-up with “To die, to sleep”, as that phrase is repeated after some lines. “To sleep” is repeated again to start line 65. This “anadiplosis” demands attention. I chose, in the delivery of the text, to yawn. Hamlet has been brooding, and he has been having nightmares. It is likely that sleep deprivation is part of his problem. As Shakespeare wrote for actors and acting choices, I felt this choice was supported in the text.

Indeed, I tried to find as many ways to stress words other than volume as I could. Inflection, timbre, and intensity were very important to me in finding variety without gaining necessarily in volume. The speech is based in antithesis.

Elston 64
“Who would suffer this, when he could do that?”; “Makes us rather bear this, than fly to that”; and of course, the crux of the matter, “enterprises of great pitch and moment.”

With this regard their currents turn away, and lose the name of action.

It is “this regard” that keeps Hamlet wondering and whirling and not acting. Hamlet’s words are full of reason and rational thought. He is, in fact, searching for the self-discipline that will keep his passions in check. As Hamlet posed the question for debate, he traces these ideas as a soul-searching student.

There is something compelling of the image of the thinker. Rodin made this image an archetype, and I used this image in shaping the piece. But I did not intend for the speech to be static. The soliloquy tells much of the story of the play. Besides being the single most famous element of the play, “To be or not to be” is, in many ways, the psychological profile of the entire play.

It is relevant too that the “get thee to a nunnery” scene follows this one. Hamlet, though he shows great introspection, shares his thoughts with an audience, and then he has his deep fears of a living nightmare ignited by Ophelia’s falseness to him. So, while the speech is a dialogue with himself, it must set the stage and the stakes for what follows.

In talking of life, Hamlet uses words like: “suffer”, “trouble”, “heart-ache”, “shocks”, “calamity”, “weary”, and of course, “fardels”. He is troubled by life. Ophelia’s act becomes a “natural shock that flesh is ere to”, and the stage has been set for its toll on Hamlet. Of course, we do not know that Hamlet is necessarily speaking of himself in the speech. The argument is posited in general, and the use of infinitives throughout the speech maintains a rhetorical structure. It is personal, and this becomes clear later. It is not clear at first, in part, because Claudius and Polonius are listening. As Alex Newell points out:

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...the language has a kind of subjective ambiguity that prevents Claudius and Polonius from being sure they understand what they overhear... it if is assumed... that they hear what Hamlet says (81). Hamlet’s considerations are on a large scale. He asks, “who would fardels bear?”, but it becomes a personal investigation. He is concerned with his own designs. “The respect”, the “thought”, the “conscience” all refer to his own plans and considerations. This allows an actor greater dramatic relevance within the speech. When he speaks of his own cowardice he is referring to an act, an act that has been deliberated. And it has been deliberated in as logical and dispassionate a way as “to be or not to be” illustrates.
Rosencrantz

Hamlet’s thought process is loaded with the central question of man’s existence. “To be or not to be” is predicated on some image of what “to be” means. Tom Stoppard considers this the central theme of the play and of dramatic action, and he allows two minor characters to explore the issue in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Stoppard married a kind of existentialism to Shakespeare’s created world from Hamlet. Stoppard brings Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* to Denmark in his own clever way.

For The Actor, the subject of meditation in Hamlet’s soliloquy brings up the question of his own mortality. He turns the recorder back on to ask the question, “Have you ever thought of yourself as actually dead?”

Stoppard wrote in a syntax that is clearly British in origin. Approaching this text without dialect work would deny a chance for the text to work its full humor. It is a product of its environment. As I often will slip into dialect when speaking to friends, the use of a dialect proved an easy leap for the character of The Actor. Besides providing an opportunity to explore dialect work, it provided a mask for The Actor. The subject of mortality is a difficult one to face. The dialect work allowed The Actor a patina of humor - a cavalier, tongue-in-cheek attitude - in approaching a delicate matter.

Before continuing a discussion of the piece, I would like to examine the process of engendering a dialect for the piece. Again, as this same process was engaged for each dialect (two or three dialects and accents were worked and discarded for “Speak the Speech”), I will offer an example of it here to serve as an indication of the analysis for all. As the English dialects are know to me, a complete phonetic transcription of the monologue was not necessary. I did transcribe portions of it, however.

Elston 67
Do you ever think of yourself as actually dead, lying in a box with a lid on it?

For a lower-class dialect became:

ddu jdu evE(r) ø(f) Ink Δ(æ)v jdu(r)sElf æz æktʃoli dE?(t),
IdIn In d b>kswlv d Id(?) >n It

And I needed to pay attention to certain vowels in particular. For instance:

frænkli becoming f(r)Enkll

Much of the dialect work was achieved by capturing the spirit of the piece. Phrases like “shouldn’t it?” and “would you?” at the ends of sentences seem to place the monologue themselves. I was fortunate to be able to explore this piece in Professor Phil Thompson’s voice class when we worked the “Cockney” dialect.

Having the dialect, though, was not that main acting issue. The ideas of the speech go straight to the heart of being human. For the character of The Actor, I was also concerned with the issue of being an actor. Being human and being human onstage have obvious parallels, but are not easy to master or distinguish. I am reminded of Nelson Mandela’s 1994 inaugural address in which he captured the enigma of being human and of being an actor:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world.
There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people

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won't feel insecure around you.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.
And as we let our own light shine, we
unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence
automatically liberates others.

It was my intention to liberate the presence of the actor. To this end I explored a more extreme physicality within this monologue. The Actor drops onto the couch, slides his torso to the floor, and then back-rolls to the floor. My intention was to capture the character's freedom within the space and his playful nature.

I wanted to heighten the comedy of the piece. The physicality aided in reaching this end. The punch line of the monologue, "Eternity is a terrible thought. I mean, where's it going to end?" works ironically, but the laugh has to be prepared with the more overtly comical, "you could lie there thinking - well, at least I'm not dead!" The comic build of the piece was also important in that it led The Actor to a more vulnerable place.
Carl and Jody

Delivering into deep issues invariably brings up personal discoveries and issues close to the heart. I didn’t want the only depth of the piece to be in Hamlet’s life. I wanted The Actor to share his own vulnerability with his friend.

Steven Dietz is one of today’s finest playwrights, and I have been taken by his work. The first play of his I encountered was the world premiere of his script Lonely Planet at a contemporary theatre, in Seattle. I fell in love with his use of language, and I purchased a script in the lobby. Lonely Planet is a deeply personal work. It is a two-character play, and the two are opposite sides of the same coin. One gets the feeling that both characters are richly endowed from the playwright’s own soul. As such their words and thought flow well together, and I had no compunction about tying their lives together to make a cohesive whole for a monologue. I also employed some creative editing.

The piece became a moment of great vulnerability for both The Actor, and myself. As my nature leans heavily toward the overtly sexual, I could well understand the isolation Carl feels in his discussion of his in-the-park rendezvous. The fact that this led to some confusion as the The Actor’s sexuality did not bother me. The moment was one of great openness, and sexuality is only mentioned again at the end of the play when he is going off to meet a woman.

The nature of the piece is a deeply personal confession. This moment is The Actor’s confession of his bisexuality to his most trusted friend. It was meant, along with “the closet scene” (no pun intended), to act as the emotional core of the piece. (A climactic moment).

I was pleased that Nathan (the real Nathan alluded to in the play) was able to see the show in final dress. He was taken with the vulnerability and emotional honesty of this monologue. As the exploration of allowing myself to be more

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vulnerable on stage has been a major focus of my studies, I allow that this was a victory for me.

The inclusion of juggling into the piece came out of an early improvised exploration of the space as The Actor. I spent a few hours playing in my own room, and I cataloged some of the more "theatrical" discoveries I made. Juggling was one that I wanted to include in the finished product (as were throwing pillows, rolling on the floor, stabbing myself with a stage-knife, and practicing vocal exercises - all of which made it into the final production.)

The final consideration of the monologue was one of great importance to me. As actors we are gypsies, and we often leave family and friends behind in solitary search of our art. The concept that we must "create" those who are important to us with our imaginations to keep them close is compelling. The fact that that brings the question of how well we can know anybody into clear relief raises the question of the nature of "being" again.

Hamlet is met in the process of reevaluating how well he knows those around him. He is not pleased with what he finds. This is particularly in evidence in his dealing with Ophelia. We know that Hamlet has spoken and written his love to Ophelia. Now, once we join the play, Hamlet is led to question, in earnest, all that he has assumed and created. When Ophelia cannot stand the test of honesty, Hamlet becomes cruel.
Get Thee to a Nunnery

It is important to note that Hamlet switches from the verse of “to be or not to be” and speaks in prose to Ophelia after she lies to him. The breakdown of the verse into prose is telling psychologically. Hamlet sees Ophelia as base and hurtful. When he refers to “sinners” he refers to her and to himself. And when he says he is “revengeful” he strikes to the heart of his sin. This is the tragedy in the play, that, though he fights revenge throughout, and is in fact, ready to forgive, he is swallowed by the energy of revenge.

Hamlet sees in Ophelia all the offenses his mother has laid upon him and his father. He sees that if she lies to him now, there may be no end. Indeed, he accuses her, and all women, of being to false as to make “monster” or “cuckolds” of their husbands. Hamlet sees all that was beautiful to him in the past as a falsehood. Ophelia’s blush becomes “paintings”, her swaying walk becomes a “jig”, her sweet inflections become a “lisp”, and her affections for dogs and cats becomes “wantonness”. He says he will have “no more of it”. He wants Ophelia banished from his heart, and he says that “it hath made me mad.” This is not part of his playing the madman. He is honest that it has made him mad, though in that moment I chose for him to see the irony and, perhaps, the truth of his predicament. In fact, he decided in that moment, that he will kill Claudius. Claudius is a liar and a sinner, and he is the “all but one” that shall live.

I chose to play this scene as a monologue. It has a heightened emotional quality that I wanted. As the soliloquies do not leave room for the exploration of making big sounds on stage, I wanted to find a moment to release my vocal instrument.

In my initial concept, Henry V’s entreatment to delve “into the breech served this purpose. For this altered show I needed a build of great emotion and fury. This

Eiston 72
speech gave me that build to the find shout as Hamlet exhorts her to “go”.

Technically I explored the breath and the extension of vowels. Ultimately, it was my playing of the moment and filling the lines with intention that made the monologue work and carried me through vocally.
Omar

The final explosion of "go" led me to a kind of inside joke for the transition. My Philadelphia "O" has plagued my career as vocal student. There was even a time in my second year when Professor Ellen Newman accused me of lying when I maintained that I could not hear a difference between the "O" sounds I made (though I could see them in a mirror).

For the transition I played with the "O" sound. I let it bring me around to the mirror. There I stood doing vocal exercises and practicing my "O". Even though this was an inside joke, I was pleased that it had enough resonance with the audiences we had to elicit laughter in each performance. I was sorry that Professor Newman was unable to attend a performance however,

It also led me into the name "Omar" for a monologue from *The Big Funk*, by John Patrick Shanley. In addition to mentioning Hamlet, this monologue gave me an opportunity to work with a New York/Brooklyn dialect and allowed me an exploration of some naturalistic comedy. The relaxed and honest hitting of the comic lines in the monologue was my aim with this piece. My exploration of the piece was to find the character's reality for myself and fill that as best I could.

For *The Actor*, the donning of another character, physically and vocally, was another example of playing in his territory. With this in mind, the delivery of comedy became terribly important. Shanley has a way of capturing the rhythms of New York speech in his writing. His short, tense language works easily toward heightened comic moments. As a north easterner, these rhythms are in me. The punching of the pillow, tossing it over my shoulder to punctuate a line, and the commitment to outrageous thoughts seem natural to me. I was delighted to develop this piece and have access to audition material for which I have great affinity.

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This is not to imply that I glossed over the meat and bones of the text. Omar "brings up the subject of love." Love is the heaviest, most loaded word in our language. He calls love "simple" and "profound", and indeed it is. Finding the honesty of that moment lead me to the climax of the show: the "closet" scene.
The Closet Scene

Again, I took a scene and created a monologue for Hamlet. This is a scene of great intensity and vulnerability as Hamlet approaches his deepest pains with the one person alive he still loves (perhaps against his will). Hamlet has killed Polonius, but this he sees as far less important than the words The Actor "rehearses". This raises the stakes.

For me, again, this was a most personal exploration as my father died only a few years ago. The natural substitution of father for father made this monologue a bit dangerous and real for me. The Actor, then, was able to reach great vulnerability.

My image for the piece came out of an interview I had with the actor Ian McKellan in 1988. I was introduced to him by a mutual friend after McKellan’s final performance of his one-man show, Acting Shakespeare. I had done my homework, and I was most interested in his company theatre of the late seventies and early eighties. It was an experiment made by McKellan, Judi Dench, Paula Dionisotti, and some other of Britain’s finest, toward a democratic theatre company.

McKellan remembered the woes primarily, but he did tell me about the show of which he was most proud: their production of Macbeth. He had included a portion of Macbeth in Acting Shakespeare that night. Their production took place on a bare stage. The actors sat in a semi-circle in chairs on the stage, and when it was their time to act, they stood and entered a pool of light. This image of the actor, in a pool, of light, opening himself to some of Shakespeare’s most powerful text was one that captured my imagination. Michael Steinberg delivered just such an effect for this speech.

Exploration of the text brought out many subtleties. I abandoned all thoughts of Oedipal desire, because this denied the pain and simplicity of Hamlet’s melancholy. Hamlet’s desires were turned to Ophelia, until they were turned to a
kind of hate, and he blames Gertrude for this. He and heaven, he says, are “thought sick” at her actions.

Hamlet gives reign to his emotions, and soon he no longer can be only ruled by his intellect. When his intellect makes a final effort toward redemption, the murder of Gertrude leads to his final emotional outpouring. But this scene allows Hamlet’s show of emotion. Alone, in a stark light, the honesty and pain of the moment consumes Hamlet.

My one fear was that I became too “naturalistic” with this monologue. But all of the feedback I received informed me that I was on the right track of filling the heightened text.
Gary

The Actor's next discussion of Shakespeare and Hamlet and the theatre in general, came from two scenes in Rudnick's I Hate Hamlet. The character of the stereotypical Hollywood agent, to whom Shakespeare is a concept more than an artist, provided the right cynicism and humor to lighten the piece and return the audience to The Actor's reality.

I constructed this monologue as The Actor's soliloquy. This was a comic nod to Hamlet within the piece. The "conversation" The Actor has with himself in the mirror gets to the heart of what it is to be an actor. Rudnick's text is a wonderful comic take on the "industry" of entertainment in which the actor is necessarily trapped in this day and age.

In terms of the show, it was my intention that the "closet scene" be the climax and the rest of the show, the comic denouement. In performance this monologue built a nice wave of response from the audience in the form of laughter that culminated in the butchering of Hamlet's advice to the players.
Advice to the Players

The "angle" I took on Hamlet's "speak the speech" speech was a gimmick. The idea behind the piece was that The Actor, fed up with the frustrations of the art, parody's a director giving notes to a company of actors with Hamlet's "advice to the players". This speech had many permutations - in dialect and editing. Finally, I decided to make reference to my undergraduate training with a grotesque and unfair parody of Professor Kevin Cotter. Professor Cotter still teaches acting at Temple University, and it was he who first introduced me to a systematic approach to the craft of acting through Michael Chekov's techniques. As parody is said to be the highest form of flattery, I was happy to compliment a fine artist and teacher.

I did this with an admittedly over-the-top performance of the speech that I enjoyed, perhaps more than my audience. I did add names, to make reference to members of a fictitious company, and I cut the speech a good deal as I was afraid that the joke would not hold up for too long. I also added my own lines in the form of a couplet at the end:

But that's all I have. That's it from me.
I love you all. Rest. Go make you ready.

The ability to give equal stress in a monosyllabic line, made the punctuation work.
Aldo

The final monologue came from the end of John Patrick Shanley’s *Italian American Reconciliation*. The Actor is getting ready to leave his apartment for a date, and he says his final words to his best friend.

Again, Shanley insists that the simple answer to the question of being is that love is the answer. This is my philosophy. For me “to be” is “to love”. The Actor makes reference to always being the prince (Hamlet) and never the king (a star) in the final double entendre of the play. He then plays Sinatra’s signature song *I Did It My Way*.

I meant this as a comment on the process of building a one-man show. I broke the fourth wall at the end to make contact with the audience. The Actor’s exit, then, became, my exit from The Ohio State University and on to New York and my career.
Appendix A

In preparation for the performance of a one-person thesis presentation in the autumn of 1995, I have chosen to focus on the works of William Shakespeare. It is clear that Shakespearean texts present complex challenges for the actor, and I believe in the importance and worth of this work as a large component of actor training. I propose to create a show built of Shakespearean monologues. It is my hope that working with a range of Shakespearean texts will give me an opportunity to increase my facility with classical works and the communication of complicated thoughts, emotions and images.

The vocal challenges implicit in this kind of work are multi-faceted. First heightened text stretches intellectual and emotional commitment and leads to greater versatility if approached passionately and honestly. Shakespeare's works also provide opportunities for exploring verse; with all its rhythmic and compositional demands. Exploring ways of attaining true freedom of expression, while presenting heightened states of emotion and being, is the greatest benefit of this work - it strikes at the heart of the demon that I continue to wrestle in my process. The hindering vocal and physical tensions that I am still working to eliminate from my creative process can be roused and routed in a variety of ways. Working moment to moment in varied and complex Shakespearean texts will allow me to explore some of those ways.

Clearly, the act of giving life to more than a dozen distinct characters, in itself, necessitates a certain range in performance. I have chosen texts to explore specific areas of expression, but I will clarify these choices in the presentation of the construction of the piece. The textual challenges are of great interest to me, but I am fascinated, too, by the possible scope of the staging of this project. As dance and movement theatre is of growing importance in my artistic sensibility, I have an interest

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in exploring heightened physical challenges throughout the piece.

The initial exploration of a few of the monologues has been constructed in a
deliberate attempt to establish the movement, and the movement signature, of the
character, and it was developed before the text was considered. The discoveries such
a process afforded were many, but, for me, the most interesting aspect became a kind
of reverse analysis of the idea of “psychological gesture”. While Michael Chekov’s
theory, that a character’s inner life is reflected in physical choices, comes from both
training and a belief in Stanislavski’s theatre of realism, the theory allows for a
systematic reversal. Developing a physical life and, then, discovering the ways in
which that informs the essence of the character is an amazingly rich source of
information for the actor. I have attempted this with the fantasy creatures (both Caliban
and Puck), as their natures lend themselves to the possibility that their physical lives
define them. Still, I believe that, as a source for discovery and a tool to open the mind
and body to new character choices, this creates a good adjunct to any method of
exploration in finding the moment to moment discoveries in a text. I think that finding
the physical challenges of the piece, as a whole, provides a sense of continuity and
theatricality for performance.

Having the responsibility of directing this project has sent me down the
“continuity road” in search of a through line for the play. I am performing monologues
from some of Shakespeare’s plays, and, as a kind of frame, I decided, early on, that I
would pair monologues from a couple of plays. Dr. McGraw encouraged me to make
this “pairing” the unifying concept, or vision, of the piece. I liked the direction that that
choice moved the piece, but it still lacked a sense of theatricality. It occurred to me that
using other bodies, as a kind of chorus, might tighten the flow of the play by providing
a frame for the work. I have decided to work with a four person chorus.

The realization that the audience would need a map of the piece in the

Elston 82
program, in order that they might follow along, concerned me. The chorus, instead, will act as a guide for the audience. They will lead the audience through the transitions from one world to another. I will choreograph and participate in movement pieces between the monologue pairings. These pieces might include elements of the story of the play, psychological gestures that would be echoed in the monologue, and provide a chance to move sets and props to establish a smooth flow for the work.

Having these bodies on stage with me has other advantages. Besides running set and props, it is possible that some sound and light elements can be operated from the stage for theatrical effect. These actors can serve as silent scene partners for some of the monologues. For instance, having a Desdemona to weep upon provides Othello with a dramatic obstacle to his rage, and this convention allows the audience to enjoy the language without having to fill in the gaps in the picture. This aspect is an important advantage with an audience that may not be well versed with the classical works from which these situations come. I believe that this will add exciting visual elements, and it will provide opportunities to play moments that might have been lost otherwise. For example, now, instead of reacting to Leontes’ outburst by himself, Camillo can elicit reactions from other courtesans, thus the transition is clearer. The presence of these actors on the stage also completes the circle of the audience in the Stadium II theatre and will enhance the energy of the house and the focus and communication for the audience.

Of course, as a director, this choice gives me the opportunity to experiment with staging ideas and explore the world of movement theatre more deeply.

My initial proposal included the addition of video imagery and interaction, but I have abandoned the inclusion of video technology in favor of the use of sound and light design. I want these theatrical elements to be integral aspects of the work in the creation of mood, place, special effects, as well as the manipulation of focus. I will

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discuss the technical choices for each monologue and transition as part of the construct of the piece shortly.

The other scenic elements will be a pull-cart (a la *Mother Courage*), a raised platform, and a chair. The cart will serve as a pulpit, wardrobe box, and prop box. The platform will be a bed and will raise a throne for Leontes and Angelo. And, of course, the use of these elements will grow and change, but I do not want the stage to get crowded or more complex.

**The Construction:**

The play will be presented in the Stadium II Theatre. With this in mind, the basic organization of the stage set will be as follows:

![Stage Diagram](image-url)
The first pair of monologues will come from *The Tempest*, so it is fitting that the play should open with a storm.

The sound of the storm will begin in a blackout, then, in a build, the lights start to come up, and, in the turbulent light, the cast enters. At this point the concept calls for the chorus to be dressed in white, and I will be dressed in black. The opening piece will include the image of Prospero, with outstretched arms, raising the tempest, and I am interested in the use of cloth to represent both the wind and water. Within the beginning, too, I, as Ferdinand, will be caught in the water, and, at the end, I, as Caliban, will be heaved into the air towards downstage-center.

Once the storm ceases, Caliban’s monologue begins. I have pieced this monologue together. It is taken from a conversation with Stephano in III;ii:

------------------------------

CALIBAN: As I told thee before, I am subject to a tyrant, a
sorcerer, that by his cunning hath cheated me of the
island.

I say, by sorcery he got this isle; From me he got it. if thy greatness will
Revenge it on him.--for I know thou darest,
But this thing dare not.--

Thou shalt be lord of it and I'll serve thee.

I'll yield him thee asleep.

Elston 85
Where thou mayst knock a nail into his bead.
I do beseech thy greatness, give him blows
And take his bottle from him: when that's gone
He shall drink nought but brine; for I'll not show him
Where the quick freshes are.

Beat him enough: after a little time
I'll beat him too.

'tis a custom with him,
I' th' afternoon to sleep: there thou mayst brain him,
Having first seized his books, or with a log
Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,
Or cut his wezand with thy knife. Remember
First to possess his books; for without them
90
He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command: they all do hate him
As rootedly as I. Burn but his books.
He has brave utensils.--for so he calls them--
Which when he has a house, he'll deck withal
And that most deeply to consider is
The beauty of his daughter; he himself
Calls her a nonpareil: I never saw a woman,
But only Sycorax my dam and she:
But she as far surpasseth Sycorax
100
As great'st does least.

Elston 86
Aye, Lord: she will become thy bed, I warrant.

And bring thee forth brave brood.

At the end of this, the cloth will be brought across the stage, and, like a old-fashioned cinematic fade, will pass in front of me and take me backstage. This will give me an opportunity to change my shirt, hoist the log, and enter as Ferdinand saying this from III; i:

FERDINAND: There be some sports are painful, and their labour

   Delight in them sets off: some kinds of baseness
   Are nobly undergone and most poor matters
   Point to rich ends. This my mean task
   Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
   The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead
   And makes my labours pleasures: O, she is
   Ten times more gentle than her father's crabbed,
   And he's composed of harshness. I must remove
   Some thousands of these logs and pile them up,

   Upon a sore injunction: my sweet mistress
   Weeps when she sees me work, and says, such baseness
   Had never like executor. I forget:
   But these sweet thoughts do even refresh my labours,
   Most busy lest, when I do it.

The next movement piece begins, and it might include these elements of the

Elston 87
plot of *Othello*: the handkerchief, a sword fight, the wedding sheets being placed on the bed. In any case, one member of the chorus will be placed to sleep as Desdemona before I enter with another. That man, as Rodrigo, leaves, and I begin this speech from I; iii:

IAGO: Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:
   For I mine own gain'd knowledge should profane,
If I would time expend with such a snipe.
But for my sport and profit, I hate the Moor:
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
He has done my office: I know not if't be true;
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety. He holds me well;
The better shall my purpose work on him.
Cassio's a proper man: let me see now:
To get his place and to plume up my will
In double knavery--How, how? Let's see:
After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife.
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected, framed to make women false.
The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are.
I have't. It is engender'd. Hell and night

Elston 88
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

Then the candle is lighted by Desdemona, and I enter as Othello speaking this, from V; ii:

OTHELLO: It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,--
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!--
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood;
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
Put out the light, and then put out the light:
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
I can again thy former light restore,
Should I repent me: but once put out thy light, 10
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume. When I have pluck'd
the rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again.
It must needs wither: I'll smell it on the tree.

[Kissing her.]

Ah balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword! One more, one more.

Elston 89
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee.
And love thee after. One more, and this the last:
So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,
But they are cruel tears: this sorrow's heavenly;
It strikes where it doth love. She wakes.

The next transition leaves Cassius and Brutus to have a dialogue. It is a bright day, and they are seated by the Tiber. The sound of the river is heard. I will play both parts, and, though these speeches come from different scenes in *Julius Caesar*, I will play them as a conversation. The first to speak is Cassius, with this from i; ii:

**CASSIUS:** Well, honour is the subject of my story.
I cannot tell what you and other men
Think of this life; but, for my single self,
I had as lief not be as live to be
In awe of such a thing as I myself.
I was born free as Caesar; so were you:
We both have fed as well, and we can both
Endure the winter's cold as well as he:
For once, upon a raw and gusty day, 100
The troubled Tiber chafing with her shores,
Caesar said to me 'Darest thou, Cassius, now
Leap in with me into this angry flood,
And swim to yonder point?' Upon the word,
Accourred as I was, I plunged in

Elston 90
And bade him follow; so indeed he did.
The torrent roar'd, and we did buffet it
With lusty sinews, throwing it aside
And stemming it with hearts of controversy;
But ere we could arrive the point proposed.

Caesar cried 'Help me, Cassius, or I sink!
I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor,
Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder
The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber
Did I the tired Caesar. And this man
Is now become a god, and Cassius is
A wretched creature and must bend his body,
if Caesar carelessly but nod on him.
He had a fever when he was in Spain.
And when the fit was on him, I did mark

How he did shake: 'tis true, this god did shake;
His coward lips did from their colour fly,
And that same eye whose bend doth awe the world
Did lose his lustre: I did hear him groan:
Ay, and that tongue of his that bade the Romans
Mark him and write his speeches in their books,
Alas, it cried 'Give me some drink, Titinius,'
As a sick girl. Ye gods, it doth amaze me
A man of such a feeble temper should
So get the start of the majestic world
And bear the palm alone.
Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.
Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, 140
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.
Brutus and Caesar: what should be in that 'Caesar'?
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
Write them together, yours is as fair a name;
Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well;
Weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with 'em.
Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Caesar.
Now, in the names of all the gods at once,
Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed,
That he is grown so great? Age, thou art shamed! 150
Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods!
When went there by an age, since the great flood,
But it was famed with more than with one man?
When could they say till now, that talk'd of Rome,
That her wide walls encompass'd but one man?
Now is it Rome indeed and room enough,
When there is in it but one only man.
O, you and I have heard our fathers say,
There was a Brutus once that would have brook'd

Elston 92
The eternal devil to keep his state in Rome
As easily as a king.

Brutus answers with this from II; i:

BRUTUS: 'Tis must be by his death: and for my part,
I know no personal cause to spurn at him,
But for the general. He would be crown'd:
How that might change his nature, there's the
question.
It is the bright day that brings forth the adder;
And that craves wary walking. Crown him?—that;—
And then, I grant, we put a sting in him,
That at his will he may do danger with.
The abuse of greatness is, when it disjoins
Remorse from power: and, to speak truth of Caesar,
I have not known when his affections sway'd
More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof,
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Whereeto the climber-upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the upmost round.
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend. So Caesar may.
Then, lest he may, prevent. And, since the quarrel
Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
Fashion it thus; that what he is, augmented,
Would run to these and these extremities:
And therefore think him as a serpent's egg
Which, hatch'd, would, as his kind, grow mischievous.
And kill him in the shell.

The next two monologues are not paired from the same play. These two are the comic pieces meant to be the fulcrum for the middle of the play.

First is this monologue spoken by Benedick in II:iii of Much Ado About Nothing:

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: I must not seem proud: happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. 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

Elston 94
no great argument of her folly, for I will be
horribly 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? a man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age.
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.

Then the scene needs to be set, with a pair of lovers on the ground, for Puck to speak this from II; ii of A Midsummer Night’s Dream:

PUCK: Through the forest have I gone.
But Athenian found I none,
On whose eyes I might approve
This flower’s force in stirring love.
Night and silence.—Who is here? Weeds of Athens he doth wear:
This is he, my master said,
Despised the Athenian maid;
And here the maiden, sleeping sound,
On the dank and dirty ground.
Pretty soul! she durst not lie

Elston 95
Near this lack-love, this kill-courtesy.

Churl, upon thy eyes I throw

All the power this charm doth owe.

When thou wakest, let love forbid

Sleep his seat on thy eyelid:

So awake when I am gone;

For I must now to Oberon.

The next movement piece must lead to the building of a royal seat for Leontes. The next portion of the piece will be a dialogue between Leontes and Camillo from I; ii of A Winter's Tale, and I will play both parts. I have not decided on a final playing version for this scene, but I do know that it will include Camillo's line, "My gracious lord, I may be negligent, foolish, and fearful...". It will also include Leontes line, "Is whispering nothing? Is leaning cheek to cheek?...". One of the reasons that this scene has not been brought to any final form in cutting, is that the play may need to be shortened, and this scene will be the first to go. So I leave it as a possible casualty of the editing process.

The throne will also serve for Angelo as he speaks of Isabella, then to her, in these two monologues from II; ii and II; iv of Measure For Measure:

ANGELO:

What's this, what's this? Is this her fault or mine?

The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?

Ha!

Elston 96
Not she: nor doth she tempt: but it is I
That, lying by the violet in the sun,
Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,
Corrupt with virtuous season. Can it be
That modesty may more betray our sense
Than woman's lightness? Having waste ground enough,
Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary
And pitch our evils there? O, fie, fie, fie!
What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?
Dost thou desire her foully for those things
That make her good? O, let her brother live!
Thieves for their robbery have authority
When judges steal themselves. What, do I love her.
That I desire to hear her speak again,
And feast upon her eyes? What is't I dream on?
O cunning enemy, that, to catch a saint,
With saints dost bait thy hook! Most dangerous
Is that temptation that doth goad us on
To sin in loving virtue: never could the strumpet,
With all her double vigour, art and nature,
Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid
Subdues me quite. Even till now,
When men were fond, I smiled and wonder'd how.

Who will believe thee, Isabel?
My unsoil'd name, the austereness of my life,

Elston 97
My vouch against you, and my place i' the state.
Will so your accusation overweigh,
That you shall stifle in your own report
And smell of calumny. I have begun.
And now I give my sensual race the rein:
Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite;
Lay by all nicety and prolixious blushes,
That banish what they sue for: redeem thy brother
By yielding up thy body to my will;
Or else he must not only die the death,
But thy unkindness shall his death draw out
To lingering sufferance. Answer me to-morrow,
Or, by the affection that now guides me most,
I'll prove a tyrant to him. As for you,
Say what you can, my false o'erweighs your true.

And then Claudio speaks to Isabella with this from III; i:

CLAUDIO: Ay, but to die, and go we know not where:
   To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
   This sensible warm motion to become
   A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
   To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
   In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice:
   To be imprison'd in the viewless winds.

Elston 98
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world: or to be worse than worst
Of those that lawless and incertain thought
Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible!
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
Can lay on nature is a paradise
To what we fear of death.

Sweet sister, let me live:
What sin you do to save a brother's life,
Nature dispenses with the deed so far
That it becomes a virtue.

The setting then changes to the outdoors and a battle field. Rain is falling on a war weary army. King Henry climbs to a height to exhort his troops, as he does in III: i of *King Henry V*:

**KING HENRY V:** Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;
Or close the wall up with our English dead.
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility:
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger;
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,

*Elston 99*
Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage;
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;
Let pry through the portage of the head
Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it
As fearfully as doth a galled rock
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.
Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,
Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit
To his full height. On, on, you noblest English.
Whose blood is flet from fathers of war-proof!
Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,
Have in these parts from morn till even fought
And sheathed their swords for lack of argument:
Dishonour not your mothers; now attest
That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you.
Be copy now to men of grosser blood,
And teach them how to war. And you, good yeoman,
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
The mettle of your pasture; let us swear
That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;
For there is none of you so mean and base,
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge

Elston 100
Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!'

Again, there is no formal pairing here, but the next character I play is also a king and a warrior.

As the woods move towards him Macbeth faces Macduff for his final battle in V, viii of *Macbeth*:

MACDUFF: Turn, hell-hound, turn!

MACBETH: Of all men else I have avoided thee:
        But get thee back; my soul is too much charged
        With blood of thine already.

MACDUFF: I have no words:
        My voice is in my sword: thou bloodier villain
        Than terms can give thee out!

[They fight.]

MACBETH: Thou losest labour:
        As easy mayst thou the intrenchant air
        With thy keen sword impress as make me bleed:
        Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests;
        I bear a charmed life, which must not yield,
        To one of woman born.

Elston 101
MACDUFF: Despair thy charm;
And let the angel whom thou still hast served
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.

MACBETH: Accursed be that tongue that tells me so,
For it hath cow'd my better part of man!
And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That paller with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope. I'll not fight with thee.

MACDUFF: Then yield thee, coward,
And live to be the show and gaze o' the time:
We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
Painted on a pole, and underwrit,
'Here may you see the tyrant.'

MACBETH: I will not yield.
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou opposed, being of no woman born,
Yet I will try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,
And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'
This scene will include a stage fight, with broad swords, and I will play a spectacular death before the lights fade to end the show.

These scenes have specific challenges. For instance, I must weep as Othello, see death before me as Claudio, and love, for the first time, as the conflicted Angelo. The physical challenges are great. There will be combat and great athletic challenges in the blocking, and Henry's speech is a terrific vocal challenge for me. I believe that I have chosen a good cross section of characters to create a tour of Shakespeare's faces of man: fool, lover, soldier, beast. And I will have audition material for the next ten years.
Appendix B

*New York, New York* is heard.

The Actor enters singing. He picks up *Hamlet* off the desk. Then moves to stereo/recorder as song finishes.

(into recorder) Hello, Nathan. That New York medley was for you. Soon I will be there and we’ll be close and you’ll be married and oh my God. Everything is changing, and I love it. I thought if I waited to write, you’d never get a letter. So I dec

projects. I’ll give you a hint, (sings *Gilligan’s Island* “Hamlet” song).

(Andrew) You know, wouldn’t the characters say, how are you, instead of how dost thou, my liege? What is a liege, anyway? And what’s a fardel? In “To be or not to be,” there’s this line; Hamlet is thinking about suicide, right? And he tells about how awful life is, the whips and scorns of time. And he says, why should anyone put up with all this “when he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin.” Quietus? Bodkin? And this next sentence, “Who would fardels bear...” Why can’t we change it? Why can’t I just say, so with all this garbage in the world, why not just stab yourself? Instead of dragging your fardels around? Then it would be clear, then people would get it!

(Hamlet) To be, or not to be: that is the question:

Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep; 60

No more; and by a sleep to say we end

Elston 104
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

(Rosencrantz) Do you ever think of yourself as actually dead, lying in a box with a lid on it? Nor do I, really... It's silly to be depressed by it. I mean one thinks of it like being alive in a box, one keeps forgetting to take into account the fact that one is dead... which should make all the difference... shouldn't it? I mean, you'd never know you were in a box, would you? It would be just like being asleep in a box. Not that I'd like to sleep in a box, mind you, not without any air - you'd wake up dead, for a start and then where would you be? Apart from inside a box. That's the bit I don't like, frankly. That's why I don't think of it... Because you'd be helpless, wouldn't you? Stuffed in a box like that, I mean you'd be in there for ever. Even taking into account the fact that you're dead, it isn't a pleasant thought. Especially if you're dead, really... ask yourself, if I asked you straight off - I'm going to stuff you in this box now, would you rather be alive or dead? Naturally, you'd prefer to be alive. Life in a box is better than no life at all. I expect. You'd have a chance at least. You could lie there thinking - well, at least I'm not dead! In a minute someone's going to bang on the lid and tell me to come out. "Hey you, what's your name? Come out of there!" (Pause) I wouldn't think about it, if I were you. You'd only get depressed. (Pause) Eternity is a terrible thought. I mean, where's it going to end?

(Jody/Carl) I answered this ad. It said: Are you interested in a cruelty-free relationship? (Like I'm going to say "no"). So, I make plans to meet this man at the park. We have agreed upon a time and a bench. Then, we have made plans to have a quiet cup of coffee. I go to the park. I like the park. I like to walk around the lake and look at the babies and dogs. I sit on the bench with my expectations. I am expecting a man who is just plain no-debate handsome. Someone who could pull
off one of those black turtleneck Hamlets.

The man approaches. My expectations are nowhere in sight. He is one of those men who honestly believes he can iron his shirt by tucking it in. And his breath. It was not just bad, it was ancient. I'm telling you, Nathan, something had crawled down in there and died. He didn't need mouthwash, he needed archaeology. Nothing happened. We didn't even get as far as the coffee. He bored me to tears for ten minutes and I left. I saw him a week later, and he avoided me like I was carrying a clipboard at an airport.

Yesterday that man took his car and mowed down twenty people at a sidewalk cafe. (Pause) A reporter asked him why. (Pause) He said: I just couldn't look at them anymore. (Silence) Maybe it's better not to know.

We don't know people. It's a mystery. Like people who knowingly but jackets with fringe on them. It's an absolute mystery. I'm talking about our friends. Who are really our friends? We don't know. Do this: Pack up and move on two days notice. See who helps you. Those are your friends.

We trick ourselves. We add up our time with someone, we arrive at number of hours or days or years, and we check that number against a chart on the wall. And the chart on the wall says: If you've spent X number of years with so and so, you must know them well. I no longer believe the chart on the wall.

I tell lies. I create occupations. For the same reason I create you, Nathan. (Pause) So, I have something to hold onto. I don't know what song you hum - though, I

Elston 107
off one of those black turtleneck *Hamlets*.

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Elston 107
suspect it's something pretty dated and embarrassing - I don't know much about you, either, (Pause) So, I create you. I create the part of you that does stuff while I'm not around. (Pause) That's what people do, Nate. That's the closest they get to knowing each other.

(Hamlet) Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a
breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest;
but yet I could accuse me of such things that it
were better my mother had not borne me: I am very
proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at
my beck than I have thoughts to put them in,
imagination to give them shape, or time to act them
in. What should such fellows as I do crawling
between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves,
all; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. 130
If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for
thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as
snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a
nunnery, go: farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs
marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough 140
what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go,
and quickly too. Farewell.
I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God
has given you one face, and you make yourselves
another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and
nick-name God's creatures, and make your wantonness

Elston 108
your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath
made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages:
those that are married already, all but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go.

(Omar) My name is Omar. I have been through more shit than I can possibly explain so lemme just say this. I have a family, a wife and two kids. I love my family. I am a man. I see the role of a family man to be a guard dog. I circle my family like a ring of fire. If anybody bothers my wife, I'll kill them. If anybody's mean to my kids, I'll kill them. The whole thing of having children brings every nut out of the woodwork. I bash these yahoos and throw them outside my family circle. Also, every person has a hell in them that contains demons. I have demons. My wife has demons. When you have kids, these demons jump outta your mouth and attack the kids. I have to beat the shit outta these demons, chuck them out into the sunlight where they shrink and scream into ugly little trinkets I call quirks. Quirks I can live with.

I am a real father. When I first saw my kids, I got terrified because the replacements had arrived for me and my wife. The heroic thing that a father has to do is encourage his son to kill him and replace him. This is what Hamlet's really about in my opinion. It's a tragedy because the son fails to kill and replace the physical father. Which is what the spiritual side of the father, the ghost wants the son to do. All you can do is hope for anybody. Now when I was a kid, I had these parents and they were alright, except for one or two things. One of the things was they didn't praise me. So I got a hole there. As a result, I'm a sucker for praise. But that brings

Elston 109
up the subject of love. A word so often abused or misunderstood that I feel I should right now define it for you. But I'm not going to. I mean I could go on and on, but love is simple. Love is profound. And talking about love is a lot of bullshit.

(Hamlet) Leave wringing of your hands: peace! sit you down,
     And let me wring your heart; for so I shall,
If it be made of penetrable stuff,
     If damned custom have not brass'd it so
That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

Such an act

That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
     From the fair forehead of an innocent love
And sets a blister there, makes marriage-vows
As false as dicers' oaths: O, such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words: heaven's face doth glow:
     Yea, this solidity and compound mass,
With tristful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act.

Look here, upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See, what a grace was seated on this brow;
     Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;

Elston 110
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;
A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man:
This was your husband. Look you now, what follows:
Here is your husband; like a mildew'd ear,
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?
You cannot call it love; for at your age
The hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgment: and what judgment
Would step from this to this? Sense, sure, you have,
Else could you not have motion; but sure, that sense
Is apoplex'd; for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd
But it reserved some quantity of choice,
To serve in such a difference. What devil was't
That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope.
O shame! where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax,
And melt in her own fire: proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardor gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn
And reason panders will.

(Gary) Wait, let me get this. It's Shakespeare, right, it's like algebra on stage. And it's in Central Park, which probably seats, what, 500 tops. And the only merchandising involves, say, Gielgud cassettes and Mostly Mozart tote-bags. And on top of this, it's free. So tell me, who the hell is representing you nowadays? Lillian! Jesus, of course. I love her, but she's a war criminal. I'm not kidding. She's a ten hour documentary waiting to happen. Okay, fine, do your little show in the park. Is it a deduction? I mean, it's not even dinner theatre. What, they sell whole wheat brownies and little bags of nuts and raisins. It's snack theatre. It's Shakespeare for squirrels. Wait, just answer me one question, one simple thing: why? Why are you doing this? Are you broke? Is there a bet involved? Are you in some sort of trouble? Hamlet. I have to say this, 'cause we're buds, and I cherish that budship - but think reputation. Word on the street. When folks - let's call 'em Hollywood - when they hear that you're doing the greatest play in the English-speaking world, they're gonna know you're washed up! I mean, maybe it's foolproof - maybe, with Shakespeare, there's no difference between bad and good. And everybody's afraid to say it. I mean, at the movies, on the tube - either you're funny, or you're canceled. You're good looking, or you're best-supporting. I mean, you can tell. But Shakespeare - it's just real hard to tell who's good, without nudity.
Can I be frank? I don't get it. The theatre. It doesn't make sense. It's like, progress right? Take it step by step. Back in Neanderthal times, entertainment was like, two rocks. Boom boom. Then, in the Middle Ages, they had theatre. Then came radio. Then silent movies. Then sound. Then TV. That's like, art perfected. When you watch TV, you can eat. You can talk. You don't really have to pay attention, not if you've seen TV before. Nice half-hour chunks. Or even better, commercials. Thirty seconds. Hot girl, hot guy, the beer, it's all there. It's distilled. I mean, when I go to the theatre, I sit there, and most of the time I'm thinking - which one is my armrest?

(The Actor) Nathan, I think I'm going insane. What if I did? What if I did go insane. What could they do to me? What if I showed up to rehearsal and Hamlet was just... Sybil? How's this for his advice to the players?

(Hamlet) Okay, gather 'round. Just a few notes. It was good. Good, but. Billy, speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently. O, Kevin. It offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-herods Herod. Pray you avoid it. Chrissy, be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. Everybody, anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere, the mirror up to nature. O, there be players that I have seen play, and heard others praise, and that highly (not to speak it

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profanely), that neither having th’ accent of Christians, not the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of Nature’s journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably. O, reform it altogether! And let those that play your clowns, Guys, speak no more than is set down for them, for there be of them that will themselves laugh, Mark, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered. That’s villainous and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. But that’s it. I love you. Get rest. Go make you ready.

(The Actor) What can I say. Still working at it. But I had to get you some thoughts. The big stuff I’ll save for face to face. Before the wedding that’s for sure. I am so happy for you two. But that’s it from me...

(Aldo) The story I set out to tell, I’ve told it. And I’ll probably tell it again and again, other nights, other places. Till it’s done with being told. Till I’m done with telling it. Which may never be. But I also said I told it to you with the purpose of teaching you something, so here’s the lesson. In the end, you are dead. In the middle, you can love. In the beginning you are taken care of. When a man goes to reconcile with his ex-wife, he does to die because he is failing to live. He goes to love because she is where he left the ability. He goes to be taken care of because he is sick from being, a little too soon a man. If he succeeds in his quest, he comes away able to love again. And this is the lesson I have to teach: The greatest, the only success, is to be able to love. So there I am. Sitting at the same place I started. Only now, at least I would like to believe, no, I need to believe, I am reconciled with myself. So I got this girl waiting for me at P.J. Clarkes. she and I have a certain history. Very stupid,
fulla trouble. I'm gonna try not to worry that she might kill me, but we'll see. We will see. Always the Prince, never the King. So far.

Wish me luck.

(Turns on My Way, looks at the audience, exits)
APPENDIX C

TO BE, OR WHAT?...
QUESTIONING ANSWERS

A COLLECTION OF MONOLOGUES ARRANGED AND PERFORMED
BY

KEN D. ELSTON
Lighting Design by Michael Steinberg

"It is the actor's own raw material that makes a character believable."
- Kristin Linklater

"Shakespeare constantly reminds us that the character’s predicament and humanity is very like our own. And that's the heart of what the actor must go for, today and always."
- John Barton

THE TEXTS

Hamlet
I Hate Hamlet
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead
Lonely Planet
The Big Funk
Italian American Reconciliation

William Shakespeare
Paul Rudnick
Tom Stoppard
Steven Dietz
John Patrick Shanley
John Patrick Shanley

MFA Project Committee
Dr. Rex McGraw
Jeanine Thompson
Phil Thompson

SPECIAL THANKS TO
My teachers, my family and my friends...
Many of whom fall into more than one of these categories.

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Bibliography


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