

Shrews, Moneylenders, Soldiers, and Moors: Tackling Challenging Issues in
Shakespeare for Young Audiences

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of
Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Elizabeth Harelik, M.A.

Graduate Program in Theatre

The Ohio State University
2016

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Lesley Ferris, Adviser

Professor Jennifer Schlueter

Professor Shilarna Stokes

Professor Robin Post

Copyright by
Elizabeth Harelik
2016

Abstract

Shakespeare's plays are often a staple of the secondary school curriculum, and, more and more, theatre artists and educators are introducing young people to his works through performance. While these performances offer an engaging way for students to access these complex texts, they also often bring up topics and themes that might be challenging to discuss with young people. To give just a few examples, *The Taming of the Shrew* contains blatant sexism and gender violence; *The Merchant of Venice* features a multitude of anti-Semitic slurs; *Othello* shows characters displaying overtly racist attitudes towards its title character; and *Henry V* has several scenes of wartime violence. These themes are important, timely, and crucial to discuss with young people, but how can directors, actors, and teachers use Shakespeare's work as a springboard to begin these conversations?

In this research project, I explore twenty-first century productions of the four plays mentioned above. All of the productions studied were done in the United States by professional or university companies, either for young audiences or with young people as performers. I look at the various ways that practitioners have adapted these plays, from abridgments that retain basic plot points but reduce running time, to versions incorporating significant audience participation, to reimagined versions created by or with student performers. I also examine programming

that occurs alongside productions, such as pre or post-show workshops and post-show discussions. I conclude by offering a collection of best practices, gleaned both from my study of these individual productions and from research in fields like applied theatre and educational theory.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to:

- The many theatre artists who took time to speak with me as a part of this research, including Christine Albright, Chris Anthony, Julia Ashworth, Michael Bahr, Misha Fristensky, Shelly Gaza, Mallore Hill, Megan Sanborn Jones, Lillian Kass, Teresa Dayley Love, Maggie Lou Rader, Michael Rohd, and Elizabeth Tobias. Special thanks to Marilyn Halperin, who very kindly met with me during my several visits to Chicago Shakespeare Theater and arranged for me to observe a rehearsal of the 2015 CPS Shakespeare production of *Macbeth*.
- The Ohio State University/Royal Shakespeare Company partnership, especially Jacqui O'Hanlon, Rachel Gartside, and Miles Tandy of the RSC, and Mo Ryan of OSU, for giving me the opportunity to learn and practice active approaches to teaching Shakespeare, and for helping lead me to this research.
- Dr. Jill Galvan and my colleagues in the Autumn 2015 dissertation seminar, who pushed and questioned my research in insightful, productive ways.

- My fellow graduate students in the Department of Theatre, especially Allison Brogan, with whom I have traversed the long road of graduate school from the very first step.
- My dissertation committee: my adviser, Dr. Lesley Ferris, for her support and insight over the past six years; Dr. Jennifer Schlueter, for her always keen and thoughtful advice on this project; Dr. Shilarna Stokes, for her help in shaping this work, especially through the department's research-in-progress colloquium; and Professor Robin Post, for her perspective on applied theatre and working with challenging issues.
- My father, for his constant encouragement and always believing in me.
- Andy, for sticking by me through the ups, downs, and in-betweens, and always being my light in the dark.

Vita

2004..... New Trier High School
2008..... B.A. Theatre & English, Tufts University
2012..... M.A. Theatre, The Ohio State University
2011 to present..... Graduate Teaching Associate, Department
of Theatre, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Theatre

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
Vita.....	vi
List of Figures.....	ix
Chapter 1: How Do You Solve a Problem like Katharina? (Or Shylock, Henry, or Othello?)	1
Literature Review.....	11
Methodology.....	17
Chapter Outline	21
Chapter 2: Make It a Love Story: Abridgments of <i>Taming of the Shrew</i> for Young Audiences.....	24
Chicago Shakespeare Theater	31
Utah Shakespeare Festival.....	43
Oregon Shakespeare Festival—A Possible Workshop Model.....	62
Conclusion	71
Chapter 3: Taking the Stage: Audience Participation in Brigham Young University’s Young Company.....	75
The Setup	83
Audience Investment	90
<i>Henry V</i>	90
<i>Merchant of Venice</i>	98
Audience Engagement Outside of Performance: Workshops	110
Underlying Philosophies	113
Conclusion	120
Chapter 4: Speak the Speech!: Producing Challenging Plays with Young Performers	122
Will Power to Youth	125
CPS Shakespeare.....	132
PROJECT38.....	152
Ensemble Building.....	153
<i>Othello</i>	154
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	157
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	160
PROJECT38 Teaching Artists.....	162
Conclusion	165
Chapter 5: The Work Being Done and a Glimpse Forward.....	168
Creating Engaging Performances and Downplaying Violence.....	168

Changing the Story.....	170
Finding Relevance to Young People’s Lives.....	173
Creating Safe Spaces.....	175
What Next?	178
Bibliography	180
Appendix: Interview Transcripts	194

List of Figures

- Figure 1: Members of the ensemble in Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s production of Short Shakespeare! *The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by David H. Bell, presented in CST’s Courtyard Theater January 27–March 3, 2007. Photo by Steve Leonard. 35
- Figure 2: Members of the ensemble in Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s production of Short Shakespeare! *The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by David H. Bell, presented in CST’s Courtyard Theater January 27–March 3, 2007. Photo by Steve Leonard. 35
- Figure 3: Petruchio (Ben Viccellio) challenges Katharina (Molly Glynn) while the ensemble looks in Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s production of Short Shakespeare! *The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by David H. Bell, presented in CST’s Courtyard Theater January 27–March 3, 2007. Photo by Steve Leonard. 38
- Figure 4: A scene from the Utah Shakespeare Festival’s 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.) 45
- Figure 5: A scene from the Utah Shakespeare Festival’s 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.) 45
- Figure 6: Mallore Hill (left) as Katherina and Tom Littman as Petruchio in the Utah Shakespeare Festival’s 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.) 49
- Figure 7: Tom Littman (left) as Petruchio and Mallore Hill as Katherina in the Utah Shakespeare Festival’s 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.) 54
- Figure 8: Mallore Hill (left) as Katherina and Kaitlin Mills as Bianca in the Utah Shakespeare Festival’s 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.) 56
- Figure 9: A scene from the Utah Shakespeare Festival’s 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.) 57
- Figure 10: Ensemble member Taleah dramatically strikes a pose in an ensemble-building exercise during rehearsals for Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s *CPS*

	<i>Shakespeare! Othello</i> , directed by Kirsten Kelly, with performances November 1 and 2, 2013. Photo by Liz Lauren.....	136
Figure 11:	Ensemble member Zhanelle consults a reference text to deepen her understanding of Shakespeare's <i>Othello</i> during rehearsals for Chicago Shakespeare Theater's <i>CPS Shakespeare! Othello</i> , directed by Kirsten Kelly, with performances November 1 and 2. Photo by Liz Lauren.....	145
Figure 12:	CPS high school student Alma Vargas as Hortensio in <i>CPS Shakespeare! The Taming of the Shrew</i> , Chicago Shakespeare Theater's arts-in-education partnership with Chicago Public Schools. Photo by Liz Lauren.....	147
Figure 13:	CPS students and teachers from neighborhoods across Chicago perform in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's <i>CPS Shakespeare! Othello</i> , directed by Kirsten Kelly, with performances November 1 and 2, 2013. Photo by Liz Lauren.....	152

Chapter 1

How Do You Solve a Problem like Katharina? (Or Shylock, Henry, or Othello?)

Enter Katherine Minola. She wears a bum roll and a voluminous, Elizabethan-era dress. Under her dress, she wears Doc Martens and a pair of sweatpants; on her face she sports an impressive beard; and on her chest, hair sprouts from the low neckline of her gown. This is Kate, as played by Forbes Masson, in the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) 2014 First Encounters *The Taming of the Shrew*. This adaptation, aimed primarily at young audiences, toured to Columbus, Ohio, early in 2014, where I saw it at the Roy Bowen Theatre at The Ohio State University. As the main conceit for the production, director Michael Fentiman chose to cast women in all of the male roles, and men in all of the female roles (including Baptista who was a mother rather than a father in this production). As I watched the performance, I could not help but ask: why? Why make this creative decision? According to an interview with Fentiman, he did so because

sometimes, if you put a man in a dress but ask him to carry on acting like a man you find something quite magical happens. His natural balance of masculine and feminine is allowed to come through, and you are no longer concerned with ideas and preconceptions that surround his gender. You focus more closely on the human being, not the gender role that is associated with the person's sex . . . I think the same can be true of a woman . . . I hope this will help the production bring the emotional journey of the characters to the forefront, and allow a timeless story to emerge; a story about troubled, melancholic but ultimately joyful love, rather than the tale of abuse and misogyny that has made the play famous. (3)

This explanation seemed tenuous to me. Does putting a man in a dress or a woman in a suit really do away with an audience's concern with "gender roles"? Or was cross-dressing a parlor trick, a clever ruse to direct audience members' attention towards the spectacle of men in dresses and away from the abuse that Petruchio inflicts on Kate in so many scenes throughout the play? This is not to say that the actors did not convey the characters' love for each other—Masson and Katy Stephens (Petruchio) did so masterfully, particularly during the road scene in which the two are returning to Baptista's home after their time at Petruchio's—but I could not help thinking that, while this casting choice may have distracted audiences from the issues of sexism and violence in the play, it did not eliminate those issues. I wondered: Was this kind of treatment common in other productions of *Shrew* geared towards young audiences? And what about other Shakespeare plays that deal with issues like religion and race?

As I thought about these questions, a few plays emerged as especially salient to examine: the aforementioned *Taming of the Shrew*, with its sexism and violence against women; *The Merchant of Venice*, full of anti-Semitic references to Shylock; and *Othello*, which shows characters like Iago and Brabantio using blatantly racist language to describe Othello. An additional work that cropped up in my research was *Henry V*, which, although it does not have the undercurrent of discrimination that the aforementioned plays contain, does have multiple scenes of violence and could be seen as glorifying war and combat, facts that make it tricky to present to young audiences. Publicity material and programs for these plays often emphasize the universality or timelessness of their themes; or, conversely, note that certain

ideas, like discrimination against women, were viewed differently by Shakespeare's audience than by a twenty-first century audience, but that the beauty of his plays is that directors of different eras can interpret them in new and still relevant ways.¹ While it is certainly important to remember that Shakespeare's plays can be relatable for twenty-first century audiences, it is also vital to ask how this relatability is being conveyed. If a production shows a deep, abiding love between Kate and Petruchio, does this suggest that his harsh treatment of her is somehow excusable? Or, if the production alters the text or shows Petruchio in a negative light, does this convey a critique of his sexism? Such questions are especially crucial when looking at productions of these plays for young audiences or by young actors: what might we be telling children or teens by saying that a play in which a husband starves his wife, or a story in which a Jewish man is forced to convert to Christianity, is "timeless"? How can a director and cast tell these stories while encouraging young audience members to think critically about the themes presented, rather than accept them at face value?

In this study, I examine how multiple professional companies and one university company, all based in the United States, have presented *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello* and/or *Henry V* either for young audiences or with young actors. The companies and programs that will be featured are Chicago Shakespeare Theater's Short Shakespeare! productions and CPS (Chicago Public

¹ See, for instance, the program for *The Merchant of Venice* at Brigham Young University; Amber Foote's "Women take center stage in BYU Young Company's 'Henry V'"; "Shelly Gaza, Taming of the Shrew Tour Director"; and CST Education Department's "A Look Back at The Taming of the Shrew in Performance."

Schools) Shakespeare program; Utah Shakespeare Festival's Shakespeare-in-the-Schools tour; Brigham Young University's (BYU) Young Company; Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles' Will Power to Youth; and Cincinnati Shakespeare Company's PROJECT38. By gathering information about the ways that each of these groups approached the plays mentioned above, I have put together a constellation of best practices and strategies for producing thematically challenging Shakespeare plays for young audiences or with young performers.

The Young Company is the only non-professional performance group included in this research, a choice that was not made lightly. Although the BYU Young Company is run by a university rather than a professional theatre, it has been in existence longer than most of the professional companies discussed here (it was founded in 1975 by Harold Oaks), and has extensive support from the Theatre and Media Arts Department at BYU: the company has an Artistic Director and Outreach Coordinator, and the resources to tour two shows a year. Additionally, BYU's Theatre and Media Arts Department has a dedicated Theatre Arts Education program, indicating the department's commitment to theatre for young people. Furthermore, the Young Company may have more latitude than some professional companies to produce plays like *Merchant of Venice* that are infrequently performed for children: while ticket sales and bookings are important, the Young Company does not have to focus as much on ticket sales as non-academic groups might (Love 2015). They also have long-standing relationships with several area schools, which helps to ensure tour bookings. These facts make the Young Company particularly germane to this research.

One of the primary points that I will be arguing throughout this work is that artists and educators can and should use these Shakespeare plays as a jumping-off point to discuss issues like gender or racial discrimination. This immediately brings up the question: why Shakespeare? Why not use a more modern text? Although there are more recent pieces of dramatic literature that offer ways in to examining these themes, Shakespeare's texts offer secondary benefits to students that these more recent texts do not. First, research suggests that reading complex texts like Shakespeare helps students make gains in overall reading comprehension and writing proficiency: Jonathan Neelands, Sheila Galloway, and Geoff Lindsay's May 2009 evaluation of the RSC's Stand up for Shakespeare program found that students studying Shakespeare made significant, even unexpected gains in test results (65). Additionally, most students will be required to read Shakespeare at some point in their high school career: in the United States, for instance, Shakespeare is a part of Common Core English Language Arts Standards and, even as individual states move away from Common Core, it seems likely that Shakespeare will remain a staple of the curriculum. A wealth of anecdotal evidence suggests that introducing students to Shakespeare through performance (either watching a live performance or having students perform themselves) increases their enjoyment of his plays and decreases the intimidation they might otherwise feel at reading a complex text.² Also, the fact

² See, for instance, Lois Burdett's "All the colours of the wind: Shakespeare and the primary student," (2003); Neelands, Galloway, and Lindsay's evaluation of Stand up for Shakespeare; Angela Ramnanan's unpublished thesis, "Introducing Shakespeare Early: Why, When, and How to Teach Shakespeare to Middle School Students" (2013); and Joe Winston's *Transforming the Teaching of Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company* (2015), especially Chapter 8. See also "Learning from Live Theater" (2015), a published study by Jay P. Greene et al; although the study does not focus

that students often feel intimidated by Shakespeare at first can actually serve them: if they find the text difficult, but are able to struggle through and ultimately understand it, they feel empowered. This feeling of empowerment may, in turn, help them feel more ready to discuss and grapple with difficult issues, a possibility that I will explore further in Chapter Four of this study. By using performances of plays like *Taming of the Shrew* or *Merchant of Venice* as a springboard for discussion, artists and educators will not only give students the chance to process and grapple with the important themes of discrimination, they will also give students the ancillary academic benefits described above.

Shakespeare is also, for better or worse, ingrained in American culture.³ By making Shakespeare accessible to young audiences (by making the plays not only available but also understandable), the companies discussed here demystify this playwright and thus empower students by giving them access to this cultural capital. Furthermore, the fact that Shakespeare does have such cachet offers a pragmatic reason to use his plays to explore challenging themes with young audiences: for schools with limited funding, it may be more practical to book a touring production of a known, respected playwright than to take a chance on a more unknown writer. Admittedly, this final reason is speculative, but is based on information gleaned from conversations with directors and producers who emphasized the importance of building relationships with schools, as well as

specifically on Shakespeare, it does support the educational and other benefits of seeing live performance rather than reading a script.

³ For two discussions of this phenomenon, see *Shakespeare and Appropriation* (1999), ed. Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer, and Barbara Hodgdon's *The Shakespeare Trade* (1998).

anecdotal evidence regarding the difficulty of bringing newer work that deals more overtly with controversial themes into school settings.⁴

Another big question that immediately arises is whether performances and workshops are really an effective way to address such difficult issues with young people. Although an in-depth, quantitative study of the efficacy of this work is beyond the scope of this research, educators and applied theatre practitioners have published books and articles that support using theatre as an entry point to discuss issues like diversity and discrimination. In *Drama and Diversity* (2000), theatre-in-education scholar Sharon Grady outlines a plethora of ways to use drama in the elementary and middle school classroom to discuss topics like race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. Grady's sample lessons include active exploration techniques like those that will be discussed in the following chapters. Joan Lazarus, a professor in the theatre education program at UT Austin, outlines similar strategies for use in the secondary drama classroom in Chapter Three of *Signs of Change: New Directions in Secondary Theatre Education* (2004). Additionally, highly experienced theatre-in-education practitioners have written case studies of professional companies that have paired performances by adult actors with interactive exploration or discussions to help young students process difficult

⁴ See Gabriel Jason Dean and Lindsay Amer's "Queer Narratives in Theater for Young Audiences: A Call to Action" (2014); Hoyt Hilsman's "Does Youth Theatre Really Have to be So Pandering and Simple-Minded?" (2015); and Cicely Jo Bosley's brief mention of a theatre's sponsor balking at a production of *The Giver* in her unpublished thesis "The Economics of a Young Audience" (2010) (31).

themes or issues.⁵ Michael Rohd, founding artistic director of Sojourn Theatre and a professor at Northwestern University, who I interviewed as a part of this research, has also written about the theatrical exercises that he used with young people and adults to explore and begin discussions about the impact of HIV and AIDS in *Theatre for Community, Conflict, & Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual* (1998). During our interview, he offered additional insight on possible techniques to use in workshops, which I will reference in the chapters that follow.

The fact that the productions discussed here do provide the opportunity to explore difficult issues through workshops and activities brings me to defining two important terms that will surface occasionally in this research: triggers and safe spaces. Both have gotten a bad reputation in the recent past: Karin Agness equated safe spaces and trigger warnings to intellectual bubble wrap in a *Time* magazine article; Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt asserted in *The Atlantic* that such measures were “disastrous” for both education and mental health; and Laura Kipnis penned an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* questioning the long term effects of allowing students to remain “cocooned from uncomfortable feelings.” There is a distinct and very important difference between the way that I will be discussing triggers and safe spaces, and the ways in which the aforementioned authors have defined these terms. First, I am not defining triggers, as Lukianoff and Haidt do, merely as something that “might cause a strong emotional response.” I am, instead, borrowing from Rita Hardiman, Bailey Jackson, and Pat Griffin’s article in

⁵ See Chris Vine’s “TIE and the Theatre of the Oppressed” and Mark Riherd and Gwendolen Hardwick’s “The Creative Arts Team in the US,” both in *Learning Through Theatre: New Perspectives on Theatre in Education* (1993), ed. Tony Jackson.

Teaching For Diversity and Social Justice (2007). They define triggers as “words or phrases that stimulate an emotional response because they tap into anger or pain” (55). They also specify that the term “connotes an instantaneous response to stimuli without accompanying conscious thought” (55). More importantly, I do not subscribe to the idea that identifying triggers is equivalent to shielding students from them. Instead, following Hardiman, Jackson, and Griffin’s lead, I look at triggers “as learning opportunities for everyone” (56). By identifying and naming triggers, students (or any participant in a discussion or workshop) can dig deeper into what exactly has stimulated an emotional response, why it has done so, and what the implications of that response might be. My definition of “trigger,” for the purposes of this research, then, is something that stimulates an emotional response linked to anger or pain, often without conscious thought, and that opens up an opportunity for learning and deeper discussion.

The idea of “safe space” is another that has come under attack in the articles described above, but that I will not be defining in the same way as those authors. Instead, I will borrow language from the particularly relevant Summer 2000 issue of *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, in which Marcia B. Baxter Magolda discusses safe spaces as “[i]nclusive and effective learning environments . . . in which opportunities for complex cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development exist for all students” (94). Another important element of this term is brought up by Barbara Mae Gayle, Derek Cortez, and Raymond W. Preiss in their study of safe spaces as a place for difficult dialogues: they note that “[t]he absence of conflict in a classroom may mistakenly be viewed as a safe classroom when in fact

its absence may only further ignorance and stifle ideas and critical thinking” (6). The safe spaces I describe in the following chapters are not ones in which students are coddled or shielded from ideas that may conflict with their own, but instead “inclusive and effective” environments in which students can further their own development and, in fact, experience conflict without fearing that they will be attacked or shut down.

The last piece of terminology that needs to be defined for this research is a set of terms: “difficult,” “challenging,” and “problematic.” I use these terms interchangeably to refer to the thematic content of the collection of works being discussed here. These terms are necessarily broad: they encompass issues that range from gender discrimination and violence in *Taming of the Shrew* to religious discrimination in *Merchant of Venice* to racial bigotry in *Othello* to wartime violence in *Henry V*. Wherever possible, I discuss the specific issue at hand in an individual play, but, because I will refer to these plays collectively at times, these broader terms are necessary. I use these three umbrella terms to designate the material within these plays that may feel dangerous, frightening, or controversial to bring up with students in a classroom or performance setting, for fear of provoking a discussion that becomes emotionally unsafe for students (see definition of safe spaces above); triggering students with no way to provide resources for them to

deal with those triggers; or experiencing backlash from school administration and/or parents.⁶

Literature Review

While there is quite a bit of scholarship on the problematic themes of gender dynamics and violence in *Taming of the Shrew*, discrimination in *Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, and some on violence in *Henry V*, most of these studies focus on textual analysis. There is less research that discusses these themes in the context of performance. What follows is a broad overview of the research most relevant to this study; the sheer amount of Shakespeare scholarship unfortunately renders a comprehensive review prohibitive.

Among the works that focus on performance is Toby Lelyveld's *Shylock on the Stage* (1960), which traces notable developments in stage representations of Shylock. In it, Lelyveld discusses the extent to which individual actors portraying Shylock focused on religion and includes a bit of information about anti-Semitism and the treatment of Jews during the time period in which each production was staged. John Gross also focuses on the character of Shylock in his (aptly titled) *Shylock* (1992). The first part of Gross's book focuses on the character of Shylock as presented in Shakespeare's text; the second serves as a selective chronicle of notable performances of this role; and the third looks at various responses to Shylock throughout history. Gross's book primarily looks at productions before World War II—although he does discuss post-war productions at the end of his

⁶ For just one of the many interesting discussions on teaching controversial issues in the classroom, and teachers' concerns about doing so, see Philpott et al., "Controversial Issues: To teach or not to teach? That is the question!" (2011).

book and acknowledges these productions' attempts to grapple with the character of Shylock in the wake of the Holocaust, he does not study these productions in depth.

James C. Bulman, on the other hand, does discuss some post-World War II productions in detail in *The Merchant of Venice* (1991), part of the Shakespeare in Performance series. As Gross and Lelyveld did, Bulman looks at how religion was handled by each actor and director, and the various interpretations of anti-Semitism in the play. The more notable example of scholarship on post-World War II performances of *Merchant*, however, is Arthur Horowitz's article "Shylock After Auschwitz: *The Merchant of Venice* on the Post-Holocaust Stage—Subversion, Confrontation, and Provocation" (2007). In this article, Horowitz looks at several versions of *Merchant* including a 1972 production directed by Peter Zadek; Georg Tabori's 1966 production, provocatively titled *The Merchant of Venice as Performed in Theresienstadt*, as well as his 1978 *Improvisations on Shylock*; and Yossi Yzraeili's 1972 staging, which marked the first time that *Merchant* was directed by an Israeli artist for production in Israel.

In the case of *Othello*, much has been written about the significance of race and racism both in the context of Shakespeare's time and more recent eras. Fewer studies focus on the significance of race in production, although several at least mention the significant players in the history of *Othello*, including Edmund Kean, who began the trend of the light-skinned or "tawny" Othello; Ira Aldridge, the first black actor to play Othello; and Paul Robeson, the first black actor to play the role in

America.⁷ Mythili Kaul gives a broad overview of the play's performance history in "Background: Black or Tawny? Stage Representations of Othello from 1604 to the Present" (1997). Lois Potter's *Othello* (2002), which, like Bulman's *Merchant of Venice*, is part of the Shakespeare in Performance series, offers a more in-depth study. Potter first examines pre-twentieth century performances of the play, and then moves to more recent productions (using Robeson's 1930 performance to mark the start of this recent era) with an eye towards directorial interpretation and influence.

Although violence is not readily named as a problematic theme in *Henry V* in the same way that racism is in *Othello*, there is some fascinating research on the staging of violence in productions of this play. In *Shakespeare, Trauma, and Contemporary Performance* (2011), Catherine Silverstone looks at the strong connections between Nicholas Hytner's 2003 production of *Henry V* at London's National Theatre, and the contemporaneous war in Iraq. R.A. Foakes examines the "troublesome" nature of violence in *Henry V* in *Shakespeare and Violence* (2003), but does so through a literary rather than a performance-based lens. Neither of the aforementioned works on *Henry V*, however, deal with any productions aimed specifically at young audiences, nor do any of those on *Merchant of Venice* or *Othello*.

Taming of the Shrew is the one exception to this dearth of material on productions for young audiences, and even for this play, the research on such productions is slim. Half of a single chapter of Joe Winston's *Transforming the*

⁷ For just a few of the discussions on these topics, see Ruth Cowhig's "Blacks in English Renaissance drama and the role of Shakespeare's Othello" (1985); James Shapiro's *Shakespeare in America* (2014); Bernth Lindfors's *Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius* (2007); and Lois Potter's *Othello*.

Teaching of Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company (2015) focuses on Tim Crouch's 2011 Young People's Shakespeare production of *The Taming of the Shrew*.⁸ Winston does discuss the issue of female subservience and "taming" in this play and outlines the various strategies that Crouch used to address these themes. One notable change that Crouch made was to include Christopher Sly throughout the show: he had Sly "[reappear] during scene changes to comment on the play or try to influence the action" (95). The specific instance of Sly's intervention that Winston mentions was at the end of the wedding scene, when Sly, played by Jamie Beamish, "[urged] the male characters to put a stop to Petruchio's mistreatment of Kate" by exclaiming "'Come on, there's five of us!'" a comment that the other characters ignored (95). Winston also writes about the post-show workshop, which involved "hot-seating" characters (an exercise in which actors remain in character and answer questions from audience members) (98). One of the main points that Winston brings up is that, in these post-show "hot-seatings," actors always tried to answer in ways that fed discussions, sometimes asking questions of the students themselves in order to prompt debate (98). Beyond this study, however, there is no writing on adaptations of *Shrew* for young audiences.

There are some works, such as Penny Gay's *As She Likes It* (1994), focused on full-length performances of *Shrew* aimed at a general audience. In one chapter of her book, Gay examines productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* at Stratford-Upon-Avon from 1948 to 1988, looking at the way that each production handled the issue of

⁸ Young People's Shakespeare was the RSC's predecessor to First Encounters, the performance series mentioned at the start of this chapter.

female subjugation. Tori Haring-Smith's *From Farce to Metadrama: A Stage History of The Taming of the Shrew, 1594-1983* (1985) also offers a broad survey of stage and film versions of this play, including summaries of trends in production, such as commedia dell'arte and modern dress interpretations. Graham Holderness's edition of *The Taming of the Shrew* (1989), another member of the Shakespeare in Performance series, examines two stage productions and two film productions of the play between 1960 and 1980. Although Holderness does briefly discuss the way that each production addressed sexual politics, this discussion is only a small part of his argument. Lesley Ferris's essay "Staging Violence against Women: A Long Series of Replays" (1999) specifically addresses representations of violence against women in several different plays, focusing on *The Taming of the Shrew* for much of her essay. Ferris does make a brief reference to the difficulty of presenting plays such as *Shrew* in an educational setting—she opens her essay with an anecdote about bringing her thirteen-year-old daughter to see *Kiss Me Kate*, and the disturbing representation of violence in the "play-within-a-play" scenes from *Shrew*—but she does not specifically discuss adaptations of *Shrew* for young people (31).

Elizabeth Schafer's *Ms-Directing Shakespeare: Women Direct Shakespeare* (2000) does have two chapters that focus on plays discussed here. She examines three female-led productions of *Taming of the Shrew*, looking at the work of directors Di Trevis, Jude Kelly, and Gale Edwards. In a later chapter, Schafer looks at *Merchant of Venice*, this time focusing on only two productions, one directed by Jude Kelly and one by Deborah Paige. Although her work does focus on the challenging themes in each of these plays, and her research is performance-based rather than

focused on literary analysis, she looks only at productions aimed at a general audience, not at work adapted for or geared towards children.

While there are no studies at the moment that focus on *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, or *Henry V* in production for young people, and only a single piece of research on *The Taming of the Shrew* for young audiences, Abigail Rokison's *Shakespeare for Young People* (2013) does examine youth-oriented adaptations of other Shakespearean plays. Rokison focuses primarily on the most popular plays for young audiences, such as *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. She does not examine any other works in depth, and her work does not focus solely on stagings of these plays: of the nine chapters in her book, two focus on live performances of Shakespeare's plays, while the remaining seven look at films, picture books, graphic novels, television shows, and plays and novels inspired by Shakespeare's texts. Rokison's work also focuses primarily on productions in the United Kingdom and does not discuss work being done in other countries.

There are also several scholars who have written more generally about theatre for young audiences. Nellie McCaslin's *Theatre for Children in the United States: A History* (1997) provides a broad overview of the history of this form in the U.S., but only briefly acknowledges adaptations of Shakespeare for young people. Roger Bedard and C. John Tolch edited *Spotlight on the Child: Studies in the History of American Children's Theatre* (1989), which, like McCaslin's work, mentions but does not focus on youth-oriented productions of Shakespeare. Additionally, scholars like Matthew Reason, Tom Maguire, and Karian Schuitema have written more recently on theatre for young audiences and children's experiences of theatre, with research

focused in the United Kingdom. These works also deal, in part, with Shakespeare, but it is by no means the focus of either Reason's *The Young Audience* (2010) or *Theatre for Young Audiences* (2012), edited by Maguire and Schuitema. Finally, there are two documentary films that merit mentioning here. The first is *Why Shakespeare?* (2004), a documentary by Lawrence Bridges discussing the enduring relevance and importance of Shakespeare. This film includes interviews about Will Power to Youth with Chris Anthony, the Associate Artistic Director and Director of Youth and Education at Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles, and with two student participants in the program. The second film is *The Homestretch* (2014), which focuses on three homeless teens in Chicago, one of whom takes part in CPS Shakespeare. Neither of these films takes a scholarly perspective, though, and neither looks specifically at thematically challenging plays. My research, then, will fill a void in the existing scholarship, by addressing best practices in U.S. productions of thematically challenging Shakespeare plays, aimed at young audiences.

Methodology

Filling this void has posed certain methodological challenges. Writing about any theatrical production is a daunting task, due to the ephemeral nature of performance. It is impossible to recreate the experience of seeing a play being performed live; even a video recording cannot reproduce that shared, embodied experience. Scholars often turn to reviews or other archival writings about a production, in order to gain some sense of what audiences' experience of the show may have been like. In the case of this study, however, only the Chicago Shakespeare

Theater Short Shakespeare! productions and the Utah Shakespeare Festival tour had been reviewed by local newspapers. Brigham Young's productions were reviewed by a small number of local bloggers, and none of the productions using young actors were reviewed or otherwise publicly documented, aside from the occasional press release or short article. Additionally, because I came to this research after all of these shows had closed, I did not see any live, and could only view recordings of three of the plays being discussed.⁹ As mentioned earlier, even these videos could not fully replicate the experience of being in a theatre, watching young audiences respond to a performance or watching young people perform.

I tackled these challenges in a variety of ways. First, I conducted interviews with several of the artists and producers involved in the various productions included here, in order to get as much information as possible about the specific details of each adaptation and performance.¹⁰ I also read the adapted scripts, if they were available, and looked through production photos, doing my best to get some sense of the text students heard and the images they saw on stage. Additionally, although there has not been much research done on Shakespeare for young audiences in the United States, there are some brief publications on Will Power for Youth and its success, which I consulted. Many of the theatres also provided some form of online resource for teachers and students seeing their plays; I read through many of these study guides and programs, in order to glean what themes and ideas each creative team wanted to encourage audiences to engage with or focus on. For

⁹ I watched archival video of the 2007 Short Shakespeare! *Taming of the Shrew*, the 2011 CPS Shakespeare *Taming of the Shrew*, and the 2013 CPS Shakespeare *Othello*.

¹⁰ Transcripts of these interviews are appended.

those productions that were reviewed in newspapers or on blogs, I read as many reviews as I could find, largely to expand my knowledge of what each production looked like, from set design choices to costumes to how actors interacted with young audience members.

I knew going into this research that, while my goal was to compile best practices in working with young people on thematically challenging plays, some companies producing these works may not have focused on discussing themes like sexism or racism with audience members. To find additional strategies and suggestions for working through these issues with young people, I turned to other theatre practitioners. I interviewed Michael Rohd, mentioned earlier, a professor and artist who specializes in civic practice.¹¹ I also spoke with Christine Albright, a teaching artist at Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF), who has developed and implemented several theme-based workshops for OSF. In addition to these interviews, I consulted books and articles by experts in both theatre and education, including, but not limited to, Brian Way, Matthew Reason, Augusto Boal, Lois Burdett, Anthony Jackson, Tom Maguire, Sarah Philpott, Fred Newmann, Joan Lazarus, Viola Spolin, Ellin Keene, and Susan Zimmerman.

Even after gathering all of this information on individual productions and on strategies for helping young people grapple with issues like discrimination, a big challenge remained: many (though not all) of the productions in this study were created by adults, for young people. And, even for programs like CPS Shakespeare,

¹¹ Rohd defines civic practice as “activity where an artist employs the assets of his/her craft in response to the needs of non-arts partners as determined through ongoing relationship-based dialogue” (“Translations”).

Will Power to Youth, or PROJECT38, in which young people do much of the adapting or staging, adults are still essentially in charge. How, then, could I figure out how much of the work being done was truly based on what young people would connect with and enjoy, and how much was based on adult perception of young people? Some children's literature scholars posit that all writing for children is based on adults' notions of youth, implying that it is impossible to gauge young people's responses to artistic works created for them.¹² Although this is an important point to keep in mind, the live performance element of theatre for young audiences does make it more possible to discern children's responses to what has been created for them, at least to some extent. To that end, I have attempted to drop in young people's voices as much as possible. Often, this was not feasible, as mentioned earlier: since I was not able to see these performances live, I was not able to observe audience members in person or speak to them after shows. I was, however, able to watch recorded Q&A sessions for Chicago Shakespeare Theater's CPS Shakespeare and Short Shakespeare! productions, as well as reading a selection of student responses to the Utah Shakespeare Festival tour. By providing specific comments made or questions asked by children (either young audience members or young performers, depending on the production), these resources offered a small glimpse of how kids responded to performances they saw or to the work they did themselves. I have also researched pedagogical theories, looking particularly at the ideas of authentic learning, in order to back up my assertions of what exercises and

¹² See Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984), and Perry Nodelman's *The Hidden Adult* (2008).

strategies might prove most effective in working with young people. By utilizing this set of resources, I have gained as much insight as possible (though perhaps not always as much as I would like) into young people's reactions to and connections with the plays that they saw performed, or in which they acted.

Chapter Outline

Each of the following chapters addresses a different approach to tackling Shakespeare with young people. Although each chapter is discrete, there is a progression from chapter to chapter, largely in terms of young people's hands-on involvement in the process. I begin in Chapter Two with abridged versions of Shakespeare. This chapter focuses only on *Taming of the Shrew*, largely because few, if any, productions of *Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, or *Henry V* have been done in this abridged style in the United States in the twenty-first century. I examine the 2007 Short Shakespeare! production at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, as well as the 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival Shakespeare-in-the-Schools tour. Both of these interpretations had very little audience participation; there were occasional instances of breaking the fourth wall, but for the most part, the audience was not involved until post-show question and answer sessions or workshops. In this chapter, I also delve into Oregon Shakespeare Festival's theme-based workshops as a possible way to help students who have seen abridged versions of *Shrew* grapple with the ideas of gender discrimination and violence.

Chapter Three moves into a performance style that is slightly more interactive. In this chapter, I look at Brigham Young University's Young Company, and their performances of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Henry V*. These productions

both involved significant audience participation: young viewers were cast in specific roles and even spoke a few lines of text. The Young Company has also begun adding workshops to their performances over the past several years, an initiative led by artistic director Julia Ashworth. Because of Ashworth's background in applied theatre (an art form that is difficult to define, but generally involves using theatre to help participants or audience grapple with an issue of personal or public concern), these post-show workshops are sometimes based around a social issue relevant to the show being staged.¹³ I will discuss these workshops and their potential to help young audiences process and talk meaningfully about various themes.

The most hands-on work comes in Chapter Four, which focuses on those programs that work with young people as adapters and performers. Here, I look at CPS (Chicago Public Schools) Shakespeare, run by Chicago Shakespeare Theater; Will Power to Youth, run by Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles; and PROJECT38, run by Cincinnati Shakespeare Company. All of these programs have worked with young people on *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and/or *Othello* in the past fifteen years. In this chapter, I look at the overall methods and underlying philosophies of each program, as well as the specific ways in which they worked with each of the plays mentioned above.

I will conclude with an overview of the various strategies that have been outlined in the previous chapters, highlighting the trends that have emerged throughout these productions, as well as those methods that are unique to each

¹³ For more on this definition of applied theatre, see Philip Taylor's *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community* (2003).

individual company or practitioner. In my interviews with practitioners, a refrain that I heard time and time again is that many people are working on Shakespeare for young audiences, but often these artists do not know what techniques other directors or actors are using, and wish they had a forum to share practices. It is my hope that this research will be the beginning of this kind of shared knowledge and can offer a resource for those who want to help young people not only understand and enjoy Shakespeare, but also grapple with the challenging themes in his work.

Chapter 2

Make It a Love Story: Abridgments of *Taming of the Shrew* for Young Audiences

In the 1920s, the only Shakespeare play on the list of most-produced plays by high schools in the United States was *The Taming of the Shrew* (Chansky 160).

Dorothy Chansky notes in *Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience* (2004) that the popularity of this text indicated that, consciously or not, young women of the period were being given the message “that women’s place was as sweetheart, wife, mother, and submitter to male control” (160). Almost 100 years later, it seems like a play promoting this kind of message should have made its way out of the rotation of popular drama. While it may no longer be the most produced Shakespeare play in high schools, *Taming of the Shrew* is still frequently staged for young audiences by professional companies in the United States, in spite of the play’s disturbing scenes of gender violence. In this chapter, I will examine shortened versions of *Taming of the Shrew* for young audiences. I refer to these versions as “abridgments,” a term borrowed from Marilyn Halperin, Director of Education at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. For the purposes of this study, I define these productions as ones aimed at elementary and secondary student audiences, in which the director and/or adapter has retained Shakespeare’s language but has cut the script to run less than ninety minutes. These productions also purport to keep the play’s basic plot intact (although this claim is sometimes arguable, as I will discuss below). Audience interaction is limited—actors may break

the fourth wall, but audience members do not perform in the play itself. All of the abridgments discussed here were performed by adult professional actors and produced by professional companies who, while they may perform contemporary plays, focus largely on Shakespeare.

This chapter deals only with abridgments of *The Taming of the Shrew*, and is the only chapter in this work that will focus on just one play. This is, quite simply, because I have not come across any companies in the United States doing these kinds of abridged productions of Shakespeare's other trickiest plays, those dealing with themes like discrimination or gender violence. The tendency in doing abridgments seems to be to stick with plays like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or *Romeo and Juliet*. These plays have their own challenges, of course, but misogyny, violence, racism, and prejudice are not their primary themes as is the case with *Shrew*, *Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*.¹⁴ These troubling themes may be why professional companies in the United States have not yet tackled abridgments of *Othello* or *Merchant of Venice*.¹⁵

There are many reasons that *Taming of the Shrew* raises red flags for readers and audience members of any age. As Tori Haring-Smith bluntly puts it, it tells "the tale of a man who brazenly declares that he is marrying for money and then breaks

¹⁴ *Henry V*, which will be discussed in a later chapter, has been abridged and performed for young audiences at The Ohio State University. This play, however, is something of a special case—its themes of war alone perhaps do not qualify it for inclusion in this study, but I have included it in Chapter 3 due to the unique use of audience participation in a specific production at Brigham Young University. This special case will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁵ Propeller Theatre Company in the U.K. has done an abridgment of *Merchant of Venice*, titled *Pocket Merchant* (although the imposition of a frame story setting the tale in an all-male prison may place this production a bit out of the realm of direct, non-plot-altering abridgment). For more information on this play, see <http://propeller.org.uk/productions/pocket-merchant-2015> or <http://propeller.org.uk/productions/pocket-merchant>.

his bride's will by cruelly depriving her of food and sleep" (3). Many readers and viewers understandably interpret these actions as "downright sadistic and thoroughly offensive" (3). The play is also part of a tradition of "shrew-taming" tales and real-life rituals, popular in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In early modern society, a "shrew" referred to an "unruly, disobedient mistress" of the devil, often viewed as worse than the devil himself (Mills 217-218). A woman who was deemed a shrew "contradicted a patriarchal concept of the submissive, biddable woman" (218). Shrew-taming, therefore, attempted to force such "unruly" women into submission. These practices were disturbing, humiliating, and often violent: women were "carted" (put on a cart and paraded through the street for humiliation), forced to endure the ducking stool (a chair to which a woman was strapped and then submerged in water repeatedly), or humiliated by charivari (a ritual in which a woman was paraded through town while neighbors banged pots and pans to make sure everyone knew the woman was being humiliated) (Newman 248). Tales of shrew-taming were a part of the oral history in Shakespeare's time, but *Taming of the Shrew* is one of the only tales that has survived to the twenty-first century, and is certainly the only popular tale of this type (Hodgdon "Shrew-Histories"). It is true that Shakespeare's *Shrew* does not contain any instances of the violence described above, but the play came from a society where such actions against women were culturally condoned.¹⁶

¹⁶ For more on the prevalence of shrew-taming tales, see D.E. Underdown's article "The Taming of the Scold" in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (1985), ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson. For more on the staging of violence against women in the Western dramatic canon, see

Although *Taming of the Shrew* does not have any ducking stools or charivaris, it does portray a woman, Kate, being controlled, humiliated, and abused by the men in her life. She is verbally assaulted by men like Hortensio, Gremio, and Tranio: they tell her to “go to the Devil’s dam,” call her “shrewd,” “ill-favored,” “froward,” “scolding,” “hilding of a devilish spirit,” “a devil,” and repeatedly refer to her as “curst,” “intolerable curst” or “curst Katherine.” Kate also gets no say in her own marriage: at the end of the scene in which she meets Petruchio, he tells her, point blank, “will you, nill you, I will marry you” (2.1.286). He proceeds to insist to her father, Baptista, that the two have agreed to marry and, in spite of Katherine’s repeated denial of this fact, Baptista agrees to give her to Petruchio in marriage. Once they are married, Petruchio manipulates, abuses, and humiliates Katherine: he denies her food, refuses to let her sleep, destroys the clothes that have been made for her, and coerces her into agreeing with whatever he says, no matter how absurd his assertions. In the final scene of the play, Kate seems utterly tamed: she comes when called, unlike Bianca or the Widow, and delivers a lengthy speech detailing why women should submit to their husbands, ending by offering to place her hand “below [her] husband’s foot” (5.2.193).

What is important to remember, though, is that, in spite of the seemingly obvious misogyny in the text, there are a lot of ambiguities in *Shrew*. Many of these ambiguities come from the fact that it is a script and therefore ultimately meant to be performed, which means that each director and set of actors interpret Kate and

“Staging Violence against Women” by Lesley Ferris, in Volume 7 of *Theatre Symposium*, titled *Theatre and Violence*.

Petruchio's interactions differently. Many actors playing Kate in full-length productions of *Shrew* have, for instance, delivered the final speech as sarcastic or ironic, as Fredi Olster did in the 1976 televised version of *Shrew*, produced by American Conservatory Theater. Olster ended Kate's speech with a massive wink to the camera, suggesting that she had not really been "tamed" at all. Other productions, such as David H. Bell's 2003 full-length production at Chicago Shakespeare Theater (CST) and a 2008 collaboration between New Mexico State University and American Southwest Theatre Company, portray Kate and Petruchio as deeply in love, two lost souls who have finally found their soul mates (Metz, Hagerman 325).¹⁷

In addition to making Kate and Petruchio's relationship a love story, many productions also extend the Christopher Sly frame in order to address some of the problems in *Shrew*. In the Folio text of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Christopher Sly appears only in the two scenes of the Induction, and then once more at the end of 1.1. In the Quarto text of *The Taming of A Shrew*, however, Sly interjects commentary on the action throughout the play, and at the very end he wakes up, implying that he has dreamt the entire story (Schafer 58, Mowat 233-245). Directors have brought back some of these Quarto scenes or, in some cases, created an entirely new frame. In a 2005 Shakespeare & Company production, director Daniela Varon not only kept Sly onstage for the entire play, she also added in an additional frame: at the end of

¹⁷ Though CST promotional literature asserted that the Kate in Bell's production, played by Kate Fry, was "a woman changed by love, not tamed by torture" (CST Education Department), some reviewers felt otherwise: Kelly Kleiman of *Chicago Reader* described Fry's delivery of the final speech as "groveling" and "likely to alienate contemporary audience members."

the performance, an actor playing Queen Elizabeth rose from the balcony above Sly's perch and announced, "I will have here one mistress and no master," and commanded everyone to bow to Kate (Mento 129). Other directors have framed their productions as a final dress or technical rehearsal, emphasizing the theatricality of the event that the audience is watching. One notable example of such framing is a 2010 production at CST, directed by Josie Rourke, which replaced the Induction with a new frame written by Neil LaBute.¹⁸ These new scenes were inserted before the play, on either side of intermission, and briefly at the performance's end. LaBute's text featured a female Director, who had cast her girlfriend as Kate. The play became about this Director "taming" her girlfriend (who was vocally upset about the sexist material in the play) just as much as it was about Petruchio taming Kate. By utilizing Shakespeare's Induction and frame story, and/or newly written frames, directors constantly remind audience members that the events happening in the Kate and Petruchio story are fictional, happening only for the sake of a "play within a play."¹⁹

Another common way that full-length productions have addressed the violent moments between Kate and Petruchio is to use farce, slapstick, and elements of commedia dell'arte. Scholars point out that Shakespeare was undoubtedly

¹⁸ For an additional, less radically revised example of this kind of frame, see Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival's 2007 production, directed by Russell Treyz.

¹⁹ LaBute's frame defies this notion, in some ways: rather than labeling *Shrew's* sexism and unhealthy relationship dynamics as fictional or a thing of the past, LaBute and Rourke forefronted these issues as still relevant in real-life contexts. However, the frame also gave the company a way to skirt the complexity of *Shrew's* final speech by having the character of the actress playing Kate become fed up with the material and storm offstage in the moment when she was supposed to deliver the speech, declaring, "Fuck this. We are done here," rather than confronting and making a statement about the thorny text of the speech itself.

familiar with the conventions of commedia and had likely seen performances of it. Shakespeare even includes a reference to a commedia stock character in *Shrew*: Lucentio refers to Gremio as “the old pantaloon” (3.1.38). Many productions use over-the-top, commedia-style clowning in order to distance audiences from the play’s violence and emphasize the artificiality of the action: in the aforementioned American Conservatory Theater televised production (which was also produced onstage in 1973 and revived twice afterwards), director William Ball utilized commedia-style masks, multiple characters in harlequin costumes, and several instances of impressive acrobatics, particularly in the wooing scene between Kate and Petruchio. Other productions of *Shrew*, such as the 2005 Philadelphia Shakespeare Festival staging and ShakespeareNYC’s 2006 production, also used commedia or slapstick techniques to stage violence, thus emphasizing the comedy in these moments and making them less alarming for viewers.²⁰

All of the productions described above were full-length and aimed at audiences of any age. Abridgments for young people, however, also utilize the tactics outlined here, in order to make *Taming of the Shrew*’s gender discrimination and violence less disturbing to audiences. The two productions that I will focus on in this chapter are the 2007 Short Shakespeare! version of *Taming of the Shrew*, directed by David H. Bell for CST, and the 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools tour of *Shrew*, directed by Shelly Gaza for Utah Shakespeare Festival. Both of these stagings emphasized the loving relationship between Petruchio and Kate, used textual

²⁰ Various mass media studies support this theory of audience reception of violence in comedy; this evidence will be discussed in further detail below.

adaptation or actor interpretation to mitigate Kate's final speech, took advantage of the frame story to remind audience members that the play was mere fiction, and used elements of slapstick and commedia dell'arte. Most of the information in this study comes from interviews I conducted with artists involved with each production, reviews published in print or online, and, in the case of the CST production, archival video.

In addition to examining these two abridgments, I will also explore ways that companies might help students grapple with *Shrew's* content, outside of the performance itself. My primary focus will be on workshops conducted by teaching artists, and I will use Oregon Shakespeare Festival's theme-based workshops as an example of such programming. I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of ways in which theatre artists might combine abridged performances of *Taming of the Shrew* with pre- and/or post-show workshops, and use these performance experiences as a springboard into discussion about difficult issues like gender discrimination and power imbalance in relationships.

Chicago Shakespeare Theater

Chicago Shakespeare Theater (CST) has had a "Short Shakespeare!" production as part of their season since 1992. Marilyn Halperin refers to these productions as "abridgments" rather than "adaptations," a choice that she says "originated out of [her] desire to assure teachers that these were 'the real deal'" (2015b). For Halperin, the term abridgment "suggests shorter but not changed appreciably apart from the length; adaptation suggests . . . more active reworking of the script—sometimes with additions, sometimes with scene intercutting,

sometimes with scene transposition” (2015b). Halperin’s explanation implies that CST, like many other American institutions, from theatres to schools, is invested in the cultural capital afforded by producing “genuine” Shakespeare, based on the commodity that Shakespeare has become.²¹ This idea will be further unpacked and questioned later in the discussion of CST’s Short Shakespeare! work, but for now, it is important to know that CST’s abridgments, while much shorter than Shakespeare’s original text, do implicitly claim a certain fidelity to the full-length plays. CST has produced two abridgments of *Taming of the Shrew*—one in 2007, and one in 2012.²² I will primarily examine the 2007 production here, because of the artistic choices made by director David H. Bell and the way in which these choices reflect interesting trends in stagings of *Shrew*.²³

Before diving into specifics of Bell’s ’07 *Shrew*, I want to explore an element common to all of CST’s Short Shakespeare! productions: the pre-show speech, delivered by one of the actors. This speech is not the typical “turn off your cell phones and don’t text during the performance” directive. Instead, the actor

²¹ For just two of the many discussions of Shakespeare as commodity and his cultural capital, see *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, ed. Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer, and Barbara Hodgdon’s *The Shakespeare Trade*. For a specific discussion of Shakespeare’s cultural capital and Chicago Shakespeare Theater, see L. Monique Pittman’s “Big-Shouldered Shakespeare: Three *Shrews* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater” (2014).

²² Both the 2007 and 2012 Short Shakespeare! productions of *Shrew* were remounted the summer following their original run, as the next season’s Chicago Shakespeare in the Parks production. Because these were remounts and not newly conceived productions, I am not counting them as separate for the purpose of this study.

²³ The 2012 production, directed by Rachel Rockwell, was more traditional in many of its choices—unlike Bell’s version, it did not use a frame story and Kate’s final speech was played fairly sincerely and in its original context. Something important to note about this production, however, is that the actor playing Petruchio (Matt Mueller) was white, and the actress playing Kate (Ericka Ratcliff) was black. But, based on the excerpts of the show that I saw on video and one reviewer’s comments, the director and actors did not really engage with the implications of this casting choice. While it is impossible for audience members not to notice an actor’s race, and viewers undoubtedly reacted, consciously or not, to the possible intersection of racial and sexual politics, this production was not trying to play up this intersection.

addresses the fact that Shakespeare's language may feel foreign at first, and that it is okay if audience members get confused—they can watch the actors' hands and faces to figure out what is happening and keep following the story. Halperin believes that “the majority of kids probably come in expecting either not to get it or to be bored,” and the idea of the pre-show speech is “to give them the tools [to follow the story and] the information that [getting lost] is probably going to happen, and just don't check out” (2015a). She and the rest of the team work extensively with the actor who gives that pre-show speech, because they want the actor to find a very specific vibe of “an older brother to younger siblings, so there's a warmth, there's a connectivity, but there is also kind of a presence, and that's a hard balance” (2015a). This kind of introduction is unique: none of the other companies that I have researched address so explicitly the complexity and challenge of Shakespeare's language. The pedagogical goal of this strategy is to prepare students to engage with the play they are about to see and encourage them to stay checked in and focused, even if they lose the thread of the story for a moment. While it is tough to measure how much the speech alone contributes to student engagement, I can say that in the video I saw of the '07 *Shrew* (which I acknowledge was a mere snapshot of the run), audience members did remain attentive during the speech and throughout the entire performance.

In this specific production of *Shrew*, director David H. Bell did away with Shakespeare's Induction, but added in his own frame that heavily emphasized the idea of *Shrew* being a “play within a play.” Immediately after the curtain speech, several characters in commedia dell'arte masks entered the space, some interacting

with audience members as they came on. Suddenly, a trunk that had been placed onstage began to rattle; it opened, and an actor dressed as a masked Harlequin emerged, holding a slapstick. Two of the masked actors took center stage, bowed, and were lauded with applause from the other masked actors, serving as their “audience.” Another masked actor quickly darted upstage, where a curtain was closed. He drew the curtain aside, revealing six unmasked actors, in costumes reminiscent of the Wild West.²⁴ The masked actor-audience members once again applauded, the Harlequin snapped his slapstick, and the masked actors proceeded to set the stage: they moved the trunk from which the Harlequin had emerged offstage, inspected the unmasked actors, and conferred with the Harlequin. Finally, the masked actors picked up the actors playing Lucentio and Tranio, who remained so stiff that they almost resembled mannequins, moved them into position at the Harlequin’s direction, and, at another snap of the slapstick, scurried into position to watch the scene that was about to start. Finally, the Harlequin snapped his slapstick once more, prompting the frozen performers to spring into action and begin Act One, Scene One of *Shrew*, surrounded not only by the student audience, but also by an onstage actor-audience composed of both masked and unmasked actors.

²⁴ This choice of using a Western style is not uncommon, though not used as often as the commedia/farce style. Productions utilizing this style, at least in part, include Michael Benthall’s 1948 RSC production; the 1990 New York Shakespeare Festival production, directed by A.J. Antoon and starring Morgan Freeman and Tracey Ullman; the 2012 Theatre for a New Audience production, directed by Arin Arbus; and the 2012 Folger Theatre production, directed by Aaron Posner.



Figure 1: Members of the ensemble in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's production of Short Shakespeare! *The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by David H. Bell, presented in CST's Courtyard Theater January 27–March 3, 2007. Photo by Steve Leonard.



Figure 2: Members of the ensemble in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's production of Short Shakespeare! *The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by David H. Bell, presented in CST's Courtyard Theater January 27–March 3, 2007. Photo by Steve Leonard.

These commedia elements served several purposes. First, they added a heightened level of theatricality, constantly reminding the student audience that this story of Kate and Petruchio was not real and was not being treated realistically. Because the Harlequin was clearly controlling and directing the action onstage, and because the other actors often formed an onstage audience, the student audience members always knew they were watching a fictional play. They could never lose themselves in the story or think that they were watching a piece of real life play out. Additionally, this frame, like that of the Quarto version of Shakespeare's text (but unlike the Folio version), was present both at the beginning and the end of the play—just as the Harlequin posed the characters at the top of the show and then brought them to life with his slapstick, he silently manipulated them into a final tableau and then used his slapstick to bring the lights down at the end of the show. This meant that, unlike a production using the Folio edition of *Taming of the Shrew*, the audience could not forget that the frame existed—even if they momentarily lost themselves in the tale of Kate and Petruchio, they were reminded of the Harlequin's presence and his role as director and creator of Kate and Petruchio's story in the show's final moment.

David H. Bell also took advantage of the commedia frame when staging the violence in *Shrew*. All combat was choreographed in an over-the-top style, complete with live foley effects that added to the cartoonish feel of the scenes. When asked about this choice, Halperin said that "David felt that [*Taming of the Shrew*] and *Comedy of Errors* were as close to farce as Shakespeare ever got, and that violence in farce isn't taken in the same way that violence even in comedy is. That there's kind

of a distancing element, that we don't really take it very seriously . . . that whole idea was just to make it a little bit more unreal, it was never supposed to be a realistic approach to this play" (2015a). As mentioned above, Bell is not the only director to utilize commedia conventions in *Shrew* in order to distance audiences or make the fighting seem artificial. Tori Haring-Smith notes that "[t]he exaggerated features of *commedia* masks and the precisely choreographed, sometimes mechanical routines can distance the play by making it seem artificial and unreal. The characters become caricatures, and the fast-paced horseplay moves the plot along so quickly that the audience has no time to consider the effects of the taming on Katharine" (108). Research on perceptions of violence in comedy support Halperin and Haring-Smith's assertions. Barrie Gunter and Adrian Furnham found that viewers generally thought of violence in cartoons as less violent, realistic, frightening, and personally disturbing than violence in any other genre of television show. Viewers also rated these scenes as more suitable for children than similarly violent scenes in genres like crime, Westerns, or science fiction.²⁵ Lucy Nevitt notes a similar effect in slapstick comedy onstage, pointing out that, in such exaggerated instances of violence, "[t]here is a contract with the audience . . . we can laugh because there are no consequences [for the injured character] and therefore no need for empathy or analysis" (17). By staging the violence in *Shrew* in a slapstick, commedia-esque style, Bell and his actors made these fights feel more remote and less disturbing to viewers.

²⁵ See also Potter and Warren, "Humor as Camouflage of Televised Violence" (1998), and Howitt and Cumberbatch, *Mass Media Violence and Society* (1975).

Another aspect of the commedia frame story that may have made the violence between Kate and Petruchio less disturbing to audiences were the responses of the onstage actor-audience. Their reactions, consciously or not, informed the actual audience members as to how they should perceive the events onstage. For instance, during the Kate and Petruchio wooing scene, several other characters gathered on the sidelines to the sound of an anticipatory drumroll, eager to watch the face-off. The fact that the actor-audience was excited about the scene, not fearful or anxious, signaled to the audience in the house that, even though Kate and Petruchio were fighting, the scene was meant as a spectacle, something to be enjoyed, rather than a realistic, grim battle.



Figure 3: Petruchio (Ben Viccellio) challenges Katharina (Molly Glynn) while the ensemble looks in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's production of Short Shakespeare! *The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by David H. Bell, presented in CST's Courtyard Theater January 27–March 3, 2007. Photo by Steve Leonard.

Many other elements of the production added to the tone of fun, over-the-top theatricality. One of the most obvious examples of this was that every time the word “Padua” was spoken onstage, the masked actor-audience would shout “Padua” as if they were cheerleaders, occasionally waving small pennants (a choice also made by William Ball at American Conservatory Theater). In the video that I watched of CST’s production, the student audience loved this running gimmick, laughing every time it happened. Another moment when this playful tone came through was when Petruchio arrived at Hortensio’s house. During this scene, when Petruchio asked Grumio to “knock,” and the two began arguing over whom Grumio should knock, Grumio pulled one of the student audience members onstage, suggesting that the audience member should be the one to be “knocked,” or hit. This audience involvement had two effects. First, it was clearly played effectively for comedy: the rest of the audience laughed uproariously. This drove home the fact that the fighting in the play was slapstick and humorous, not real or serious. Also, since there was no way that the actors would allow an audience member (in the video I watched, a teenage boy) to be injured, using the audience member in this scene emphasized the “unreal” quality of the performance and reminded viewers that the violence happening onstage was farcical and theatrical.

I want to acknowledge here that there are potential problems with making the violence in *Shrew* comedic rather than serious. Such treatment may trivialize physical aggression, which some might argue makes young people more likely to commit violent acts themselves. While this is a valid point, many sources do

recommend that mediation from adults can help ameliorate such effects.²⁶ This mediation may include discussing the violent acts witnessed, asking what may have prompted a character to act in that way, and brainstorming other possible reactions. For a show like *Shrew*, post-show workshops may be an ideal venue for such discussions; these types of workshops will be discussed later in the chapter.

Another strategy utilized by Bell and his actors, to downplay the imbalance of power between Kate and Petruchio, was to emphasize that the two were in love, a relationship demonstrated in part through Ben Viccellio's portrayal of Petruchio. Throughout the play, Viccellio's Petruchio went back and forth between being a macho braggart and a tender, sincere gentleman. He tended to display his bravado and exceedingly macho persona whenever anyone other than Kate was onstage, which created the impression that his harsh treatment of her was only for the benefit of others, to convince them that he was the right man to "tame" Kate. When the two were alone, however, his demeanor softened, and he acted in a sweet, even loving manner towards Kate, which suggested that he did genuinely care for her. These tender moments did not completely cancel out the imbalance of power and Petruchio's sometimes misogynistic, even abusive tendencies—he did deprive Kate of food and clothes, and he humiliated her at their wedding—but by portraying two drastically different sides to Petruchio, Viccellio did all he could to suggest that Petruchio loved Kate and perhaps based some of his treatment of her on others' entrenched perceptions of her shrewishness.

²⁶ See, for example, Elizabeth Thoman's "What Parents Can Do about Media Violence" (n.d.) and Eugene Beresin and Steve Schlozman's "Violent Video Games and Movies Causing Violent Behavior" (2012).

Molly Glynn's portrayal of Kate also contributed to the genuine relationship between the two characters and made clear that, even in the play's final scene, Kate remained independent, a strong woman who made her own choices. Halperin described Glynn as "a very strong, very compassionate woman [with] a real internal strength in her, [which] she brought . . . to that characterization, and to her interpretation" (2015a). This strength was obvious throughout the show, but one of the most interesting displays of it was in her final speech. Bell cut the portion of the scene in which Lucentio, Hortensio, and Petruchio bet on their wives' obedience, and so, rather than directing that speech to Bianca and the Widow, Glynn addressed the speech to the men onstage, specifically Gremio and Hortensio. Halperin recalled that "the idea behind that was that there was already an understanding between her and Petruchio . . . that's a speech that didn't need to be shared with him, because they had reached this sort of intimate understanding between them" (2015a). This is certainly true, but I think that there was an additional purpose, based on my viewing of the production video. Immediately before Kate began her speech, Gremio and Hortensio had been mocking her. Because the speech was prompted by their cruelty, it became about chastising anyone who was cruel to another person, rather than about chastising women who were disobedient to their husbands. Additionally, the final scene ended with Kate and Petruchio kneeling on equal levels, not with Kate kneeling below Petruchio to "place [her] hand below [her] husband's foot," as Shakespeare's text suggests (5.2.177). These staging and acting choices showed that, in this production, Kate was a strong woman on equal footing with her husband, who never became subservient or "tamed."

This change to Kate's final speech, however, calls into question the use of the term "abridgment." Taking a speech that, in Shakespeare's original context, is addressed to two women and extols the virtues of being an obedient wife and reframing it to chastise two men and discuss the benefits of being a kind person seems like an "appreciable change." Although this alteration does change the play's story to a degree, I would argue that perhaps, in focusing on remaining faithful to Shakespeare's story, too much value is placed on textual authority. After all, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, there is not necessarily a single definitive text of *Shrew*—who is to say if the Quarto version or the Folio version is the "right" one? Many critics have challenged the idea that there is a single authoritative version of any of Shakespeare's texts, especially considering that these plays were meant for performance, and therefore any individual production will interpret a text in its own way.²⁷ Building on these critics, I would suggest that, while there is value in CST's assuring teachers that what they and their students are seeing is largely based in a text attributed to Shakespeare, complete fidelity to that text is unnecessary and perhaps even detrimental to the production as a whole, particularly in a situation like Kate's final speech where a slight alteration can help create a productive and interesting characterization.

In this 2007 production, David H. Bell, his cast, and his production team created a version of *Shrew* that utilized slapstick comedy, commedia conventions,

²⁷ For a small sampling of further analysis on this idea, see: Margaret Jane Kidnie's *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (2009); Introduction to *Adaptations of Shakespeare* (2000), ed. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier; Ruby Cohn's *Modern Offshoots of Shakespeare* (1976); and W.B. Worthen's "Staging 'Shakespeare'" and Laurie E. Osborne's "Rethinking the Performance Editions," both in *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance* (1996), ed. James C. Bulman.

textual adjustments, and acting choices to tell a specific tale of Kate and Petruchio's relationship. In reviewing this production, *Chicago Tribune* critic Chris Jones wrote, "Kate tames her macho Petruchio . . . and in turn, she decides to offer him a quiet life. Fair deal for all. Not Shakespeare's deal, perhaps. But who cares?" In this brief description, Jones points to the potential hole in the CST concept of "abridgment," but also deftly (if irreverently) plugs that hole with his question of "who cares?" In the end, perhaps it does not matter if a production devoutly adheres to Shakespeare's "original" text (a shaky concept, if there ever was one). Instead, this production did what, in the end, most productions do: they created a version of Shakespeare's *Shrew* that would tell the story best suited for their audience.

Utah Shakespeare Festival

Every year, Utah Shakespeare Festival produces a Shakespeare-in-the-Schools tour. This tour travels from January to April and performs an abridgment of a Shakespeare play in schools, community centers, and other local venues in three states. Between 2005 and 2014, the Festival produced *Taming of the Shrew* as their touring show three times. I will be looking primarily at the 2014 production, directed by Shelly Gaza.²⁸

Like David H. Bell did in his 2007 abridgment for CST, Shelly Gaza did away with Shakespeare's original Induction, but added her own frame. Gaza referred to this frame as a prologue, and it served multiple purposes, one of which was to welcome the audience into the space. One of Gaza's main reasons for adding a prologue was that she felt this kind of introduction helped "set the world that the

²⁸ Gaza also played Kate in the 2005 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools tour of *Shrew*.

audience is coming into, set the aesthetic, set the tone” (2014). She pointed out that we, as modern audiences, are used to being eased into stories in this way, noting, “[W]hen you go to a film . . . you’ve got the whole opening sequence, the credits, the score . . . you know [by what] the music is, by what the credits look like, [you] know what [you]’re in for” (2014). Having this sort of preparation “puts an audience at ease, especially those that aren’t used to Shakespeare” (2014). The prologue, then, served a similar purpose to the pre-show speech at CST: it helped audiences begin to engage with the story and suggested that, even if they did not understand every word of Shakespeare’s complex text, they could still follow along with the story.

The prologue for this tour of *Shrew* was especially helpful in making audiences comfortable because of the fun, upbeat tone that the prologue set. It mostly consisted of movement, set to a piece of music that had “a hip-hop beat [with a] carnival sampled loop that went through it” (Gaza 2014). According to actress Mallore Hill, who played Kate in the 2014 tour, the contemporary music immediately signaled to audiences that this production was going to be different from what they might typically associate with Shakespeare, and the hip-hop beat gave many young people something familiar to hold on to and with which to engage (Hill 2015a). The movement over the music also grabbed audiences immediately—Misha Fristensky, who played Tranio, Grumio, and the Widow, entered first. He began by leaping into the air in a “half split,” as his way of saying “hello to everyone without saying hello . . . just using . . . actions and a little bit of dance” (Fristensky 2015). This prologue immediately created a positive, energetic vibe for the show, which prepared audiences for a fast-paced comedy. Furthermore, by setting this

expectation early on, Gaza and her team, like Bell at CST, suggested to audience members that any violence that would happen later on in the show was not to be taken seriously because it was all taking place in a humorous context.



Figure 4: A scene from the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.)



Figure 5: A scene from the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.)

The prologue also set up the action of *Shrew* as a play within a play. The conceit that Gaza used for the frame was that the company was a troupe of actors in a traveling Victorian gypsy circus, with hints of a commedia aesthetic. The prologue showed them setting up their equipment to perform the show, accompanied by the hip-hop/carnival music mentioned earlier. This opening, like Bell's commedia framework at CST, immediately told audiences that what they were about to see between Kate and Petruchio was entirely theatrical, making no attempt to portray "real life." The frame also appeared at the end, although more subtly than Bell's final moment featuring the Harlequin. Gaza described the closing scene: "After Lucentio's final line, we had a nice tableau of 'happy family around the wedding feast table,' and then we cut fairly quickly to the raucous hip-hop music for curtain call. And, when taking their bows, the actors took on their 'actor personas' as opposed to the 'character's persona'" (2015b). For Gaza, this helped to "[remind] the audience that we [the company] are a troupe of actors telling a tale . . . we aren't pretending that this is real life" (2015b). Although it is difficult to know for certain how audiences perceived this final tableau and curtain call, I question whether taking bows as an actor rather than a character is enough to remind viewers that what they just watched was a play within a play that did not try to show real life. Most theatrical performances do end with a curtain call, and unless the company adds scripted or choreographed bits to demonstrate explicitly that the actors are bowing in character, audience members can usually make the assumption that actors are breaking character during curtain call and bowing as themselves. While some may

argue that young people do not make this assumption, Matthew Reason's research on children's perceptions of theatre suggests that children as young as six do understand the distinction between the material experience and the illusions of theatre, and thus comprehend that the people they see onstage are actors playing roles.²⁹ The curtain call for *Shrew*, then, would not necessarily have emphasized the fact that this story was not "real life," given that plays that do claim to show slices of real life feature curtain calls in which actors bow out of character. This is not to say that the overall frame, particularly the prologue, did not help highlight that Kate and Petruchio's story was entirely pretend; it may very well have accomplished this goal and thus downplayed the harshness of the violence, but I would suggest that ending with a more explicit call back to the opening prologue may have been even more effective in emphasizing the fact that the play was entirely separate from real life.

A choice that was likely more effective in downplaying the severity of the violence in *Shrew* was the performance aesthetic utilized throughout the show. Gaza said that it was important to her that the actors "tell the story physically as well as verbally" (2014). This meant that, when casting, she looked for actors who were comfortable "physicalizing the action . . . [using] a broader kind of acting" (2014). Mallore Hill described this style as "larger than life," with "a heightened sense of reality" (2015a). This heightened physicality and over-the-top aesthetic helped lessen the impact of some of the more violent moments in the play, especially because Gaza called on commedia traditions to transform moments that could

²⁹ See Chapter 5 of Reason's *The Young Audience: Exploring and Enhancing Children's Experiences of Theatre* (2010).

contain combat into moments featuring broad physical comedy or acrobatics instead.³⁰ One such transformation took place in the wooing scene. Gaza said that it was very important to her that this exchange be a battle of wits, and that it maintain a sense of play. A particularly playful moment in the scene came when Kate, frustrated that Petruchio had one-upped her in “verbal sparring, [*sic*]” “chucked three beanbag balls at [him] . . . which he proceeded to then catch and start juggling with. He did this not only to avoid being hit by the balls of course, but to entertain Kate—to try and make her laugh” (Gaza 2015a). Michael Bahr, Utah Shakespeare Festival Education Director and producer of the Shakespeare-in-the-Schools tours, echoed Gaza’s feelings about this scene. He believes that, “the wooing scene, if handled correctly, solves all the problems in the second half of the show. Because frequently, [groups producing *Shrew*] go, ‘Oh, here’s a time when we can have a knock-down, drag-out, physical humor [fight]’ [but] it’s called a wooing scene. This is where Petruchio meets his match. Where he goes, ‘I love her. I love her even more than what I did before’” (2015). While it may be an exaggeration to state that this one scene can solve all of the problems in this very complex play, Gaza and her actors did avoid making this scene a big “knock-down, drag-out” fight, and instead kept the scene whimsical. By doing this, Gaza made the wooing scene about Petruchio trying

³⁰ Gaza used the commedia term “lazzi” to refer to much of the combat in the play, perhaps referencing the fact that the fights were turned into small comic bits of action rather than full fights. Commedia aesthetic also came through in the production’s costumes, with their bright colors and silhouettes that were partially period. Gaza’s production though, did not rely on commedia tropes as heavily as Bell’s: her actors’ costumes combined commedia dell’arte silhouettes with Victorian silhouettes, as well as the modern touch of Converse sneakers, and she did not use commedia masks or slapsticks.

to win Kate through humor, not through physical dominance, which lay the groundwork for a positive, genuine relationship to develop between the two throughout the rest of the play.



Figure 6: Malloree Hill (left) as Katherina and Tom Littman as Petruchio in the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.)

Gaza also tried to mitigate the sexism in the play through her adaptation and interpretation of the script. One idea that she particularly wanted to focus on was the fact that Kate was not the only character to transform by the end of the play: Petruchio changed as well. Gaza noted that she and Michael Bahr were in agreement on this point:

[We both felt that *Shrew*] works best today when the idea is that there's two shrews, that Petruchio is a shrew, and Kate is a shrew, and that it's about those two people learning how to love each other, those two people learning how to be partners, how to be spouses . . . so . . . that informed some of the

things that I cut. If it just felt too one-sided, as far as Kate's a baddie and Petruchio's a goodie . . . then I just let it go, I just cut it from the script. (2014)

Furthermore, Kate and Petruchio are not the only shrews in the play. Mallore Hill mentioned that, when audiences were asked during post-show discussions about who in the play was a shrew, they often brought up Bianca. Michael Bahr also pointed to Bianca as a possible "shrew," noting that she, like many other characters in the play, (although not, in Bahr's view, Kate and Petruchio) is playing someone that she is not in order to get what she wants (2015). By focusing on the fact that many characters in this play are abrasive, manipulative, and difficult, not just Kate, this production told a transformation story that was less about one gender submitting to the other, and more about people, both male and female, learning to change and compromise to be together.

Gaza's choice to cast Baptista as a mother rather than a father also changed the way that gender and power played out in the plot of *Shrew*. Gaza said that it was very important to her that "the power structures in *Taming of the Shrew* not all [be] male," and that it not be "all men deciding Kate's fate" (2014). Casting a female Baptista made the conflict between Baptista and Kate about "parent-child dynamic, not female child-male parent dynamic" (2014). Mallore Hill elaborated on this parent-child relationship, mentioning that "it added a new dynamic when it was a mother who was just trying to get her daughter to have a good life. All she wanted was the best for her kids" (2015a). Although there were still several scenes in this abridgment in which Kate was dominated or manipulated by a man—Petruchio still deprived her of food, for instance—showing Kate fighting with a mother figure

rather than a father figure did change the power dynamic in the play, if only a little. While the production did still show a significant power struggle between genders, it also showed a generational power struggle, thus suggesting that power in this world was not held exclusively by men.

Having a female Baptista also meant that there were almost equal numbers of men and women onstage in this production: Gaza cast three women and four men. She was very deliberate about this choice, not only for the sake of trying to show that women held some power in her version of this play, but also because of the message she wanted to send to girls in the audience about classical theatre. She felt that it was “really important to show young women that there’s a place for them in classical theatre, and in Shakespeare” (2014).³¹ In fact, she had initially wanted to cast a female Tranio and have four women and four men in the cast, but was ultimately unable to do so, due to budget constraints (2014; 2015a). Even without exactly equal representation of men and women onstage, Gaza’s choice to add just one more woman, and to have that woman play a character who has some clout, helped to show that (at least in this version of *Shrew*), Padua was not entirely dominated by men.

Script adaptation and cross-gender casting were not the only ways that this production subtly changed the gender dynamics of *Taming of the Shrew*. Like Molly Glynn in the 2007 Short Shakespeare! *Shrew* at CST, Malloree Hill wanted to be sure that her Kate was strong-willed. Hill said, “[W]hen I found out that I had been cast in

³¹ Gaza cast two African American actors (Tetrianna Silas and Misha Fristensky) for similar reasons, hoping to encourage young people of all races and ethnicities to see a place for themselves in theatre (2014).

the role, I knew that I wanted to bring a little more groundedness to her, and a little bit more of a sense of her doing things on her own terms, not doing them because somebody was making her do it “(2015a). Something that Hill said helped her develop this independence as Kate was that Tom Littman, who played Petruchio in the tour, “was not playing Petruchio as [a] . . . completely domineering jerk. He was playing him with a lot of his own insecurities, and a softness that I think complemented what I was doing very well” (2015a). For Hill, the relationship between Kate and Petruchio did not hinge on one person having power over the other; they were two individuals who each had their own problems and insecurities. The story became about how their relationship developed, rather than about Petruchio “taming” Kate. A moment that Hill pointed to as indicative of the relationship between Kate and Petruchio in this production was the first time that the two saw each other, in the wooing scene. As soon as she entered into the scene where Petruchio was waiting, Hill said:

We would just turn and see each other, and it was . . . the love at first sight moment. And so you get this sense, instantly, that they both have a connection, and there’s something there, but then they immediately [put up all their emotional walls]. I think it gave the audience . . . a taste that they were real people, and that there was something there beyond just being told that they were going to be together. It gave the audience an opportunity to fall in love with them and who they are. (2015a)

The immediate connection and attraction between Kate and Petruchio helped maintain the image of Kate as a strong character. It signaled to the audience that, even with all the emotional walls she put up, Kate did ultimately want to be with Petruchio, and that their eventual marriage was her choice as much as his.

Another moment in the play that helped Hill portray Kate's strength and independence was the road scene, when Petruchio and Kate are on their way back to Baptista's house. Michael Bahr believes that, like the wooing scene, this scene is key to setting the tone for Kate and Petruchio's relationship in any staging of *Shrew*. On the one hand, a production can stage the scene to show that Petruchio is forcing Kate into submission, an interpretation that is easily supported by the text. On the other hand, a director and cast can work against what appears on the surface of the text to show that, rather than one person dominating or manipulating the other, Kate and Petruchio are learning the way that they, as a couple, can compromise and function together. This latter version is what Gaza's team wanted to show. Bahr described what he saw of the rehearsal and development of that scene:

[They] did it, and it was good . . . But I went up, and I said, "Man, she needs to look like she wants this, and . . . it needs to be her choice." . . . And they worked it, they worked it, they worked it, they worked it, and . . . [Petruchio] used to go in early rehearsal, (*gruffly*), "All right, back to your father's [*sic*]," you know, the braggart, and instead he turned it into, (*quietly*) "Back—back to your father's [*sic*]" . . . [and] as he turns and starts to walk back, she goes, "No, I will give you a kiss." And the way Malloreë said it, it was very, (*forcefully*) "No. I'm in charge. I'm going to do this." And then he comes back to her, and it was just a tender, gentle thing. (2015)

Hill's interaction with Littman (Petruchio) in this scene emphasized that Kate was making her own choices; based on the description of the line delivery, it seems like this Kate would not have kissed Petruchio if she did not want to, no matter the consequences.³²

³² In spite of these interpretive choices, Petruchio's lines do still feel rather manipulative, a problem that I will discuss at more length shortly.



Figure 7: Tom Littman (left) as Petruchio and Malloree Hill as Katherina in the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.)

Hill's delivery of Kate's final speech was also intended to remind the audience that, even though it may have seemed otherwise, Kate was continuing to dictate her own terms and make her own choices. When I asked Hill about the infamous speech, she responded, "That final speech! I remember . . . getting cast, and I immediately went, 'That speech is gonna kill me,' . . . that speech will be the death of me" (2015a). The most important part of the speech, for her, was that the audience "understand that it was Kate's choice, and that she was doing it because she wanted to do it, not because she was being forced to do it" (2015a). This was not

an easy tone to find. Both Gaza and Hill mentioned a response from an audience member to a preview performance, before the show went out on tour. The audience member was a mother who had come to the show with her pre-teen daughter, and, according to Gaza, this mother “was bummed out hard by the end speech. She kept [saying], ‘I thought it was going to be a joke’” (2014). Hill overheard this response, and both director and actor knew that adjustments had to be made in that final speech. They ended up cutting about eight lines of it, and Hill made the choice to address some of the speech to the audience. She described what went into that decision:

[W]hat ultimately ended up happening, in the middle of a rehearsal one day, I just remember [saying], “Shelly, I need to talk to the audience . . . I just need to get them on my side, I need them to understand what I’m doing.” And so we ended up taking a portion of the speech directly out to the audience, and I had a moment where I went from talking to Petruchio to talking to everybody, and sort of just being like, “Everyone, calm down. I know what I’m doing. This is fine. Everyone relax.” And it gave the audience a moment to breathe . . . and added some humor to it—I needed so badly a moment to really connect with them, and to just say, “I’m doing this on my own terms.” (2015a)

Part of this speech being on Kate’s “own terms” also meant that it was about more than just her relationship with Petruchio. According to Hill, the speech “became an apology for her behavior. A lot of it became her owning up to her own faults, and saying ‘I’m sorry . . . I threw a chair, and I tied my sister up for no reason . . . I recognize my faults, and I want to be better, and I think I can be better, if I just allow myself to love this man’” (2015a). By delivering Kate’s final speech as an active acknowledgment of her past mistakes and commitment to be better, not just for her husband but for the rest of her family as well, Hill wanted to show that Kate’s

transformation was not about changing for a man. Instead, it was about independently realizing her past mistakes and making the active choice to remedy them, for the sake of her relationship with her mother, her sister, and her husband.



Figure 8: Mallore Hill (left) as Katherina and Kaitlin Mills as Bianca in the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.)



Figure 9: A scene from the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2014 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Photo by Karl Hugh. Copyright 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival.)

Littman's response to this speech, as Petruchio, also emphasized Kate's independence by showing that he wanted her to be his equal, not be subservient to him. Hill said, "[O]ur Petruchio was very good in that final speech about not allowing it to be something that he was necessarily proud of . . . He always had this air of, 'Well, that's not what I want you to do, and I hope you know that I don't expect you to do that'" (2015a). Mallore Hill, Misha Fristensky, and Michael Bahr all mentioned a specific moment in this speech that was especially important, and that consistently got a strong reaction from audience members. When Kate said the line "place your hands below your husband's foot," she knelt before Petruchio. Petruchio, however, took her hand and raised her back up; Fristensky said that, in this moment, Petruchio "was saying, in . . . essence, 'No, we're gonna do this together'" (2015). He also mentioned that, "in some community performances," particularly where the

audience was familiar with the show and knew what was coming in that final speech, that moment would draw “some gasps” from audience members, “or slight little claps” from people who were “so engaged in the story and were so happy that” the speech had ended the way it did (2015). Bahr also appreciated the way that Shelly Gaza staged this moment and described his reaction to watching it for the first time: “When I watched it [and saw Kate kneel], I went, (*panicked*) ‘Ohh, Shelly! Oh my—gahh! I hired you so I wouldn’t have this! What on earth are you doing with this?’ . . . [But then Petruchio] jumps up, and he stands her up and says, ‘No. No. You will not do this.’ And then they’re equal partners . . . it was just so fabulous” (2015). Through this final image, of Kate and Petruchio on the same level, the production highlighted that the two were equals in this relationship, rather than Petruchio having “tamed” Kate.

Many of the reactions during post-show discussions suggested that audience members did see that Petruchio and Kate were a couple on equal footing, and that Kate actively chose to change rather than being forced into subservience. During these discussions, the cast asked audiences specific questions, such as if Kate was “tamed,” and why they thought Kate changed. Mallorie Hill described some of the most memorable answers that kids gave. One young boy, who Hill thought was about eight years old, said, “I think that Kate just realized that when you’re in a relationship, it can’t be all about you, it’s a partnership, and you have to make it about each other” (2015a). The cast got a slightly different, but equally insightful, response from a group at a youth correctional facility, where the audience was predominantly teenage boys. When asked why Kate changed, they responded, “She

realized that, just because she was upset and didn't like something, she couldn't just act out about it . . . that wasn't the right way to handle it. She realized that she had to open up to somebody else. She realized that she could actually be loved by somebody” (2015a). The interpretive choices made by the company conveyed the message, at least to the audience members mentioned by Hill, that Kate had valid reasons to change, and that she did so not to please her husband, but for the sake of improving herself and her relationships with many of the people in her life.

Hill also mentioned that many audience members' personal connections with Kate surfaced during post-show discussions, and that having the space to talk about these connections seemed really important for many viewers. For the boys at the correctional facility, she said, “you could just tell that they need expression, and they need to talk about some of these themes—not necessarily the theme of men and women, but the theme of behavior, and how do you deal with emotions that you feel, because Kate obviously expresses them in a very negative way in the beginning” (2015a). She also mentioned a young man who picked up on Kate's insecurities, and said that, at the start of the play, Kate “could never be what her mom wanted her to be,” and that part of Kate's change was about finding someone who loved her and who made her feel loved (2015a). Hill said that, when this young man spoke, “you could . . . tell that there was a personal connection there with him, and those sort of moments where [audience members saw] something in their own lives in the show, were always really, really wonderful to hear” (2015a). This production, then, allowed young people to connect with Kate's struggles with insecurity and

expressing emotions, and the post-show discussions gave many of them an outlet to begin talking through their own experiences.

Not every audience member reacted positively to the show, and a few focused on the misogyny still present in the text. In one of the show's performance reports, the stage manager recorded that a young girl at Duchesne High School asked, "Do you REALIZE that this show is about Petruchio torturing his wife and it benefitting you in the end?" (Bahr, NEA report) Hill recalled her response to this comment: she reminded the audience that Kate's behavior was far from exemplary. Kate had been cruel to those around her, and Hill felt it was important to reiterate that "[n]obody is perfect, and [Kate] certainly is not," so Petruchio was not the only character who behaved badly (2015a). Michael Bahr also mentioned this student's comment, saying that when he saw it, he "was thrilled" because it meant that he had "an informed student watching this" (2015). When he spoke to the actors before they went on tour, he told them that they might get these kinds of comments and to "embrace them" and "engage" the students by having a real conversation, discussing why the student asked the question and if he or she saw that kind of theme play out in this production (2015). It is difficult to know for sure how much actors did engage students who made comments pointing out issues like sexism in *Shrew*: while there is some record of student questions and comments, there is not an archive of the back and forth exchange between actors and students. Furthermore, while it is admirable to set the goal of engaging with audience members in discussions of tricky topics, the reality is that it is challenging to jump into discussions of big topics like misogyny with a large group of students in any

environment. This task becomes especially daunting in the context of a tour like Shakespeare-in-the-Schools, because there is a time limit set for discussions (students must get to their next destination, whether it be lunch or their next class, on time), and actors and students have never met before. How, then, might actors have these conversations? And how important are such discussions?

To answer the second question: very important. The fact is that, in spite of the text cuts and interpretive choices made by Gaza and her team, it is difficult to escape the misogyny and imbalance of power between genders in *Shrew*: these issues are in the script, and without a complete rewrite, they are virtually impossible to eradicate. Even though Hill's Kate fell for Petruchio the moment she saw him, Petruchio still announced their marriage without her consent, giving her little chance to refuse him. Though Kate may have made the decision to kiss Petruchio in the road scene, it is tough not to feel like he was manipulating her: as gentle as Littman may have been in delivering the lines, those lines still indicated that Petruchio knew Kate wanted to go to Baptista's house and refused to let her go until she kissed him. And, even though Hill, as Kate, chose to deliver the final speech, and was ultimately lifted up by Petruchio to be on equal footing with him, the speech itself still had some very sexist overtones, chastising Bianca and the Widow for disobeying their husbands. With all of these tricky, uncomfortable elements still present in the script, we come back to the first question above: how can companies deal with this thorny text in a way that engages students in meaningful discussion of themes like sexism, rather than ignoring or glossing over them? I would suggest that one way may be to combine an abridged performance like Gaza's or Bell's, which

thoughtfully focuses on portraying a strong Kate who has a genuine relationship with and love for Petruchio, with a post-show workshop that tackles the issues of sexism and misogyny head on. While there are several companies and artists who might provide a model for such sessions, I will focus here on Oregon Shakespeare Festival's educational work, since they are a Shakespeare-focused company with a strong education department that often utilizes theme-based workshops to work with students on difficult material.

Oregon Shakespeare Festival—A Possible Workshop Model

In this section, I will explore a wide range of Oregon Shakespeare Festival's (OSF) theme-based workshops, which are led by OSF teaching artists and center around one or more plays in the company's season. Although not all of the workshops are Shakespeare-based, I will focus primarily on Shakespeare-related activities here. Based on my interview with OSF teaching artist Christine Albright, numerous writings detailing the benefits reaped by students whose teachers use on-your-feet methods of exploring Shakespeare, and my study of applied theatre artists who use theatre to open up discussion around big issues, I believe workshops like OSF's may be an effective way for theatre artists doing abridgments of challenging Shakespeare plays to help young audiences process the issues within the text at hand.³³

³³ For more on active approaches to Shakespeare, see especially Edward L. Rocklin's *Performance Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare* (2005); Jonathan Neelands, Sheila Galloway, and Geoff Lindsay's "An evaluation of Stand up for Shakespeare: The Royal Shakespeare Company Learning & Performance Network, 2006-2009" (2009); and *Reimagining Shakespeare for Children and Young Adults* (2003), ed. Naomi J. Miller. For more on applied theatre artists, see Michael Rohd's *Theatre for Community, Conflict, & Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual* (1998) and Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985) and *The Rainbow of Desire* (1995).

OSF teaching artists create a wide variety of theme-based workshops each season, which take place both in schools and at the OSF theatre in Ashland. The company offers two different types of workshops that go into schools. The first is a part of their School Visit Program. In this program, two actors come to the school, do a short performance, and then do a workshop with students. The performance might be a cut down version of a single play, or scenes from several plays that all focus on the same theme. The other type of workshop is an extended residency, which takes place at one of the schools with which OSF partners. In these schools, OSF actors are on site for two to five days at a time, and they go to the school three years in a row. Then, during the fourth year, the students come to Ashland to see shows at OSF, and OSF teaching artists do a workshop or workshops with them about the shows that they see.

Although *The Tempest* is not a play that I am focusing on in this research, OSF Resident Teaching Artist Christine Albright told me about a School Visit Program workshop associated with *The Tempest* that dealt with the theme of slavery and mastership, an idea that could certainly be deemed difficult or challenging.³⁴ She described some of the exercises that teaching artists did with students to help them grasp these themes. One of the first activities was what Albright called “babbling.” Students began by walking around the room. Teaching artists then instructed them to “lie on the floor, stare at the ceiling, and just start to free-associate [with the word] ‘Master.’” (2015). They asked students to think about what it meant “to

³⁴ Although “mastership” is not usually used in this context, in these workshops, “mastership” meant having power over another person, essentially owning that person as a master owns a slave.

master something, to be a master, to have somebody mastering you,” and to talk continually until they were told to stop. Students then got up again, walked around, then “[froze], [stared] at the ground [and] [talked] about slavery” (2015). This introductory exercise allowed students to begin exploring a specific theme kinesthetically and verbally: they physically put themselves in an open, more free position as they spoke words associated with “master,” and then they made themselves physically closed off by staring at the ground as they free associated with the word “slavery.” Without any kind of formal introduction to the topic, students started to figure out what the ideas of mastership and slavery might mean to them.

Once students finished the “babbling” exercise, they got text for a scene between Ariel and Prospero. Students read the scene in various ways, first with Prospero moving around the space and Ariel following Prospero, and then vice versa, with Prospero following Ariel. They used this exercise as a jumping-off point to discuss the relationship between Prospero and Ariel in the scene, exploring how movement, or lack of movement, helped define or emphasize the master-servant relationship between Prospero and Ariel. They explored similar themes with a piece of Caliban’s text, physicalizing certain images from the speech and exploring how these images emphasized the idea that Caliban is a slave to Prospero (Albright 2015). These text-based activities built on students’ initial free associations around the ideas of slavery and mastership. By physicalizing Shakespeare’s words, students could begin to explore and analyze the master-servant relationships and underlying themes of slavery and mastership present in *The Tempest*. These physical

explorations can, in turn, lead to thoughtful, critical discussions about these themes and the way that they manifest in the text of the play.

OSF has also done several workshops dealing with sexism and misogyny in *The Taming of the Shrew*. One workshop, which the company did in-house rather than in schools, dealt with Kate's final speech. Teaching artists gave students the text of the speech and directed students to read it chorally with different "as if" scenarios: they read it as if they were completely serious, as if it were a joke, as if they hated the person they were speaking to, as if they were trying to educate the person they were speaking to, etc. (Albright 2015). Albright pointed out that, after reading the speech in so many different ways, students realized that the text, which may have seemed straightforward at first, was actually really complicated (2015). By trying out different ways that the speech might be performed, students saw that, while an actor might play Kate as completely subservient to Petruchio by interpreting the speech seriously, that same actor could also choose to play Kate as more powerful by performing the speech as a joke, or as a way to get back at Bianca and the Widow for what they have said about her.

Another workshop gave students the opportunity to explore physically the different ways that an actor might play Kate, and the different versions of Kate that we see throughout *Taming of the Shrew*. In this workshop, which compared Kate to Juliet from *Romeo and Juliet*, teaching artists gave students several lines of Kate's, and several lines of Juliet's. Students looked at each character's lines, one at a time, in the order that they are spoken in the play. For each line, students made a physical shape, creating a sculpture of the character in that moment. Albright said that, when

looking at Kate's journey throughout the play, many students noticed that "she starts in a bigger, scarier . . . place, and then we start to see her become somebody . . . who could soften in a way" (2015). Some students, Albright noted, viewed this change as negative, while others saw it as positive: teaching artists did not tell students that Kate had definitely changed for the better, or was absolutely being oppressed by the end of the play. Instead, students were able to use these physical exercises as a springboard to help them form their own opinion of Kate's journey, much like they did with the exercises centered around Kate's final speech.

OSF created another version of this workshop comparing Kate, Petruchio, and Bianca's journeys during *Shrew*. Many students noticed, like Michael Bahr and Mallore Hill from Utah Shakespeare noted, that Bianca is much more shrewish and manipulative than she might seem at first glance (Albright 2015). This discovery offered yet another area for young people to explore and analyze: in what ways is Bianca a strong character, and what must she do in order to survive and thrive in this world? These workshops, then, gave students the chance to use physical character exploration to dig into the ways that various characters must adapt, compromise, and scheme throughout *Shrew*. It also gave students the opportunity to evaluate these journeys for themselves, deciding whether such changes were a good or a bad thing for each character.

Something that is particularly interesting and valuable about both this workshop and the previously mentioned activity using Kate's final speech is that they allow students to see that there are multiple valid interpretations of *Shrew*. When describing both of these activities to me, Christine Albright mentioned that

teaching artists talk to students about the interpretations that they have come up with during the workshop, but they also remind students that, when they go in and see the show, they should think about the choices that the actors make (or think back to what they saw the actors doing, if students saw the show before doing the workshop). The value of this reminder is twofold. First, students get to see the text that they have been working with performed by professional actors, which gives them a new experience of and perspective on the text. Second, and perhaps even more important, when teaching artists present the actor's interpretation of the text as part and parcel of an activity in which students are interpreting the text themselves, it reinforces the idea that one actor or director's choice is not the only correct version of this character. If the actor in this particular production has chosen to play Kate's final speech as a sincere homage to her love for Petruchio, but a student believes that the speech is better played as a joke between Kate and Petruchio at the expense of Bianca and the Widow, the student will likely not worry that his or her own interpretation is wrong, but instead feel empowered by his or her ability to see and understand a wide variety of perspectives on this play. By delving into multiple interpretations of the text, students can see that *Shrew* can send several different messages about gender power dynamics, based on the choices made by the production team. This discovery can, in turn, lead to candid, in-depth discussion of the themes of sexism and misogyny in the play.

OSF has also used workshop exercises to help students relate themes of power and status in *Shrew* to their own lives. One such workshop used a card game activity, in which students were assigned a status based on a randomly drawn

playing card. There were multiple iterations of this game. In one, each student held a card on his or her forehead, facing out, so others could see their status but each person was unaware of his or her own status. In another version, each student knew his or her own status, but it was a secret from everyone else, and a third round combined both of these—each student had a secret status, known only to him or her, but also had a different status on display to everyone else. In each version of this game, students interacted with each other based on status. For instance, in the first iteration, a student might act haughtily towards someone showing a “2” playing card, but behave deferentially towards someone with a “King” card; in the third version, a student whose secret status was a “Queen” but who showed a public status of “3” might try to act superior to everyone around him or her, but find him or herself treated badly by everyone else in the room. Teaching artists then asked students to think about how they felt during each round of the game. What did it mean to have a status that you were unaware of, but everyone around you knew? How did that feel different from having a secret status that only you knew? How was it different yet again to think of yourself as having one status, but to be treated as if you had another? After discussing their reactions to each part of the exercise, students related their experience during the activity to Kate’s experience in *Shrew*. They thought about questions like, “[H]ow does [Kate] think the world sees her?” and “What does she feel about herself?” (Albright 2015). Thinking about Kate in terms of the clash between the way she thinks of herself and the way others treat her gave students yet another way to interpret and process *Shrew*. Furthermore, by leading students through an exercise in which they actually experienced this kind of

dissonance between self-perception and treatment from others, teaching artists could help students connect more deeply to Kate's experience and therefore to the play overall.

This exercise can also help students connect the themes of *Shrew* to their personal lives and everyday experiences. Albright noted that kids can easily relate to these kinds of discussions about status, "because they deal with it on a daily basis" (2015). They completely understand what it might mean for someone to be popular or high status one day, and then suddenly be ostracized and of low status the next day. If students can understand how this kind of status shift plays out in their own lives, it makes it much easier for them to relate to a character like Kate, who might want others to see her as confident and powerful, but is treated like she has no power or independence. Making these themes concrete and real for students helps them to see that the things that Shakespeare wrote about are still relevant today, which helps them engage with the play and have meaningful discussions about big ideas like power and lack of power in *Shrew*.³⁵

These discussions can be intimidating for artists and educators, especially because of the potential for a student to be triggered, for the complex material to bring up something deeply personal and upsetting for a student. I asked Christine Albright if this was something she had experienced, and how she handled it. She said that she had had a handful of those moments and told the story of one young man

³⁵ See scholarship on authentic learning, especially Newmann, Secanda, and Wehlage, *A Guide to Authentic Instruction and Assessment* (1995) and part one of Newmann's *Authentic Achievement* (1996). Although these scholars do not directly discuss theatre workshops, they do delve into the benefits that are reaped when students find extracurricular, real world value in the content they learn in school.

who, after learning about the play *Water by the Spoonful* and hearing that mothers and motherhood were big themes in the play, asked if it would be all right if he left the theatre, should he become emotional. Albright responded that it was fine if he had to leave, but also said the following:

I would challenge you to actually keep watching what happens. Because if you walk away when it gets hardest, you might not see the payoff. You might not see where this is going that could teach you something. If this is something that you actually have in your own life . . . [y]ou can watch how other people deal with it. And maybe you could learn something about your own situation . . . But also, you need to feel safe. (2015)

The next day, she learned from the student's chaperone that he had indeed stayed in the theatre and had been profoundly affected by the play (2015). *Water by the Spoonful* gave this young man the opportunity to see actors onstage, dealing with a situation similar to what he was going through, and he was able to learn from it while still feeling safe. Albright's exchange with this student provides an example of an effective way to help students confront difficult topics or moments. She gave this student permission to leave if that was what he needed for his emotional safety, but she also helped him see the benefit in staying to watch a difficult situation similar to his own. Although this can be a difficult balance to strike, I think that it can help theatre artists who want to discuss challenging themes, like those in *Shrew*, with students. It is vital for students to feel safe, but also to understand that facing the difficult moments, both in the play and in discussion, can help them learn.

Albright also mentioned that, although teaching artists leave space for students to share personal experiences and connections to the play, they also reserve the option to help the student find further resources when necessary. If a

teaching artist feels like what the student has shared cannot be fully addressed in the workshop alone, he or she has “permission to say, ‘ . . . I don’t deal with you on a day-to-day basis, let’s talk right now, and then I want to include your teacher in this conversation, so that it can keep going, and that you don’t feel cut off . . . ’” (Albright 2015). The option to find additional resources is an important part of helping young people work through challenging themes. In the situation Albright described, this additional resource is a teacher, but in other instances, a social worker or school counselor might be better equipped to help the student in question.³⁶ Regardless of what support a teaching artist seeks, knowing what resources are available and being open to directing students to those resources is necessary in order for teaching artists and students to have open, meaningful discussions about topics like gender inequality and misogyny.

Conclusion

There is no escaping the fact that Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew* shows an extremely imbalanced power dynamic between Kate and the men in her life, most notably Petruchio. This issue becomes even more difficult when thinking about presenting this play to young audiences. After all, what message do children take away when they see a man forcing his wife to submit to his will by depriving her of food, clothing, and sleep, at which point his wife not only submits, she also chastises other women for not obeying their husbands? Due to the play’s enduring popularity,

³⁶ Michael Rohd, founding artistic director of Sojourn Theatre, also mentioned the importance of these kinds of resources when I interviewed him. He suggested, if a teaching artist plans to be in a school discussing intense material, to touch base with the school counselor to let him or her know what conversation will be happening and make sure that it is okay to send students to the counselor if needed (2015).

though, many theatre practitioners have attempted to reframe this tale in a way that downplays *Shrew's* more offensive elements. David H. Bell, for instance, used a commedia dell'arte frame story in his 2007 *Short Shakespeare!* abridgment at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, to remind audience members that what they were seeing was entirely fictional and theatrical. He also choreographed cartoonish, farcical combat, complete with foley sound effects, in order to make the violence humorous and therefore less disturbing for audience members. Additionally, Bell and actor Molly Glynn emphasized Kate's strength and compassion by altering her final speech to make it about all people being kind to each other rather than about women submitting to or serving men.

The 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival Shakespeare-in-the Schools production of *Shrew* also featured a strong, compassionate Kate. Mallore Hill focused on portraying the character as grounded, hoping to show that she changed not because Petruchio forced her to, but because she realized that she had been cruel to those around her and wanted to mend her relationship with her family. Gaza also tried to focus her adaptation on showing multiple flawed characters, retaining the scenes or moments that showed Petruchio as a shrew, as well as those in which Kate was shrewish. She further diffused some of the unequal gender power dynamics in the play by casting a woman as Baptista, thus highlighting the idea that, at least for Gaza and her team, this play was about conflict and compromise between all people, not just about power struggles between men and women. Like Bell, Gaza utilized over-the-top, stylized, commedia-inspired combat both to lessen the harshness of some of the more violent moments and to engage young audience members. The larger-

than-life physicality and acrobatic, often circus-like stage fighting helped draw kids in, but also made interactions like the wooing scene more playful and whimsical than violent.

Although both Chicago Shakespeare Theater and Utah Shakespeare Festival created engaging productions that conveyed a version of Shakespeare's story to young audiences, I would argue that these performances could have gone one step further by using Shakespeare's text to open up discussion about troubling topics like sexism. One possible way to accomplish this goal would be to combine one of these entertaining and thoughtful stagings with a workshop like those done at Oregon Shakespeare Festival. These workshops explore complicated and delicate ideas like the way Kate changes by the play's end and her status compared to men in the world of the play. They give students a chance to unpack these kinds of ideas not only in the context of the play itself, but also in the context of their own lives. Activities like the one dealing with Kate's final speech can open up debate by letting students explore several interpretations of a speech or a character, showing them that there is more than one valid version of a play and that they do not necessarily have to agree with choices made by a specific production team. This kind of preparation or debriefing could pave the way for an extended discussion exploring multiple viewpoints with a student like the young woman in Duchesne, Utah, who objected to Petruchio's treatment of Kate. I would advocate for future productions to combine mindful abridgments, like those at Chicago Shakespeare Theater and Utah Shakespeare Festival, with theme-based workshops like those led by Oregon Shakespeare Festival teaching artists. Students would then not only have the

opportunity to see and enjoy a performance of *Taming of the Shrew*, they would also (and perhaps more importantly) be able to use the text and their experience of watching the show to process the still-relevant theme of sexism and imbalance of power, both through physical exploration of text and through critical discussion.

Chapter 3

Taking the Stage: Audience Participation in Brigham Young University's Young Company

It is December 27, 1904. A petite woman stands at the edge of a vast stage in the Duke of York's Theatre in London, peering over the footlights. She looks out to an audience of boys and girls and implores them, "Do you believe in fairies? Say quick that you believe! If you believe, clap your hands!" As the faint light of Tinkerbelle grows stronger, the actress playing Peter Pan exclaims, "Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!" and races off to save Wendy (Barrie).

This scene from the premiere performance of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* is often cited as one of the earliest moments of audience participation in theatre for young audiences (TYA) (Jackson 61-62). Audience participation was, of course, in use well before 1904, particularly in popular entertainment: to give just one example, audiences at nineteenth-century pantomimes in the United Kingdom frequently called out warnings or advice to characters onstage, who sometimes talked back to audiences.³⁷ Jackson does acknowledge that such participation existed before the turn of the twentieth century, but also states that *Peter Pan* was likely the first "large-scale mainstream professional production in a West End theatre" to use such a tactic (a statement that perhaps unfairly labels the West End as a site of artistic

³⁷ For more on the history of audience interaction in pantomime, see Dawn Lewcock's essay "Once Upon a Time: The Story of the Pantomime Audience" in *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance*, ed. Susan Kattwinkel (2003).

superiority)(62). While theatre theorists have varying views on the benefits and use of participation, many TYA and Theatre in Education (TIE) practitioners have continued to use audience participation in the century or so since *Peter Pan's* debut.³⁸ One group in the U.S. incorporating significant amounts of audience participation into their work is Brigham Young University's (BYU) Young Company. Before going any further, I want to acknowledge here that BYU explicitly states on their website that they are "founded, supported, and guided by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," and as such, it is likely that the tenets and values of this religion influence the Young Company and the productions discussed here ("The Mission of Brigham Young University"). In fact, in my interview with Michael Bahr, the director of education at Utah Shakespeare Festival, he theorized about the connection between the LDS church and the affinity for Shakespeare that he has observed in the state of Utah (2015). While the influence of LDS is fascinating and no doubt important, it is beyond the scope of this work, and is in and of itself a large enough topic to fuel an entire research study.

BYU's Young Company was founded in 1975 and is a part of the college's Department of Theatre and Media Arts. The group is run by faculty and staff, but performers are all undergraduate students. The company tours two TYA shows per year to local schools, one Shakespeare and one contemporary. What makes the Young Company's use of participation in recent years particularly interesting is that they are one of the few groups using this tactic in performances of Shakespeare for

³⁸ For more on different opinions on audience participation, see Anthony Jackson's *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings* (2007), especially Chapter 5: "Audience Participation and Aesthetic Distance."

young people.³⁹ Leading the way in this work at BYU is Teresa Dayley Love, an adjunct faculty member and frequent adapter and director for the Young Company. Love and the Young Company's work, however, did not develop in a vacuum; it has been influenced and shaped by a generation of TYA and TIE artists who have worked to come up with new and innovative methods of involving young audience members.

Brian Way was one of the foremost twentieth-century TYA artists utilizing meaningful participation, going far beyond a mere call to "clap if you believe in fairies." Way's major TYA work began when he founded Theatre Centre in London in 1953. Through this company, he began to implement ideas he had developed by observing children's shows while stage managing at the Old Vic (Johnston). One of these ideas was the "open stage," his ideal space for audience participation, which eliminated the gap between actors and audience typical in a proscenium theatre (Way 65). He also used several different forms of audience involvement, ranging from spontaneous participation, in which young people shout out helpful suggestions unprompted, to directed participation, when actors instruct the audience to perform specific actions in the moment, to rehearsed participation, where young people are given a scripted role and have a short amount of time to learn their part (31-33, 142-165). Underlying all of these types is Way's theory that participation "is a phenomenon that exists within the children themselves" (1). Rather than being the gimmick or uncomfortable coercive tool that some detractors

³⁹ As mentioned in the introductory chapter to this study, the Young Company's unique use of audience participation is the reason that they are the only non-professional company included here.

view it as, Way saw active participation as the natural way for people, especially young children, to experience and enjoy theatre.

While Way focused on TYA as an art form purely for enjoyment and entertainment, another group of artists utilized audience participation to enhance theatre's educational value. TIE began in England in 1965, at Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, influenced and inspired, in part, by Brian Way's use of audience participation. This company (and others founded soon after) created theatre pieces that related to school curriculum and to students' lives. Students actively participated in these pieces, often influencing a play's outcome through their involvement. This audience involvement varied from piece to piece; one play might ask students to participate "in-role" as villagers voting on the best way to spend funds in an impoverished state (Turner 8-9), while another might ask them to decide, as themselves, whether a Native American man should be allowed to retain artifacts belonging to his ancestors or be forced to give them up to his white employer (Jackson 149-151). Over the past fifty years, TIE has grown and changed, spreading to the U.S. and elsewhere. One of the most notable changes, due largely to economic constraints, is that participation is now often confined to a post-show workshop, rather than being woven into the show itself, to enable companies to perform for more students at one time. The basic tenets of TIE are still present, however: the content has an educational purpose, whether it is linked to the academic curriculum or to a social issue; and the piece involves significant, meaningful audience participation intended to help young people debate, rethink,

and/or understand the topic at hand, whether it takes place during the show or in a post-show workshop.

Although there is a precedent for audience participation in the work of the practitioners described above, not many artists currently working in the United States utilize significant amounts of meaningful audience participation during performances. One practitioner who does focus on audience involvement is BYU faculty member and frequent Young Company collaborator Teresa Dayley Love, mentioned above. Love has worked extensively in TYA and TIE, including co-founding and running two Los Angeles-based TIE companies.⁴⁰ Love utilizes what she terms “robust audience participation,” meaning that she strives to have audience members participate in ways that will meaningfully affect the play (Love 2015). One type of “robust” participation Love often uses is to have audience members play roles in the show with no prior rehearsal (2015). This level of participation would make her work unique regardless of the plays she was working with, but it is especially unusual that she utilizes this kind of audience involvement with Shakespeare, an author whose work rarely gets combined with this type of unrehearsed participation.⁴¹

Another unique element of Love’s work, particularly with the BYU Young Company, is that she has often chosen to work with plays that are seldom produced

⁴⁰ For more information on Teresa Dayley Love, see her faculty page and CV at <https://cfac.byu.edu/tma/faculty-and-staff-profiles/580/love-teresa/>

⁴¹ Abigail Rokison has documented the work of a few UK companies who use similar unrehearsed participation with Shakespeare, including Regent’s Park Open Air Theatre, Young Shakespeare Company, and Propeller. (For more on these, see “Cut-Down Stage Versions for Young Children” in *Shakespeare for Young People*.) I have found no documentation of such work with Shakespeare plays in the United States, and, even taking into account the aforementioned U.K. companies, this form of participation is still relatively rare.

for young audiences. In 2012, she adapted *Merchant of Venice*, and in 2014, she adapted and directed *Cymbeline*. Part of the reason she chose these shows was her own affinity for them, but it could not have hurt that, because the Young Company returns to the same schools year after year, they strive to produce a wide variety of Shakespeare's work, going beyond plays like *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, typical fare for young audiences. The Young Company also reached outside the Shakespeare-for-young-people canon with their 2013 production of *Henry V*, a play produced slightly more often for young people than *Merchant* or *Cymbeline*, but still not usually the first choice for young audiences, both because of its reliance on audience knowledge of royal lineage and its brutal battle scenes. This show was directed by Megan Sanborn Jones (and adapted by Jones, along with BYU students), and also contained quite a bit of audience participation, due, at least in part, to Love's influence and example. The artists working with the Young Company have thus created a unique combination in many of their seasons: not only does the company choose unconventional shows, they also use significant amounts of audience participation, differentiating their productions from the more simply abridged versions of Shakespeare discussed in the previous chapter.

Of the three shows mentioned above, the two that are most remarkable in terms of their potentially sensitive content and how the BYU productions handled that difficult subject matter are *Merchant of Venice* and *Henry V*. *Cymbeline* is also an undeniably challenging play, with its accusations of infidelity and downright creepy bedroom scene. Love's adaptation and use of audience involvement, however, did not focus on those difficulties, whereas her adaptation of *Merchant* and Jones's of

Henry did more to highlight the problematic moments of each play. Both productions' navigation of tricky themes becomes especially noteworthy when considering that these shows were aimed primarily at fourth through sixth grade audiences.

Merchant of Venice can be a difficult play to stomach, whether done for children or adults. There are many moments showing characters being blatantly racist (particularly in scenes involving the Prince of Morocco), and even more in which characters are viciously anti-Semitic. Characters refer to or address Shylock as "Jew" or "the Jew" almost sixty times during the play, often adding modifiers such as "faithless," "villain," "dog," "harsh," or "currish." They mock his grief when his daughter runs away with his money and possessions, including a ring that he got from his late wife. They delight in their triumph over him at the final trial, relishing his forced conversion and the decree that he must give his money to his (now estranged and Christian) daughter and her new husband. Some may say that this treatment of Shylock, particularly at the final trial, is warranted by his actions—after all, he did demand a pound of flesh from Antonio in return for a defaulted loan, refusing to relinquish his claim even after he is offered many times the amount that Antonio borrowed. But the Christian characters' repeated connections between Shylock's villainy and his religion make clear that their abuse of him stems first from his religion; his actions are not nearly as relevant as the fact that he is Jewish.⁴²

⁴² Jessica, Shylock's daughter and the only female Jewish character in the play, is treated well by the Christian characters. They, however, make clear that they like her because she does not seem like a Jew; Gratiano, for instance, refers to her as "a gentle and no Jew" (2.6.53). She also converts voluntarily, making her truly a gentle (Gentile) rather than a Jew.

Many productions have tried to temper this discrimination by showing Shylock as sympathetic, a victim rather than a villain. In the 2011 Theatre for a New Audience production, to cite just one example, Charles Isherwood wrote of F. Murray Abraham's Shylock: "Mr. Abraham makes us feel acutely how his suffering and his thirst for revenge are tragically, inextricably linked."⁴³ No matter how sympathetically Shylock is portrayed, though, religious discrimination still permeates this play, not unlike the gender oppression and violence that pervades *Shrew* even when adaptations try to skirt that issue, as discussed in the previous chapter. And, like *Shrew*, the ever-present issues in *Merchant* should be addressed, particularly when performing for young audiences.

Henry V may not seem as challenging as *Merchant of Venice* at first glance, since it does not feature explicit racism or religious discrimination. It does, however, contain scenes of violence that make it particularly tricky to perform for young audiences. Two of the important scenes in the play include the siege at Harfleur and the Battle of Agincourt; the latter includes Henry's command to murder all the French prisoners, and the death of the youngest character in the play, the Boy. And, although any Shakespeare play could be deemed confusing due to complex language, *Henry V* can be especially tough to decipher because the audience needs to know about Henry's checkered past as Prince Hal. The only U.S. production for young audiences that I am aware of, other than BYU's 2013 tour, is Ohio State's

⁴³ For a few more of the many sympathetic portrayals of Shylock, see Oregon Shakespeare Festival's 2010 production; the 2006 production at the Shakespeare Tavern in Atlanta, Georgia (which featured two actors playing the role on alternating nights); and the 2006 Ten Thousand Things Theater Company's production in Minneapolis, Minnesota. See also John Gross's *Shylock: A Legend and its Legacy*.

2015 touring production.⁴⁴ Ohio State's production addressed the aforementioned problems by using stylized movement for the fights; poppy petals for blood when the prisoners were killed; and inserting a section at the start of the play explaining how Henry IV came to power and describing Henry V's years as a wayward prince. BYU used some of these same strategies, as well as additional methods to invest young audiences in this complicated play, while working to keep the violence from being too graphic. Through audience participation (among other methods), BYU's productions managed to help young audiences buy in to both *Henry V* and *Merchant of Venice*, and also address some of the problematic themes contained in these plays.

The Setup

Audience participation is not something that can simply be shoehorned into an existing script or performance. This kind of involvement must be taken into account from the beginning of the production process, starting with writing (or, in BYU's case, adapting) the script. A mere glance at one of Teresa Dayley Love's adaptations demonstrates her commitment to insuring that audience involvement is an integral part of the performances she is helping to create. In *Merchant of Venice*, she includes specific stage directions that not only denote when a child should be pulled from the audience to play a certain role, but also offer suggestions for how actors might interact with that child to help him or her succeed and feel confident in

⁴⁴ Even outside the U.S., *Henry V* is a rare choice for young audience adaptations. The Royal Shakespeare Company created a First Encounters adaptation that toured to the U.S., but even they shied away from simply adapting the play on its own: they instead titled their work *The Famous Victories of Henry V* and combined key moments from *Henry IV Parts I & II* and *Henry V*. (<http://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/the-famous-victories-of-henry-v/>). Propeller Theatre Company, an all-male U.K. company, has also produced an adaptation titled *Pocket Henry V*; interestingly, they have also produced a *Pocket Merchant* for young audiences. (<http://propeller.org.uk/productions>)

the role. One example of these instructions to actors occurs both in Love's introductory notes and her stage directions in the first scene. In her comments before the script, Love mentions: "There is a little joke for Shakespeare nerds. Gratiano is known to be a non-stop talker and a sort of good time guy (as well as hugely anti-Semitic [sic]). In our play he is played by a child from the audience. The way the part is structured now, he really doesn't need to say anything. However, Bassanio still treats him as if he's just a wild chatterbox" (2). Then, throughout the first scene, she includes several stage directions instructing the actor playing Bassanio to react as if Gratiano has whispered to him, offering moments when Bassanio and Gratiano can "converse" wordlessly, and suggesting ways that Bassanio and other actors can help guide the child playing Gratiano around and eventually off the stage. By cutting Gratiano's lines and giving these directions to the actor, Love maintained the joke of Gratiano's loquaciousness while toning down his discrimination against Shylock as much as possible.⁴⁵ She also allowed the child playing the role some freedom to interact with the actor in pantomime. At the same time, she made sure that the child would never be put on the spot without knowing what to do and avoided the problem of an actor having to feed unfamiliar Shakespearean dialogue to the child and expecting him or her to parrot it back or read it from a printed script.⁴⁶ Directions like these pop up frequently throughout

⁴⁵ The prejudice expressed by Gratiano and several of the other characters in *Merchant* is still a problematic issue to be grappled with, even when some of the text has been removed or altered. I will discuss this at length later in this chapter.

⁴⁶ There is one moment in the script when the child playing Gratiano is fed the line "THOU INEXECRABLE HOUND" to shout at Shylock (30). The child playing Nerissa also has four short lines, in modern English, which are given to her by one of the actors (10-11). Though these lines are

Love's script of *Merchant*, and also come up occasionally in Jones's adaptation of *Henry V* (which, as I will discuss later, involved less of this kind of single-student participation). By making audience participation an integral part of their scripts, even including suggestions to actors as to how best to handle this participation, Love and Jones made sure that the children playing roles or interacting onstage were a crucial part of the performance, rather than part of a tacked-on gimmick.

Young audience members may be hesitant to go up onstage, however, if they are unaware of how the participation will work, or if they are uncomfortable with the actors. Megan Sanborn Jones addressed this immediately for *Henry V* audiences by having actors circulate, in character, and seat students before the performance, a technique advocated by Brian Way.⁴⁷ As a part of their interaction, actors not only welcomed audience members, they also informed them that they (actors/characters) were part of the English army, that the English were the "good guys," and that the French, in blue, were the "bad guys." This pre-show interaction served several purposes. It immediately engaged students and made them comfortable with the actors; it gave them crucial information to understand the show, namely that the English would be wearing red and the French would be wearing blue and that, for the purposes of this show, the English were the good guys; and, through this delineation of "good guys" and "bad guys," suggested to the audience that they were (or should be) on the English side. The audience was eventually officially designated as the English army, before the show began, when

important, both child participants have significantly more wordless or improvised action than scripted lines.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 6 of Brian Way's *Audience Participation: Theatre for Young People* (1981).

the cast taught them the cheer, “For God, Henry, and St. George,” a chant that they would perform, when prompted, later in the play. By having actors greet students and immediately “cast” them as the English army, Jones and her cast made sure that young audience members understood the basic parameters of their participation in the show, and helped them immediately feel comfortable with this participation.

I would like to pause here for a moment to acknowledge that the stark division of the English and French into “good guys” and “bad guys” can be viewed as problematic. It does set up a potentially oversimplified binary, glossing over tragic moments like the massive loss of life from the French army, and uncomfortable moments, such as the scene in the full script in which Katharine is coerced into marriage for the sake of political efficacy. (Katharine was cut from Brigham Young’s adaptation.) But, for an audience unfamiliar with English royal lineage and the history of Henry V’s martial success, the benefits of this binary may outweigh the drawbacks. Yes, subtle nuance is lost, but the audience can clearly understand the plot, which is vitally important for audience members of any age.

In addition to pre-show business and stage directions that helped incorporate student participation, both *Henry V* and *Merchant* used stage setups that encouraged intimacy between audience and performers, spaces reminiscent of Way’s “open staging.” In her adaptation of *Merchant*, Love specifies that in-the-round staging is ideal, even offering a diagram with a suggestion for audience and stage setup in a typical school multipurpose room (*Merchant* 2-3). Love generally prefers working with an arena or in-the-round space for young audiences, with little gap between performer and audience; this configuration, she says, makes it easier

for an actor to find a child and invite him or her in for a moment of participation or interaction without having to leave the stage, enter the audience, and then try to refocus attention back on the stage (Love 2015). While *Henry V* used alley staging rather than in-the-round, the company still maintained close physical proximity to the audience. This staging choice also helped emphasize the fact that the audience had been cast as the English army: frequently, actors would walk among the audience members on one side or the other, addressing those young people as though they were English soldiers. This meant that, for the opposite half of the audience, it was almost as if they were watching their fellow students take part in the performance with the actors, on a proscenium stage (Jones 2015a).⁴⁸ This close proximity to the actors helped audience members feel like they were always a part of the play, thus increasing audience engagement. It also helped to make participation less intimidating: if the stage is a mere step away, going up and playing a role does not seem that scary.

Furthermore, both Jones and Love emphasized the importance of setting up a system and expectations for the audience from the beginning, both for participation and for what to expect from the show in general. Jones referenced the actors' welcoming the audience, described above, as a big part of the way that they established the system and expectations for participation in *Henry V* (Jones 2015a). Their adaptation also included a short introduction, interwoven with Shakespeare's Act I prologue, in which Falstaff explained that Henry used to be called Prince Hal,

⁴⁸ This choice had the added benefit of making the English army appear larger without having to cast additional actors.

and that he and Hal were close; Canterbury gave the background information about Henry's planned taxes, addressing a specific child and having a brief exchange with him or her; and Henry, cast as a woman in this production, explained that, even though she was a woman, she was still a king and her name was Henry. This introduction set up several important concepts: first, it established important character relationships, and it told the audience that the interaction with actors was not limited to their pre-show conversations during seating, but would continue throughout the performance. It also set up the idea that the casting was gender-blind, an idea that Jones said most children easily accepted.⁴⁹ Because the adaptation introduced important relationships and systems upfront, the company set students up to understand complex relationships, get on board with unconventional casting choices, and be ready for interaction and participation.

Love's method of setting up the system for participation in *Merchant of Venice* (and in shows that she has directed as well as adapted) was a bit more elaborate and scripted. In the *Merchant* adaptation, she had one character serve as a storyteller, and at the end of a lengthy introduction, the actor explicitly told the audience, "Oh, and some of you are going to be in the play. When we ask for volunteers, just raise your hand. You'll figure it out" (*Merchant* 6). Although this may seem like insufficient preparation, it seems to have done the trick: both Jones and Ashworth assert that Love's use of participation in her adaptations has been successful. Furthermore, though the line may seem like a brief throwaway, it does contain all of the information that young audience members need. It tells them that

⁴⁹ This assertion is, of course, difficult to prove and will be investigated further later in this chapter.

the actors will ask for volunteers to go onstage, so they will not be caught off guard by that request. It also teaches them how to indicate that they want to go onstage. Everything else that young participants may need is provided by actors supporting children onstage in the moment, as previously discussed. While her scripted introduction to the participation system may be quick, Love is emphatic about the importance of setting up these systems. She always tells her actors, “this is a language that [kids] understand, this pretending thing,” but that in order for young audience members to jump into participating, you must give “some sort of indication at the beginning, either explicit or implicit, about how it’s going to go, so that they can read and decode what’s going to happen in the play” (Love 2015). Simple as it may seem, the mere act of telling students that they will be asked to participate and explaining how they will be expected to volunteer helps students ease comfortably into taking on a role onstage.

These elements—establishing a system for participation, strategically setting up the space, adapting with audience involvement in mind—do not just help young people feel comfortable getting up onstage. They also help to create an environment in which young audience members will be invested in the play and its characters and feel that they are in a safe space, regardless of whether or not they choose to participate actively in the show. This investment and comfort level will ideally set students up to engage with the themes presented in these plays: discrimination in *Merchant*, and violence and war in *Henry V*.

Audience Investment

Henry V

Participation was not the only reason that young audiences were invested and engaged in the Young Company productions of *Henry V* and *Merchant of Venice*. One way that Jones helped increase audience engagement was through the themes that she chose to highlight in this production. She was concerned that some of the more “dated things” in the play, like “lineage, who gets the throne, etc.” would be hard for young audiences to connect with (2015a). Instead, she and Makenzie Larsen, who played Henry, worked together to figure out Henry’s journey of self-discovery as she finds her role as king, a story that seemed much more relevant to students. As Jones put it, they wanted to look at “what it means to come into your own, or what it means to listen to some advisors and not listen to other advice, and what are the consequences of those kinds of decisions,” focusing especially on Henry’s decision to go to war (2015a). Although the audiences seeing this show may not have been making decisions as momentous as taking troops into battle, they were young people facing the question of whose advice to listen to, and what consequences, good or bad, they might face as a result of listening to that advice. Pulling out this theme of coming-of-age, and the challenges faced in the transition from childhood to adulthood, made this play more accessible for students than a production of *Henry V* that focused only on stories of ascending the throne and deploying troops for battle.

Jones and her production team also pulled the story into the twenty-first century through costume and sound design. Jones described the costuming as a

“medieval mix”: actors wore “high tops and skinny jeans and graphic t-shirts [but on top of that] they would be wearing leather jackets that had been altered to look like chain mail” (Jones 2015a). This eclectic mix of costume pieces set the play in the twenty-first century, but also retained a hint of Elizabethan flavor with the chain mail-esque leather jackets. The choice of music also contributed to the contemporary feel, since the songs chosen were all post-2000 releases, including “Welcome to the Black Parade,” by My Chemical Romance; “Sail,” by AWOL Nation; and “Carry On,” by fun. These songs, all or most of which would likely be familiar to student audiences, emphasized the fact that, even if the historical Henry lived many centuries ago, some of the struggles that he (or, in this production, she) encountered might still be faced by young people today.

In addition to design choices, some of the choices that Jones made during the adaptation process (many of which were made with her cast and other BYU students) helped increase young audience members’ engagement in the production. One of these came during a key battle towards the end of the play. All of the battles in the play were heavily choreographed, so they ended up looking like “dancing fighting” more than typical stage combat (Jones 2015a). Part of this stemmed from the fact that choreography is always part of Jones’s directorial style: she was a professional dancer, and so came at directing from a choreographic perspective (2015a). It also, though, came from a desire to make the fights look “rough and violent” while still keeping the aesthetic stylized rather than realistic (2015a). One of the biggest reasons that Jones wanted to maintain a style that was not completely realistic was that, since the costuming did place the action in the twenty-first

century, these characters would likely have used guns rather than swords as weapons, and Jones emphatically did not want to send her actors into schools with prop guns (2015a). The choice to make the violence stylized also gave the Young Company actors freedom and creative license when working with Jones to create the battle movement sequences.

Battle scenes were not the only places where Young Company actors were involved in the adaptation process, and, for that matter, Young Company actors were not the only BYU students involved in creating this version of *Henry V*. Jones found a unique way to involve students in the adaptation and creation process: she was teaching a survey course on Contemporary Performance Practices in fall 2012, the semester before the show toured. She cast the show before that semester began, and her cast was required to enroll in this fall semester course. The class focused on several different contemporary styles of performance, including “hip-hop theatre . . . devised theatre ala Mary Zimmerman, . . . [and] heavily movement-based theatre, among others” (2015a). Jones had students, both those in her cast and those not in the cast, complete exercises and assignments to incorporate these contemporary styles into *Henry V*. One of these assignments focused on moment work, in the style of the Tectonic Theater Project. Jones asked students to come in with eighteen ideas for specific moments in the play. She described one notable idea that ended up in the final performance:

So one of the moments we worked was "How do we kill the Boy? How are we going to do this?" And we killed that—well, we killed that Boy. We killed that Boy so many ways, like, here's another way we could kill the Boy, here's another way we could kill the Boy, and here's how Fluellen reacts to killing the Boy. Here's one thing Fluellen could do, here's how he can handle it. And

we just played with it and played with it, until we found moments that worked. And we knew: "Those moments, that's right." It gave us chills. "Two of you are crying. Done. That's how we're going to do it." (2015a)

She also described what the scene, during the climactic Battle of Agincourt, looked like in performance:

[W]e had the entire cast in role as English soldiers, all running hard, with fierce attitude, as if to engage the enemy in front of them, but in slow motion. The Boy was running as well, but terrified, until she [the Boy was played by a female actor] was stopped with a pantomimed wound to her stomach, like she was run through by a sword. This arrested her forward movement and she froze in agony before slowly dropping to the knees as the rest of the cast moved past her and offstage. It was really noticeable because of the juxtaposition between the movement of the army and her stillness. (Jones 2015b)

The rest of the actors cleared the stage, and the Boy remained alone onstage for her death. The actor playing Fluellen eventually entered, making sure to come on "before the shock and sadness of the death led to restlessness at the lack of stage action" (Jones 2015b). According to Jones, this shock and sadness was often profound for audience members; she was "amazed at how long a roomful of hundreds of elementary school kids were willing to sit in silence" during this death scene (2015b). This reaction of focused, intense silence suggests several possibilities. It may indicate that students were absorbed by the movement sequence and thus continued to pay attention, even after the battle scene ended. It may also point to the fact that audience members felt invested in or connected with the story and the character. It may indicate both of these things. Regardless of the exact cause, students' focus and attention to the death of the Boy does demonstrate their engagement with the play itself, and their investment in this specific moment.

An important adaptation note: in Shakespeare's original script, the Boy does not die onstage. Instead, Fluellen enters with Gowers, lamenting and mourning the fact that the French have killed all of the boys. Considering the fact that Jones wanted to make sure that the violence in the play was not too nightmarish, this raises the question: why stage a death, a piece of violence, that is not in the original script? Jones's primary reason for staging this scene was dramatic efficacy: she prefers, when possible, "to evocatively dramatize important moments in plays," and the death of the Boy was one of those important moments in *Henry V* (2015b). The staging described above was also not a superfluous portrayal of violence: there was no actual weapon used, and the movement sequence focused (based on Jones's description) on the emotional import of the battle and of the boy's death rather than on physical violence. Based on the above description of the audience's silence, this staging seems to have conveyed that emotional import to the elementary school students watching the play.

Another adaptation choice, also made with Jones's Contemporary Performance Practice class, that helped update the show and perhaps make it more accessible, was a change in Fluellen's lines and speech style. One of the things that Jones struggled with was that, in the full script of *Henry V*, Fluellen has a strong Welsh accent, which, for Shakespeare's audiences, would have marked this character as different from the English characters and would have emphasized Henry's assessment of Fluellen as "out of fashion" (IV.i.83). She wondered, "[H]ow do we show that [Fluellen is] a guy who's legit lower-class, and doesn't quite fit in, but is a man's man?" (2015a). The answer came through one of the styles studied in

the course: students had looked at *Othello: The Remix*, by the Q Brothers, along with other hip-hop versions of Shakespeare, and the actor playing Fluellen at BYU, Matthew Fife, was “a remarkable hip-hop artist, a spoken word artist” (2015a). For Jones, the cast, and the class, it made sense for Fluellen to demonstrate his difference from the other characters through spoken word poetry; the actor adapted Fluellen’s lines into this style, and, according to Jones, it worked beautifully. It marked Fluellen as different from the rest of the English characters in a way that read to young audience members, while still keeping much of Shakespeare’s language intact (2015a).

While this choice did help to distinguish Fluellen from other characters and showcased Matthew Fife’s talent, it also could bring up the question of whether utilizing hip-hop and spoken word poetry in this way constitutes cultural appropriation. Jones clarified that Fife’s performance tended toward spoken word rather than rap, and that her contemporary performance course (which all of the *Henry V* actors had taken) included conversations “about the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and performance” (2015c). The performers, therefore, may have had the opportunity to discuss and work through what it might imply when white performers use an art form that has its roots in urban communities and communities of color.⁵⁰ But what might audiences have taken away from this

⁵⁰ Like hip-hop, spoken word also has roots in African American history, although it originated during the Harlem Renaissance, slightly earlier than hip-hop (“Say It Loud”). For an interesting discussion on the complexities of the relationship between hip-hop and race, see Nelson George’s *Hip Hop America* (1998), particularly Chapter 5, ‘black owned?’ George emphatically points out that white entrepreneurs had a place in the development of hip-hop in America through their support of early artists, thus suggesting that the African American community alone cannot claim ownership over the art form. However, he also notes that the initial creators of hip-hop were predominantly

choice? Due to the ephemeral nature of performance and lack of audience survey data, it is tough to know for sure. Tony Porter, a contributor to the Utah Theatre Bloggers Association website, did mention Fluellen's "hip-hop speech pattern," but only to note his "initial misgivings" and later acceptance of the artistic choice, not to comment on possible appropriation. Regardless of whether audience members associated Fluellen's hip-hop/spoken word lines with stereotypes about African American men, I would suggest that it is vital to consider such implications when making this kind of choice, one that could be interpreted as a way to showcase actor talent, but could also be taken as perpetuating stereotypes associating urban men of color with lower class status or "other"-ness.

Another unique adaptation choice, this one made primarily by Jones, intended to increase investment and engagement for some audience members, was the decision to cast Henry as a woman. Jones made this choice for several reasons. First, she said frankly that, in her experience at BYU auditions, "you get, normally, 3-4 times as many women auditioning for the female roles available. And never quite enough men to even fill the roles" (Jones 2015a). The choice, then, was partly practical—the best actors that she saw at auditions were women, and so she chose to cast a woman in the largest role in the show. But the choice was also driven by the fact that women do not only make up over half of auditioners, they also make up at

male artists of color, including African American, Latino, and Caribbean dancers and DJs, thus emphasizing the strong association between hip-hop and men of color; he also acknowledges the stereotypical association between hip-hop and African American artists, even as he points to the flaws in this generalization. And, for a brief overview of hip-hop and its roots in African American oral forms, see Alice Price-Styles's "MC origins: rap and spoken word poetry" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop* (2015); for an interesting take on assumptions regarding race in hip-hop, see Anthony Kwame Harrison's "Hip-hop and racial identification," also in *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*.

least half of the show's audience, and she wanted young women in the audience to be able to see themselves in the play's protagonist. As Jones put it:

I think it's important for both . . . boys and girls . . . to be able to look at men and women heroes, and relate [to characters of the opposite gender]. We expect girls to do it all the time. "Harry Potter's just like you!" You know, "Henry V is just like you!" And I thought, "Why don't we just make Henry V just like you?" So, she was a girl. (2015a)

For Jones, this change was fairly simple—all the pronouns were changed from "he" to "she," and Henry explained briefly at the beginning that, even though she was a woman, her name was Henry, and she was a king. Jones did note that many of the teachers whose students were seeing the play were skeptical; they worried that it would confuse kids to have a woman be a king. From the perspective of Jones and the actors, though, students did not have trouble with the change and, in the vein of imaginative play, accepted that this woman could be a king much as a child might accept that, when playing house, a girl might play a father when there are no boys around. This is not to say that students did not ask their teachers or parents questions about the gender shift after the show, or that they were completely unfazed by it, but it seems not to have interfered substantially with their basic understanding or enjoyment of the show. It also gave young women the opportunity to identify with a strong protagonist, and, as Shelly Gaza mentioned in her adaptation of *Shrew*, described in the previous chapter, having several strong female roles in this production of *Henry V* (four of the seven cast members were women, with many of Henry's advisors changed from male to female) may provide encouragement for young women who see this tour and want to pursue acting in the future.

Merchant of Venice

Although both *Merchant of Venice* and *Henry V* used audience participation in ways that helped increase audience buy-in and investment, the participation scripted into Teresa Dayley Love's *Merchant* adaptation was much more extensive. The most obvious way that she leveraged participation to the advantage of the actors and the production was by having students play Gratiano and Nerissa; she also had an adult from the audience play Bellario and a child play Jessica, along with other brief moments of individual participation, but none of these roles were as substantial in her adaptation (or in the original) as Gratiano or Nerissa. Having young audience members play these two roles served multiple purposes. First, regardless of the age of students watching the show, it increased engagement. Love pointed out that having kids come up onstage builds relationships between audience and actor, even for those audience members who do not participate; after the show, she mentioned, everyone in the audience wants to talk to the actors "because they've seen [the actors] be accessible to everybody else" (2015). Elizabeth Tobias, the Programs Director at Theatricum Botanicum and a former colleague of Love's, echoed this sentiment:

[T]he minute [an actor], with a welcome, open heart, invite[s] somebody to be a part of what [he or she is] doing, it changes the dynamic of everyone in the room. I've done shows that Teresa has written, where we're performing for 350 kids and we're asking for a volunteer. Why should those other 349 kids feel anything other than slighted if they don't volunteer? Because the way [Teresa] trained me to do that was, it is an invitation to everyone. And whether you [the student audience member] get chosen or not, you are chosen, because we are working together now. (Tobias 2015)

Brian Way similarly suggests that young people are aware and accept the convention that not all can take part in this kind of participatory opportunity, and thus remain engaged even if not chosen (97). Admittedly, this claim is difficult to prove. However, a sentiment that is echoed across many books, articles, and interviews about theatre for young audiences is that children will let you know if they are not engaged. Love referred to young audience members as “bellwethers,” because they will simply not give you their attention if they are not interested (2015). Way supports this notion, writing that young children do not know the unspoken rules of theatre: they are unaware that audience members are to sit quietly and not voice their reactions to the performance, and thus young audiences, if not entertained, will often make their feelings known (2). Playwright Alan Ayckbourn has expressed the same opinion: he once said in an interview that, while a bored adult audience will give you ten to fifteen minutes of attention, hoping that the play will improve, “kids will give you about five seconds before they go, ‘boring!’ and turn away.”⁵¹ These statements, then, suggest that actors can tell, even from a distance, if their young audience members are engaged or not, which lends credence to Elizabeth Tobias’s claim that she and fellow actors could, indeed, tell that young audience members felt included based solely on the invitation to participate. The research that would need to be done to prove this assertion definitively is outside the scope of this project, but the anecdotal evidence described above suggests that,

⁵¹ For more on the unique nature of the TYA audience, and on writing or creating specifically for this audience, see Tom Maguire’s “There is no audience,” in *Theatre for Young Audiences*, ed. Tom Maguire and Karian Schuitema.

at least in some instances, single-student participation can help a full audience feel invested and engaged in a performance.

This investment and engagement through participation was particularly vital for junior high audiences of *Merchant of Venice*. Love pointed out that kids in seventh and eighth grade tend to be more wary of the touring actors than elementary students are, and thus more hesitant to engage fully with the show. As she put it, “By junior high, they’re weighing you, to try and decide if you’re worth listening to or not . . . it’s the ‘Are we all going to think this is cool or are we all going to think this is stupid?’” (2015). But, once you pull a student from the audience, things change—if the actor senses that the audience is resistant and can, in Love’s words, “judiciously pull out a kid who is the popular kid, or a show-off kid who wants to be [onstage],” then, according to this theory, the attention shifts to the narrative of that child with the actor, which can turn a resistant audience into an invested audience (2015).

Of course, this strategy does have the potential to backfire: pull a “popular” kid who has social power within the school onstage, and other audience members might shut down upon seeing social hierarchy maintained, feeling excluded and unwelcome rather than included and engaged. However, a few things are important to remember. First, Love certainly does not suggest that actors always choose the student who is especially extroverted or gregarious. In fact, she does not ask teachers which students to call on for participation for this very reason: she loves the moment when a “little kid who is completely quiet in class” raises his or her hand, goes onstage and surprises his or her teachers (Love 2015). The suggestion to

target a particularly outgoing or popular student for a role applies specifically to situations when the audience seems resistant, a phenomenon that Love asserts happens more with junior high audiences. Additionally, I would suggest that, while Love used the term “popular” student when describing which student to choose when an audience is especially difficult, a more apt description might be “a student who is a leader within the school or class,” whose leadership qualities can be channeled positively.

Regardless of terminology, however, not much research or writing has been done on the effects, psychological or otherwise, of using participation in this way, so it is difficult to confirm or refute Love’s theory. But a topic that has been explored is the power of peer pressure, positive or negative, among adolescent students. Teachers Julie Burwell and Robert Stone, for example, write about the ability that powerful students (the term they use in place of the label “popular”) have to “influence general attitudes (often in a negative way) about someone or something—the ability to steer an individual or a group in a particular direction” (78-79). They go on to assert that a powerful student can “influence peers and decide if a lesson or activity is ‘uncool’ and therefore not worthy of full participation,” a claim similar to Love’s observation that junior high students often judge as a group whether something is “cool” or not (79). If, as Burwell and Stone claim, a single student has the power to make an activity undesirable for an entire group, why not turn that power on its head? Why not use that student’s power in a positive way, to make an activity cool and worthy of participation for the entire group? Burwell and Stone cite an example of an eighth grade boy with social capital

and power who became a positive influence in a classroom, looking out for a less powerful classmate (88-89). And, in an entirely different setting, a Pennsylvania high school has utilized positive peer pressure to help young men who have committed violent crimes succeed academically and leave criminal behavior behind: Glen Mills high school, a residential school whose entire student body consists of teenage boys sent there by the court system, uses strategies including identifying former gang leaders and “channel[ing] their leadership qualities” into the creation of a positive, productive environment (Diegmuller).⁵² The environment at Glen Mills is clearly very different from a performance of *Merchant of Venice* at a Utah junior high school, but the principle is the same: by bringing a student onstage who is a leader or who has social power in the school, Love’s actors have a better chance of convincing the rest of the students that the production is “cool” and worth their active attention and engagement.

In addition to the research on positive peer pressure, anecdotal examples from other performances offer support to Love’s suggestion of strategically choosing a popular or outgoing student for participation. In my own experience, I have reaped the benefit of working with a student who is a leader in order to influence a middle school class positively. To give just one example, in fall 2014, I conducted multiple workshops as a teaching artist with students at a Columbus City Schools middle school. During one of these workshops, the classroom teacher and I used an exercise utilized by Royal Shakespeare Company teaching artists, which involved me delivering a monologue several times to a scene partner, in this case a

⁵² See also David Barstow’s 1996 *St. Petersburg Times* article, “A New Form of Reform.”

student chosen by the classroom teacher. Based on my previous visit to the class, I knew that the selected student was outgoing and talkative, and socialized quite a bit with other students in class. The student's presence with me in the scene elevated students' engagement exponentially compared to my first visit: they were responding not just to my performance, but also to the reactions of the student who was performing with me, reactions that were contingent on the fact that this student was confident enough to react in a way appropriate to the scene and invested enough to commit to those reactions. Having a confident, outgoing, well-liked student onstage with me was therefore incredibly helpful in holding students' attention.

Other performers have also deployed this strategy, although in a slightly different way: Tam Williams, a performer from the UK company Propeller, described the joy he gets from "singl[ing] out the ring leader—and there is always one" and taking that student onstage to play the Duchess in *Pocket Dream*, Propeller's abridged version of *Midsummer* (qtd. in Rokison 122). Although Williams did not explicitly state his reasoning for doing this, part of his goal seems different from Love's: he implies that part of his objective is to take that student down a peg. Some of his implied purpose for "singling out the ring leader," though, overlaps with Love's goal, and with what I suggest is the primary benefit in using a powerful leader in audience participation: by bringing an outgoing and possibly mischievous student onstage, actors can cut off audience heckling and disruption, and hopefully influence other students to become more engaged with and attentive to the performance. Although these anecdotal examples do not definitively prove Love's

theory, they do add further evidence that an idea that may at first seem counterintuitive can work in helping a performer engage an audience. Some important things to remember in thinking about this strategy: first, as mentioned before, it is not one that is used all the time, but rather with audiences that seem disengaged or resistant. Second, a part of the reason that this strategy is important (and perhaps part of the reason that it works) is that, for the BYU Young Company tour, the performer or performers' work with students is essentially a one-off encounter. These actors do not have the opportunity to build a relationship and trust with students that a teacher might have, or even a teaching artist who works with a group of students repeatedly over the course of a year. Instead, the actors have a single chance to grab students' attention and get them to buy in. Utilizing positive peer pressure to increase audience buy-in by enlisting a powerful student is a risk, but the reward can be an audience that is significantly more engaged than they might otherwise have been.

Once the actors got past the challenge of engaging student audiences in *Merchant*, another challenge remained: addressing the difficult theme of anti-Semitism in the script. For this adaptation, however, Love chose not to mention anti-Semitism, and instead decided to work with the general theme of discrimination. She is not the first to eliminate Judaism from a *Merchant* adaptation for young people: Edith Nesbit, whose *Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare* was published in 1907, cut religion entirely from her short story version of *Merchant*. Love has used Nesbit's stories as a jumping-off point in the past, and, when she noticed that Nesbit's version of the play did not mention that Shylock was Jewish, she felt that

she had hit on a strong theme that would resonate with Young Company audiences. For Love, *Merchant of Venice* is a story about being “the Other” far more than it is about being Jewish or even religious (Love 2015). Since she strongly believed that young audiences in central Utah would need a prohibitive amount of background information in order to understand the anti-Semitism directed at Shylock (many, for instance, might need to be taught what Judaism is before even beginning to learn about anti-Semitism), she instead adapted the play to be about the conflict between what she termed the “Dominant” culture and the “Other” culture in a society. Her adaptation does not contain any specific names or descriptions of these cultures—it merely designates where an actor should insert “name of Dominant” or “name of Other” culture. Students at each school (sometimes specific classes, sometimes the entire school) were asked before the show to decide on the specific designations for “Dominant” and “Other” for their school’s performance. Love’s initial hope, she said, was that at least once in a while, the choices might “reflect the school’s social climate” (2015). Since she did not attend many performances in schools, she was not sure if this happened; she did mention that certain pop culture trends of the 2011-2012 school year surfaced a lot, specifically characters or districts from *Hunger Games*. Although that may not have been what Love was aiming for, she felt that it still gave the actors useful information about what students were thinking and where their heads were at, which in turn helped actors figure out how best to relate to their student audiences, and how they could allow the students’ pop culture choices to inform their own choices in performance (Love 2015).

Love further emphasized students' personal connection to *Merchant's* themes by adding brief modern-language scenes at the beginning and end of the play. In the opening, the actors performed scenarios that Love described as "typical 3-6th grade scenes," such as students cutting in line, one student retaliating against another and justifying the action by saying that someone else did it first, and someone being ostracized by peers (*Merchant* 4). In the script, Love advised that, if possible, these scenes should be blocked in such a way that "similar images" and stage configurations could be used in the body of the play, calling attention to the parallels between these school scenarios and the events of *Merchant of Venice* (4). Then, at the very end of the script, after a storyteller character described Portia and Nerissa's return home after the trial and Shylock's forced conversion (which, in this adaptation, involved a costume change indicating a shift to the "Dominant" culture), the actors asked the audience, "Was it fair?" "Was it funny?" "Did he deserve it?" "Or did they?" (40). Love noted that these questions are based on key phrases that come up in the opening frame scene, depicting typical school scenarios. These questions functioned on multiple levels. First, they asked the audience, point-blank, to consider whether Portia, Nerissa, Gratiano, and Bassanio's revenge on Shylock was fair or not. Then, they linked the behavior of these characters to students' own behavior, through the repetition of the key phrases that were used in the opening school scenes of cutting in line and retaliating against a peer. Finally, by linking the action of *Merchant* to students' own lives, these questions asked students to look critically at their own behavior and decide whether or not they themselves act fairly. It is hard to know how many students took these questions to heart and really

examined or changed their own behavior, but Love's adaptation did offer them the opportunity to begin to think about these questions, and to see how Shakespeare's treatment of discrimination was still relevant in their own lives.

Love's choices in this adaptation bring up a couple of big questions. First, is there a cost in equating scenes of classroom fighting with religious or cultural discrimination? These situations are, clearly, vastly different, and some practitioners might object to the way that this adaptation connects the two. This objection has merit, but it is also important to remember that this adaptation was written for a specific target audience: elementary school students (and some junior high school pupils) in and around Provo, Utah. For these young students, being able to anchor discrimination against a specific culture in the real-world experience of seeing a classmate ostracized or harassed may lead to a better understanding of the deeper issues of prejudice in *Merchant of Venice*. Love is not alone in using this strategy: TIE practitioner and scholar Allison Manville Metz has written about the success of a program in rural Texas that connected bullying with, among other things, the Holocaust. Metz vehemently asserts that, while this program might not have succeeded with students in a heavily Jewish community, or who had a strong understanding of the Holocaust and its effects, it was absolutely effective in the rural Texas community for which it was written, where students were largely unfamiliar with Judaism and its history (105-106). Without audience response research (which is outside the scope of this project), it is impossible to know for sure if the frame scenes in *Merchant* were similarly effective, but the intention was similar: to help young students in a specific community, who may or may not have experienced the

large-scale cultural discrimination present in this play, to connect with the play's themes.

Perhaps the biggest question this adaptation raises, though, is whether or not doing away with Judaism in *Merchant of Venice* is justifiable. Does it make sense to lose such a central issue in the name of helping students understand the piece and feel that it is relevant to their own lives? Can one still claim to be performing *Merchant of Venice* if Shylock is not Jewish? Love's decision is, in some ways, understandable, because of the target audience mentioned earlier. According to a June 2012 *Huffington Post* article (coincidentally, published shortly after this production finished its run), less than .1% of the population of Utah at that time was Jewish. This statistic suggests that very few, if any, of the students who saw this touring production were Jewish. If, as many theatre education practitioners and education theorists assert, students can benefit when they can connect material to their own lives,⁵³ then perhaps it makes sense to allow young people to choose groups that feel directly relevant to them, thus giving them an automatic frame of reference for the play.

But if the Young Company's goal was to find a play that is easily relatable to children in and around Provo, Utah, why choose *Merchant of Venice* in the first place? Why not stage a more recent play that already includes situations students encounter on an everyday basis, or create a play with students about their specific

⁵³ See especially scholarship on authentic learning: Newmann, Secanda, and Wehlage *A Guide to Authentic Instruction and Assessment* and part one of Newmann's *Authentic Achievement*; see also Dewey, "The School and the Life of the Child" and "Froebel's Educational Principles" in *The School and Society* (1915).

school's culture? One might argue that, as Nesbit and Love found, the theme of *Merchant of Venice* is the ramifications of a dominant group discriminating against a group that is "other" or that is the "outsider," and that it does not matter what those groups are called. But Shakespeare did not create a character who was a generic "outsider"; he created Shylock, a decidedly Jewish character. Even if Judaism and anti-Semitism are unfamiliar concepts to the students who will see the tour, there are ways to leverage this play to address that unfamiliarity, and to teach students about Judaism and about some of the history of anti-Semitism in the U.S. and abroad. An example of such work, pairing a unit on *Merchant of Venice* with a unit on the Holocaust, will be discussed in the next chapter.⁵⁴ Perhaps combining this kind of interdisciplinary work with robust participation can expand into new possibilities: once students have learned about anti-Semitism, both in a historical and current context, participating or seeing peers participate in a play like *Merchant* can help them connect this context to embodied characters onstage. This, in turn, may help them make the connection between anti-Semitism and instances of discrimination or ostracism in their own lives, a connection that could be strengthened by the contemporary frame scenes already present in Love's adaptation. Strategies like Love's, then, could continue to be effective (perhaps even more so) in an adaptation that kept Shylock as a Jewish character, if such an adaptation were combined with

⁵⁴ For further examples of interdisciplinary drama work on the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, see Lazarus, *Signs of Change*, pg. 115-133. Here, Lazarus describes an entire interdisciplinary unit on *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Also, see Metz's dissertation, "Applied Theatre in Schools in the United States" (2008), in which she discusses a successful TIE program, focused partly on the Holocaust, developed for a rural Texas community with very few, if any, Jewish residents.

an interdisciplinary effort to help students gain a solid context for understanding Judaism and anti-Semitism both in and outside of the play.

Both Teresa Dayley Love and Megan Sanborn Jones used several strategies to invest audiences in their productions of *Merchant of Venice* and *Henry V*. From design choices to casting choices to strategic adaptation, Love and Jones tried to make these shows relevant and accessible for young audiences. Although some choices were problematic and may bear rethinking, many of their strategies went a long way towards making these works relevant for students and thus increasing audience engagement. Participation also helped with audience engagement, and though some of the tactics used, particularly by Love, may seem counterintuitive, they are grounded in years of experience and, in many cases, backed up by other artists and principles of education research.

Audience Engagement Outside of Performance: Workshops

BYU's Young Company does not limit its audience engagement to the performance itself: since 2011, every touring show has been accompanied by a pre- or post-show workshop, centered around an important theme or element of the production. This change came about, in large part, because of Artistic Director Julia Ashworth's efforts to reshape the Young Company tour. When Ashworth took over as Young Company Artistic Director in 2008, she realized that the tour was, in some ways, an onerous experience for the undergraduate actors involved. Students were leaving campus at four or five in the morning, traveling two or more hours, performing at multiple schools, and returning to campus at five PM or later.

Ashworth worked to change the touring model to take some of this time burden off

of students and simultaneously create more meaningful experiences for the schools involved in the tour. Now, the touring locations are all within an hour of BYU's Provo campus, and the Young Company goes to only one school a day. But, even though the company visits fewer schools, they have a more meaningful and sustained relationship with the schools that do receive touring performances because of the workshops that are now part of every Young Company show. Workshop themes stem from the specific show touring that semester; Ashworth notes that she originally assumed all of the workshops would somehow be centered around a social issue, since she has a background in applied theatre, which tends to focus on specific social issues affecting a group or community (Ashworth 2015). As the workshop model evolved at BYU, though, it became apparent that, while some shows lent themselves to a workshop on a social issue, others seemed more suited to activities based on an artistic concept.⁵⁵ At this point, Ashworth states, the workshops are based on whatever will give students "the most authentic hands-on experience" that they can have to accompany the production (2015).

Sometimes these hands-on experiences do center around a social issue, such as the workshop for *The Hundred Dresses* (directed by Ashworth), the contemporary play that toured in fall 2011, the semester before *Merchant of Venice*. The goal for that school year was to address "themes of bullies and bullying" as much as possible in both of the touring productions, and in the workshops for the productions (Ashworth 2015). Ashworth notes that, although the Young Company wanted to

⁵⁵ One workshop that exemplifies this was the workshop on genre for Teresa Dayley Love's production of *Cymbeline*, which was performed as a fairy tale adaptation for kindergarten through third grade, and as a film noir adaptation for fourth through sixth grade.

address these themes with students, they never used the term “bully” or “bullying” in the workshops, instead focusing on the opposite of that: what it means to be a friend and to include rather than exclude peers. For the workshop accompanying *The Hundred Dresses*, Ashworth’s cast developed all of the activities from scratch, which meant that, although the activities were perhaps not the typical ones someone might expect to see in a post-show workshop, the cast was incredibly invested in and passionate about the work that they were doing.⁵⁶ The workshop ultimately became what Ashworth described as “the little workshop that could,” a post-show session that, because it had been so specifically tailored to this production, really homed in on important themes that actors wanted to focus on with students (2015).

One activity that Ashworth identified as working particularly well was one that the actors termed “Sacrifice to Win Relay” (2015). In this activity, student participants sat in a line, and one student was given a cup of candy. The cast told students that there was not enough candy in the cup for everyone to get a piece; if everyone took one, the final person would get nothing. They then began the “relay” component, passing the cup back through the line, with each person having the opportunity to take candy. Ashworth was not present at all of the performances, but she did receive reports on every show and workshop, and she said that there was never a workshop in which the cup was empty when it reached the final student. In

⁵⁶ Due to time constraints in the rehearsal process, Young Company casts usually do not create workshops entirely from scratch anymore. They do still have some ownership over the process, though: casts are now given several options of already-created activities, and are able to choose the ones that they would like to do for their workshops, thus retaining some control over and say in the process of workshop creation.

fact, there were often multiple pieces of candy left at the end of the activity. Actors then used this hands-on experience as a springboard to discuss what it means to sacrifice to have relationships, and why it is important to support one another (2015). Students had an authentic learning experience, in which they saw a production about inclusion and what it means to be a friend, did a concrete activity to explore that theme further, and then were able to debrief and discuss that theme and how it applied to their own lives. The activity was, of course, not a perfect authentic experience, since including and supporting peers is rarely based on something as simple as sharing candy, but it did give students a concrete access point for talking about this theme in the limited time allowed for the workshop. Although *The Hundred Dresses* is not a Shakespeare play, the concept behind this workshop could be applied to a workshop for a piece like *Merchant of Venice*. By using hands-on activities in the vein of those described above, cast members could work with students to explore and discuss sensitive themes like discrimination and prejudice; or, perhaps more aptly, explore how one can support and be an ally for a peer rather than harass or ostracize him or her.⁵⁷

Underlying Philosophies

Much of the framework underlying Teresa Dayley Love and the Young Company's use of audience participation is based in meeting kids where they are, entering into their world and seeing things through their eyes rather than forcing

⁵⁷ Unfortunately, due to archival limitations, I have not been able to access workshops for *Merchant of Venice*. The underlying strategies used in the workshop described here, however, could easily be transferred to a Shakespeare play to help open up discussion around themes like bullying and discrimination.

them into a world or point of view created by adult directors or actors. One way that Love does this is simply by inviting students to participate in performances. As she says, “when kids are young, you don’t have to teach them how to play pretend” (2015): it’s something that comes naturally. Because of this, using audience participation and asking children to play roles onstage means that the actors are “working on [the kids’] playground, and not the grown-ups’ playground,” speaking in a language that is familiar to and comfortable for children (Love 2015). This comfort and familiarity, much like the comfort established through the pre-show process of establishing systems, discussed earlier, may help young audience members more readily absorb some of the themes and big ideas present in these plays.⁵⁸

However, Love also asserted that the themes and moments that adults deem “problematic” in some of Shakespeare’s plays may not always be things that children are ready to process or grapple with just yet. She said that, in her work, she does not “believe in didacticism,” heavily emphasizing a theme or message in a play (2015). What she appreciates about Shakespeare’s plays is that, rather than being overly didactic, “the themes are worded and presented in such a way that if you can

⁵⁸ For another interesting take on utilizing children’s instincts and play in TYA, see “The Peter Pan approach,” by Peter Wynne-Wilson in *Theater for Young Audiences*, ed. Maguire and Schuitema. There are some scholars who assert that, because art forms aimed at children (literature, theatre, etc.) are created by adults, it is difficult to know if they truly appeal to a young audience, and are often created based on adult notions of childhood rather than children themselves (see especially Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*). While there is certainly merit to this view, and it is vital to parse out the distinction between what adults think children should be exposed to and what children are actually able to process, it is also important to note that such scholars are generally not documenting their own active work with children, but rather researching and theorizing about literature or plays of the past. This, perhaps, lessens their ability to speak to the effectiveness of current theatre work with children in the way that Love and Wynne-Wilson can.

have ears to hear, you can hear it, and if your heart's not ready, or your mind's not ready, or just developmentally you're not ready, it can still be an interesting show" (2015). Elizabeth Tobias echoes this sentiment to some extent: she notes that, when adults read or see a play,

we read it with our own framework . . . and sometimes we forget that kids approach it with their own framework. And it doesn't mean that . . . it isn't worth having them start to think about certain things that they may not have noticed, but we presume as adults that ours is the more correct framework, and it's not, it's just appropriate for our age and our experience. (2015)

These points suggest that, rather than imposing an adult's framework, or an adult's ideas of where the problems are in a show, there is some merit in allowing young audiences to lead the way. This philosophy has its benefits: as has been stated over and over, students learn best when they can connect to a topic or theme, so imposing a framework on them that feels irrelevant to their life experience will likely not do much to help them process a theme like religious discrimination. These ideas, however, can become an easy way out for artists or educators who do not feel comfortable confronting a topic like discrimination with students. How, then, can artists reconcile the idea of meeting students where they are with the need to address important yet controversial topics responsibly?

Teaching resources for educators focused on diversity and social justice may offer potentially fruitful ways to approach sensitive issues while also giving students material that they are ready to hear. Resource banks like the Morningside Center for Social Responsibility offer tips for teachers on discussing controversial issues in the classroom; Robin Haskell McBee, director of the Virginia Institute for Law and Citizenship Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, worked with elementary

school teachers to create model lesson plans to help students as young as kindergarten explore topics like violence on television and in their community; and Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin's *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* gives detailed suggestions and session plans that, while intended for college and adult participants, contain principles that can be transferred to work with younger students. While these resources may initially have been intended for classroom teachers, they offer a wealth of strategies and insight for teaching artists as well.

Another useful field to mine for such strategies is applied theatre. Julia Ashworth's move towards including issue-based workshops in the Young Company's repertoire suggests applied theatre's capacity to help practitioners address sensitive topics with young audiences, and consulting the best practices of other artists in this field can provide further tips and strategies for engaging with these subjects as effectively as possible. Michael Rohd, founding artistic director of Sojourn Theatre, has done extensive work in theatre for youth and in social and civic practice.⁵⁹ When I interviewed Rohd, he suggested that an important place to start when discussing sensitive topics with a group is to address upfront that the discussion will be "intense," and that the facilitator or leader must remain attuned to what is happening in the room (Rohd 2015). As mentioned in the previous chapter,

⁵⁹ Social and civic practice are two different, though related, methods for an artist to work with a community partner to explore an issue or need. In a 2012 article on HowlRound, Rohd defines his distinction between social practice and civic practice: social practice begins with an artist's desire to explore a specific concept or issue, and, while it may engage non-artists and the community, ultimately comes from the artist's own desire and initiative. Civic practice, on the other hand, stems from a non-artist community partner: a community of some sort has a need, and the artist offers his or her craft and skills to help address that need through an ongoing relationship and dialogue between artist and community partner. (Rohd, "Translations")

he also suggested that teaching artists should always have options available for students who need additional resources. This may mean having a social worker present in the room, or talking to the school counselor to ensure that students in distress can be sent to him or her (2015). Rohd further offered examples of workshop activities that he might do when exploring a show that dealt with sensitive or intense material. Many of these activities asked participants to identify the moments in the show that stuck with them, and either discuss those moments or create physical images to recreate those moments.⁶⁰ Exercises like this would allow artists both to meet students where they are and explore the important and difficult topics in a show like *Merchant of Venice* or *Henry V*. By creating a physical representation of an important moment in the play, for instance, students can identify what spoke to them in the show, which helps teaching artists running the workshop understand what young audiences gleaned or took away from the show. Teaching artists can then use this activity and students' initial impressions of the play as a starting point for a more in-depth exploration of issues like discrimination or violence onstage.

There are two major challenges associated with the strategies outlined above that must be mentioned. The first is time. In order to conduct a thoughtful workshop that gives adequate consideration to a subject like religious discrimination or violence in wartime, teaching artists need a good chunk of time with students, ideally half a day, or perhaps multiple shorter sessions spread out over several

⁶⁰ For an example of similar work utilizing drawing rather than physical images, see Matthew Reason's *The Young Audience*, especially Chapter 9, "Drawing on the Experience."

visits. Many schools simply do not have the time for this kind of workshop. A possible way of overcoming this hurdle is increased collaboration with classroom teachers whose students will be seeing the show and participating in the accompanying workshop. If teaching artists are able to work with classroom teachers and offer possible activities and discussion questions that relate both to the performance coming to the school and to the post-performance workshop, teachers and students can do some preparation before teaching artists arrive, and continue to debrief and process the performance and workshop in the classroom after teaching artists have left. Although this kind of collaboration can be difficult to coordinate, and is perhaps not the ideal way to engage with sensitive or controversial issues, it may be the best way for teachers and artists who must deal with time constraints but would still like to give students the space to process and grapple with the topics presented in the play that they have seen.

Another possible difficulty that may arise is fear of administrative or parental backlash. This fear is not faced by teaching artists alone: classroom teachers also must contend with this possibility (Philpott 39). Although this, too, is a challenging issue to overcome, there are potential strategies for conquering it. One is to develop a relationship with administrators or other gatekeepers in schools, to help foster an environment in which these gatekeepers are more likely to support and encourage the conversation that the company wants to have with audience members.

Playwright Gabriel Jason Dean, whose TYA play *The Transition of Doodle Pequeño* deals with homophobia and what it means to be an ally, spoke in an interview about the struggles that Northwestern University's Purple Crayon Players encountered

when trying to tour the show to local elementary schools. Although they had successful performances at two schools, a third cancelled the tour because of the show's content. Dean mentioned that, ultimately it is "up to the gatekeepers to . . . have the courage to change the conversation" and, in this specific case, allow their students to see shows about homophobia and to have the potentially difficult conversation about how to combat prejudice and be a friend and an ally to LGBTQ students. In the case of a play like *Merchant of Venice*, the school gatekeepers must be willing to support conversations about anti-Semitism and its impact today; or, for *Henry V*, conversations about violence and war. Garnering this support may be easier said than done, but many of the artists interviewed for this project did mention the strong relationships that they or their companies have built with schools and administrators, and how important these connections are. Marilyn Halperin mentioned Chicago Shakespeare Theater's commitment to maintaining relationships with teachers; Elizabeth Tobias described the way in which Theatricum Botanicum tailors programs to each classroom; and both Julia Ashworth and Teresa Dayley Love mentioned the benefits of having strong relationships with the schools to which the Young Company tours. Of course, sometimes these relationships lead to theatres shying away from staging controversial or sensitive material, in the name of maintaining the relationship. I would suggest, however, that strong connections with schools can, at least in some cases, be leveraged into frank conversations about sensitive content, which can then lead to artists bringing in meaningful, well-conceived productions and workshops to spark discussion of

controversial themes and subject matter, like the religious discrimination in *Merchant* or the wartime violence of *Henry V*.

Conclusion

Teresa Dayley Love and Megan Sanborn Jones's use of audience participation in BYU Young Company performances opens up many opportunities for increased audience investment and engagement. By creating adaptations that incorporate participation, and setting solid systems and expectations for such audience involvement immediately, Love and Jones have created environments where students can feel comfortable getting up onstage. This kind of participation utilizes the imaginative play that comes naturally for young children, which creates an experience of performance completely unlike the films, television shows, or video games that students might encounter elsewhere. Live, engaged experiences like these help audience members invest in the events of the play, as evidenced (to give just one example) by students' profound reactions to the death of the Boy in Jones's *Henry V*. Utilizing participation, whether through individual students playing roles onstage or casting an entire audience as the English army, is one way to help students buy in and engage with a performance, which can, in turn, lead to more opportunities for students to grapple with and process controversial issues like discrimination and violence in the plays discussed here.

Another way in which the Young Company has helped students engage with these sensitive topics is through participatory post-show workshops, such as the one described above for *The Hundred Dresses*. These sessions can offer opportunities for students to explore ideas like bullying and friendship (in the case

of *The Hundred Dresses*), both in terms of their own experiences and in the context of the performance they have seen. Interactive, physical exploration, along with discussion and/or writing during these workshops gives students the chance to begin to grapple with potentially difficult themes and process the way that issues and situations arising in the play at hand might crop up in their own lives.

The performances and workshops described here are not perfect, however. The focus on not imposing an adult framework on the plays, and on making the work relevant to students' lives, may result in sacrificing the opportunity to explore topics like religious discrimination in a deep and meaningful way with students. This sacrifice is not inevitable, though: I contend that it is possible both to create productions to which students can relate and connect, and offer students opportunities to discuss and absorb potentially controversial material, even if these topics (like anti-Semitism in Utah) may be outside of young people's immediate experience. But, through combining strategies like robust audience participation with opportunities for students to learn important contextual information, and with thoughtfully constructed workshops that let students identify what parts of the show were meaningful to them while leaving room for teaching artists to push students to explore the potentially controversial topics at work in the play, practitioners can create profound opportunities for students to process and digest sensitive issues like discrimination and violence in war.

Chapter 4 Speak the Speech!: Producing Challenging Plays with Young Performers

The previous chapters of this study have focused on Shakespeare performed for young audiences by professional or university actors. This chapter takes a slightly different focus: here, I will look at programs that work with young people as creators and actors. These programs all guide students in reading and processing a Shakespeare play, and then presenting a version of or response to that play. Depending on the program, these presentations might be performances of an adapted or abridged version of the text, or a piece of writing or art created as a reaction to the play's themes or characters. All of the programs discussed here have worked with *Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and/or *Taming of the Shrew* between 2000 and 2015.

The elements that make *Taming of the Shrew* and *Merchant of Venice* potentially triggering, or difficult to navigate in class discussion—gender violence in *Shrew* and anti-Semitism in *Merchant*—have been discussed in previous chapters. When working with *Othello*, the most obviously problematic aspect is the racist attitude displayed by many of its characters. Othello, termed “the Moor of Venice” in the play's complete title, is described using various racial epithets throughout the play. Roderigo describes him as “the thick-lips,” and Brabantio refers to Othello's “sooty bosom” (1.1.72, 89). Other characters, particularly Iago, use bestial imagery like “old black ram” and “Barbary horse” to describe Othello (1.1.97, 125).

Furthermore, Iago links these images with allusions to Othello's sexual relations with Desdemona, thus maligning Othello by implying that his marriage is based solely in carnal, animalistic desire rather than affection. Othello is also accused of witchcraft and is repeatedly objectified when characters refer to him as "the Moor" rather than by his name or military title. Additionally, there are repeated references throughout the play to black as evil and white as good, which suggests that some characters may see Othello, the only dark-skinned character in the play, as inherently evil.

The portrayal of race in *Othello*, however, is not as black and white as it may initially seem. As Eldred Jones and Martin Orkin have pointed out, Shakespeare's treatment of Othello and his race is quite nuanced. Jones suggests that Shakespeare was aware of stereotypes and prejudices against dark-skinned Moors in Elizabethan England, but resisted such stereotypes in order to create a character who "typified by his fall, not the weaknesses of Moors, but the weaknesses of human nature" (87). Orkin argues that Shakespeare is "working consciously against the colour prejudice reflected in the language of Iago, Roderigo and Brabantio" (67). Reviews of recent productions suggest that directors, too, are working against the prejudice displayed by some of the characters: a 2008 Shakespeare and Company production, for instance, portrayed Othello as a buoyant, exuberant soldier with a deep love for Desdemona, not a man governed by lust, as Iago suggests with many of his lines (Ko). Additionally, this production cast an African American actor as Cassio, which suggests that the director and cast may have been trying to downplay the racial aspect of *Othello*: with this casting, Othello's jealousy and fear is no longer based on

race, as it might be in a production with a white actor playing Cassio. Reviews of Theatre for a New Audience's 2009 production similarly mention an Othello whose love for Desdemona is pure, attributing Othello's downfall to Iago's malicious plot rather than any inherent flaw in Othello himself (Isherwood). And yet, even with these productions that focus on Othello's heroism, in this play we still have a character who is undeniably "other" (that is, distinct from the dominant social group, in this case European whites), and who ends up murdering his wife because he believes baseless accusations against her. Even if Shakespeare's text and twenty-first century directors work against racist assumptions, the play is still full of language and imagery that associates blackness with being evil, and Othello is repeatedly marked as different from the rest of the characters, constantly fighting to prove his worth.⁶¹ These aspects of the play and Shakespeare's complex treatment of them need to be discussed with young people who see this play, or who perform in adaptations of it.

Although not many companies have produced *Othello* for young audiences, there are some that have guided young people in creating their own versions or interpretations of the play, including two of the three programs discussed in this chapter. The three programs that I will be discussing are Will Power to Youth, run by Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles; CPS (Chicago Public Schools) Shakespeare, run by Chicago Shakespeare Theater; and PROJECT38, run by Cincinnati Shakespeare Company. I interviewed all of the following program directors and

⁶¹ For more on representations of race in *Othello*, see *Othello: New Essays by Black Writers*, ed. Mythili Kaul, especially Section III; Eldred Jones's *Othello's Countrymen* (1965), particularly pg. 86-109; and Chapter 3 of Martin Orkin's *Shakespeare Against Apartheid* (1987).

participants, both over the phone and via e-mail: Chris Anthony, Associate Artistic Director and Director of Youth and Education at Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles; Marilyn Halperin, Director of Education at Chicago Shakespeare Theater; Lillian Kass, a teacher at Austin Polytechnical Academy in Chicago, who participated in CPS Shakespeare; and Maggie Lou Rader, PROJECT38 Coordinator. I also viewed archival video of CPS Shakespeare's 2011 production of *Taming of the Shrew* and 2013 production of *Othello*, attended a CPS Shakespeare rehearsal in October 2015, and traveled to Cincinnati in April 2015 to see portions of the inaugural PROJECT38 Festival.

In this chapter, I will examine each program, looking particularly at the ways that each one focuses on ensemble building and fostering meaningful discussion with students about challenging themes. I will also look at the specific ways in which each of these programs approached studying and/or staging difficult plays with young actors by examining Will Power to Youth's 2003 adaptation of *Merchant of Venice*; CPS Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and *Othello*; and the 2015 PROJECT38 presentations of *Othello*, *Taming of the Shrew*, and *Merchant of Venice*.

Will Power to Youth

Will Power to Youth (WPY) was launched in 1993 by Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles, as part of the City of Los Angeles's Summer Youth Employment Program. WPY is unique in that it not only allows participants (often underserved youth) to become involved in the arts, it also gives them a paying job (Anthony 2014). The program also strives to build participants' skill sets beyond the arts: it helps young people learn how to build "a respectful workplace community"; master

workplace etiquette and protocol; and improve academic skills, particularly in literacy (Aguilar 23, 27). Every summer, the young people in WPY mount a sixty to ninety-minute production, which always uses a Shakespeare play as a jumping-off point.⁶² Students adapt the piece to be relevant to their own lives, but retain the theme, and often much of the plot, of the source play. WPY has produced adaptations of several Shakespeare plays during the past 22 years, including multiple reimaginings of *Merchant of Venice*.

In order to create these adaptations, the first weeks of the program focus on facilitated discussion and physical, theatre-based exploration. Much of this early exploration centers around identity development, helping participants think through how they view themselves and who they would like to become. Although this may seem outside the scope of a theatre program, WPY's goals go beyond teaching students about theatre arts and Shakespearean text. The program has four primary components: theatre, human relations, workplace training, and academic development. The human relations strand focuses largely on participants' personal development, with desired skills outcomes such as "I can talk about my thoughts and feelings related to my identity," "I feel positively about the groups I belong to, and can show respect to other groups," and "I can identify how a specific issue impacts characters in the play, and make connections to my life here and now" (Aguilar 33). In order to help students reach these outcomes, the WPY facilitation

⁶² Although WPY has always been billed as a summer program, the productions are not always in the summer—some schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District are on or have been on a multi-track academic calendar, so there have been years when WPY programs have run during seasons other than summer, to serve schools with a long break in the spring or fall.

director works with other staff members, including the program director, to craft discussion questions that help young people both think about their own identity and engage with the themes of the text on which the group is working (Anthony 2014). These questions ask young people to think about the following, in one form or another: “‘Who are you,’ ‘What are the messages you get about who you are,’ ‘How do you feel about those messages,’ and ‘Who do you want to be’” (2014). Facilitators explore these questions with participants in many ways. Students might discuss a question in small dialogue groups, or they might answer through “social mapping” exercises, in which a question is asked, and students move to different parts of the room based on their answers (2014). WPY also uses more explicitly performance-based activities to help young people explore identity. For instance, students might be asked to “walk around the room, and walk like a man. Walk like a girly girl” (2014). Group facilitators would then use these exercises to prompt discussion about gender roles. Or students might tell a story about a moment in their lives and then create a tableau, which participants would then discuss. Facilitators also sometimes use Boal-inspired exercises to “start a scene, and then . . . stop it, interrupt it [and] rework it,” in order to prompt discussion (2014).⁶³ These activities and subsequent discussions address multiple areas of the WPY human relations strand: they help young people develop and discuss their identities and their feelings about those identities; they ask students to develop their communication skills and thus adapt their communication styles to others when needed; and they uncover connections between the plays and students’ lives. These connections, in

⁶³ For more on Boal and his techniques, see *Theatre of the Oppressed* and *Rainbow of Desire*.

turn, serve as a springboard for student playwrights to begin creating the script for the summer's production.

The 2003 WPY adaptation of *Merchant of Venice* clearly demonstrates ways in which participants latched on to themes in a play (in this case, religious discrimination) and found clear and salient connections to their own world. In March 2003, students adapted *Merchant* to reflect "their thoughts about justice and fairness," among other things (Anthony 2014). In the adaptation, the students made Shylock a Muslim businessman whose daughter had run away. This change in Shylock's religion very specifically reflected the world around these students: the United States was still reeling from the effects of the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, and was on the cusp of war with Iraq. In the years immediately prior to students' creating this adaptation, there had been a significant spike in hate crimes against Muslims, suggesting echoes of the vilification and persecution experienced by Shylock in *Merchant*. Interestingly, according to the FBI's hate crime statistics, the number of hate crimes motivated by anti-Jewish bias in 2001 and 2002 was significantly higher than those motivated by anti-Islam bias in the same years. However, I would suggest that two important factors contributed to students' choice to make Shylock Muslim rather than Jewish. First, though there were fewer anti-Islamic incidents in 2001 than anti-Jewish incidents, there was a significant increase in anti-Islamic incidents between 2000 and 2001: while these crimes were the second least reported in 2000, they became the second highest in 2001 and 2002. Furthermore, U.S. media coverage of terrorist incidents often (intentionally or not) fanned the flames of anti-Islam bias, and the government

rhetoric surrounding the “War on Terror” had a similar effect.⁶⁴ All of these factors indicate that, even though the raw number of anti-Islamic incidents was lower than the number of anti-Jewish incidents, anti-Islam sentiment would have been more in the public eye and thus may have felt more applicable for this adaptation.

Additionally, there was a personal connection to the looming war in Iraq for one student in WPY in 2003: one young man had enlisted in the military, and at the time of the program was about to go to basic training and likely on to deployment (Anthony 2014). Although Chris Anthony did not mention specific ways in which this student’s presence influenced the adaptation, I would argue that his being in the program, about to fight in the “War on Terror,” likely helped to push debate about anti-Islamic sentiment in the United States to the forefront of discussion and thus into the adaptation itself. In creating this version of *Merchant*, students took their source material and found ways to make concrete connections between the themes in this original play and their own experiences, an idea that many educators, in theatre and elsewhere, cite as important for student learning.⁶⁵

Of course, there are potential problems with making Shylock a Muslim character. As discussed in the previous chapter, making a change like this does significantly alter the story of *Merchant of Venice*: Shakespeare’s play specifies that Shylock is Jewish, not a member of a non-specific persecuted culture or religion.

⁶⁴ For more on this, see Powell, “Framing Islam: An Analysis of U.S. Media Coverage of Terrorism since 9/11” (2011), Gershkoff and Kushner, “Shaping Public Opinion: The 9/11-Iraq Connection in the Bush Administration’s Rhetoric” (2005), and Smith, “Anti-Islamic Sentiment and Media Framing during the 9/11 Decade” (2013).

⁶⁵ For more on this, see especially Chapter 3 of *Signs of Change*, by Joan Lazarus; *Collected Writings on Education and Drama* (1984), by Dorothy Heathcote; and *The Process of Drama: Negotiating Art and Meaning* (1992), by John O’Toole.

This change also means that students do not have the opportunity to learn about Judaism and the history of anti-Semitism, or to connect that history to an embodied, live performance. However, in the case of WPY, I assert that such changes are warranted because of the program's specific goals. WPY does not claim to produce shows that adhere strictly to Shakespeare's texts and contexts. Instead, this program's purpose is to have students create an adaptation, inspired by a Shakespeare play; Chris Anthony noted that WPY emphasizes to students that "Shakespeare borrowed from mythology, and the Bible, and he found his stories, and embellished and worked from there, so now you [WPY participants] can . . . add [your story] to this heritage of the great storytellers" (2014). Rather than having students act Shakespeare's text as written, WPY empowers students by having them take their place in a lineage of storytellers; the program even has a play writing team, a group of students specifically assigned to work under the supervision of a mentor artist to create text for the WPY performance (Aguilar 68). Also important to take into account is that these adaptation choices came out of facilitated activities like those described above, which suggests that students spent a significant amount of time thoughtfully and critically connecting their own experiences to the themes of religious discrimination at play in *Merchant of Venice*. Although making personal connections is not the goal for all programs dealing with Shakespeare, it is, as previously stated, an important part of WPY's human relations arc. For this program, then, these adaptation choices did not rob *Merchant* of nuance or eliminate opportunity for discussion; instead, they opened up new possibilities for conversation and analysis in areas more closely connected to students' lives.

In addition to identity development, making personal connections to Shakespeare's text, and becoming part of a lineage of storytellers, another of WPY's goals is that students discover the value of perseverance and collaboration. This is a huge part of why the program uses Shakespeare's text: Anthony said plainly that one of the reasons they use Shakespeare is "because it's hard" (2014). She pointed out that a lot of education is "positioned as something for the smart kids," so students either understand material and are successful, or struggle and feel that school is not for them (2014). WPY helps students realize that, even if something is hard at first, you can work at it and succeed, reinforcing the idea of "effort-based outcomes," results based on persistent work rather than solely on intrinsic ability (2014). Staff members also model working collaboratively towards a successful result, which is often a new way of working for students. Anthony pointed out that in many settings, including the underserved urban schools that WPY participants generally attend, "the ability to work by yourself and ignore other people is sometimes really, really useful," but that this is not necessarily the best way to succeed in a twenty-first century workplace (2014). By helping students tackle difficult tasks through persistent effort and collaboration, WPY not only helps students succeed in adapting and performing a Shakespearean play, it also empowers students, which Anthony cited as one of the ultimate goals of the program (2014).

All of the elements outlined in this section, from facilitated discussion to finding personal connections to strategies for youth empowerment, are present in all iterations of Will Power to Youth, not just those years when the program is using

a play that deals with themes like religious discrimination. As Chris Anthony expressed in our interview, every play has potential challenges, these difficulties just arise in “different areas” (2014). For this reason, WPY’s strategies provide a potential tried-and-tested model for educators and artists who want to broach discussions about potentially sensitive themes or topics. Various student testimonials featured in the documentary *Why Shakespeare?*, as well as an impact report on WPY authored by Professor Simeon Slovacek in 2010, suggest that the methods used do have favorable effects for student participants.⁶⁶ These methods can therefore serve as a starting point (to be altered and revised as necessary, depending on student needs) for theatre educators to guide young people in fruitful discussion and, ultimately, successful performances centered around difficult themes like religious discrimination.

CPS Shakespeare

CPS (Chicago Public Schools) Shakespeare is a part of the education department at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre (CST). The program began in 2006, and all participants are teachers and students in CPS high schools. Participants are chosen through CST’s Bard Core professional development program, which trains teachers in active techniques for exploring Shakespeare in the classroom. Some of the teachers who have gone through the professional development are invited to take part in CPS Shakespeare, and are asked to recruit a few of their students to be a

⁶⁶ Although this impact report was published by Shakespeare Center, the study was done by Slovacek, a tenured professor at California State University, and the research was conducted by the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Program Evaluation and Research Collaborative at California State University, not by Shakespeare Center.

part of that season's production. Marilyn Halperin, Director of Education, mentioned that she has very specific reasons for recruiting in this way: if the theatre created a general audition call for the program every year, they would likely only reach those students who are already succeeding, the "crown jewels" of their schools or drama programs (2015a). Instead, CPS Shakespeare "want[s] to reach into some of the really underserved neighborhood schools in the city" and also reach students who are not necessarily the stars of their schools. For this reason, Halperin always asks teachers to recruit "students who are falling between the cracks, either academically or socially" (2015a).

Once teachers and students have been chosen, they attend a week-long intensive in the summer and then begin evening and weekend rehearsals in the fall, with final performances in November. Although CPS Shakespeare, like WPY, works towards the ultimate goal of a full-scale production of an adapted Shakespeare play, CPS Shakespeare has a different adaptation process than WPY. At CPS Shakespeare, the play's director cuts down the original text without making significant changes to the characters, major plot points, or time period.⁶⁷ Participants do, though, have some influence in the adaptation process, which I will discuss later. Since the program's start, students have performed adaptations of six different Shakespeare plays.⁶⁸ The two productions that I will largely focus on here are the 2011

⁶⁷ Kirsten Kelly directed and adapted the first nine CPS Shakespeare productions. Matt Hawkins, who had worked on several of those first nine productions, directed and adapted the 2015 production of *Macbeth*.

⁶⁸ These plays are: *Hamlet* (performed in 2006 and 2012); *Romeo and Juliet* (performed in 2007 and 2010); *Macbeth* (performed in 2008 and 2015); *Midsummer Night's Dream* (performed in 2009 and 2014); *The Taming of the Shrew* (performed in 2011); and *Othello* (performed in 2013) ("Production

production of *Taming of the Shrew* and the 2013 production of *Othello*. I also observed a day of rehearsal for *Macbeth* in October 2015, so I will speak briefly about that show, although I will use it primarily to discuss CPS Shakespeare's overall process and methods, rather than that play's specific themes.

One of the most important elements of CPS Shakespeare, according to teacher Lillian Kass, who participated in *Othello*, is the ensemble building that takes place during the summer training week. During this time, Kass said, the focus is on "building the confidence of the kids, and then building . . . camaraderie in the group" (2015a). Kass described some of the activities that the group did over the summer; one element of this work that stood out as especially important was the system put in place for responding to mistakes. Whenever anyone made a mistake in a game,

everyone else would say "ohhhhhhh" while waving their arms in the air and turning around in a circle. This way, kids could acknowledge others' mistakes without making them feel bad. It just became a silly thing to laugh about, and then we would start over. This helped everyone feel more comfortable with each other and with taking risks. (Kass 2015b)

This rule is incredibly important, because it takes away the negative association that students often have with messing up and helps students not have to worry about looking foolish.⁶⁹ This, in turn, creates a safe space for students, which helps

History"). Notably, *Shrew* and *Othello* are the only two that have not had repeat performances, at least at the time of this study.

⁶⁹ Speaking from personal experience, I have seen this technique work very well in the college classroom: in InterACT Theatre Project for Social Change, a service learning course at The Ohio State University, students learn on the very first day that, any time someone makes a mistake in a theatre game or exercise, everyone jumps into the air and yells "Whoopee!" This was implemented by course creator Robin Post, and has been used subsequently by Dr. Elizabeth Wellman and by me when we each taught the course. In my semester teaching and several semesters observing the class, this method has gone a long way towards helping students feel comfortable taking risks and making mistakes.

students let their guard down and feel ready to take risks, a necessary element of creating theatre or exploring complex texts.

One of the teachers working on *Macbeth* also mentioned that the activities during that week-long intensive helped both students and teachers feel safe and ready to commit to risk-taking. He highlighted an activity involving dancing and clown noses as especially seminal. All participants, student and teacher alike, had to put on red clown noses and stand in a line. Each participant then danced, one by one, down the line. Everyone had to commit fully to their dancing or they were required to start over, and no one was allowed to opt out. Lillian Kass also mentioned this activity, although her description was slightly different: rather than dancing, Kass described the activity as “parad[ing] down the line . . . putting on some kind of show and interacting with people along the way” (2015b).⁷⁰ Either way, parading or dancing, this exercise was challenging and downright scary for some. These challenges, however, are what made the activity valuable: taking such a big risk and committing to an over-the-top performance so early on in the program helped students and teachers feel comfortable continuing to take risks and letting themselves be vulnerable during the rehearsal process.

⁷⁰ These two teachers participated in CPS Shakespeare in two separate years, with two different directors. Their slightly differing descriptions may therefore stem either from their individual perceptions of the activity, or may be a factor of the exercise being run differently by Kirsten Kelly in 2013 than it was by Matt Hawkins in 2015.



Figure 10: Ensemble member Taleah dramatically strikes a pose in an ensemble-building exercise during rehearsals for Chicago Shakespeare Theater's *CPS Shakespeare! Othello*, directed by Kirsten Kelly, with performances November 1 and 2, 2013. Photo by Liz Lauren.

The safety and comfort that come out of these activities serve several important purposes in CPS Shakespeare. First, as previously mentioned, feeling safe and being able to let one's guard down is vital for creating theatre with actors of any age, especially when working with complex texts like Shakespeare. If an actor is too afraid of failure or mockery to try out a big character choice, or venture a theory as to what a line means, then the final performance will not reach its full potential. This fact was emphasized when a teacher at *Macbeth* rehearsal mentioned to me that director Matt Hawkins frequently tells students and teachers, "I'd rather you be 100% wrong than 50% right." In other words, it is better to commit fully to a choice that ends up being wrong than only partially commit to a correct choice. Another important reason for developing a safe environment in the rehearsal room, this one more specific to CPS Shakespeare, is that authentic, honest conversations about the

themes of whatever play students are working with (including themes like gender discrimination in *Taming of the Shrew* or racism in *Othello*) are an integral part of the program. Marilyn Halperin described these discussions as

the place that every English teacher wants to be in his or her classroom, which is deep reading, close analysis, engagement with a character, taking a stance, getting inside a different character's perspective . . . and really that you care about a character . . . [T]hose discussions are like the Platonic ideal of what you want a classroom discussion to be, they're just full . . . kids [are] vying and having really strong opinions. (2015a)

She pointed out that these conversations often help students make personal connections with the play's characters and themes, which in turn helps students understand the plays on a deeper level. As Lillian Kass put it, rather than presenting Shakespeare as "this thing that's separate from you and who you are, and you're just learning it," CPS Shakespeare allows students to find themselves and their experience in Shakespeare's plays, which helps them reach a nuanced and complete understanding of the text (2015a).

These personal connections are not confined to discussions early in the process; they come up again and again during blocking and run-throughs, which I witnessed during *Macbeth* rehearsal. Hawkins often worked on small scenes while the rest of the ensemble watched, and he sometimes paused and asked the entire group to think of a time when they had felt the way that the characters in the scene being rehearsed were feeling. For example, when doing detailed text work for a scene in which Macbeth and Lady Macbeth argue about whether they will go through with killing Duncan, Hawkins asked students and teachers to think of an argument from their own life. The group discussed how they felt when they were in

a high-stakes argument in real life, and then related that back to the scene. This technique of using memories and past experience to fuel performance is not unique to this program, or even to Shakespeare (Stanislavski, Uta Hagen, and Lee Strasberg, among others, advocated for similar methods), but I would argue that, in this situation, calling on personal experience is more than just an acting technique. It certainly does improve acting by helping performers find genuine emotion and experience to use in their scenes. But more importantly for CPS Shakespeare, discussing personal connections allows everyone in the room, whether or not they are in the particular scene being rehearsed, to find ways in which Shakespeare's text speaks to their individual life experience.

Students were eager to talk about their personal connections to *Shrew* in 2011. According to Halperin, discussions of gender and the portrayal of women in the play were "fueled" (2015a). In the archival video of this production, students' passion about this issue became clear during the post-show question and answer (Q&A). During this conversation, director Kirsten Kelly summed up the challenges of the play and the wealth of strong opinions on Kate's final speech:

[I]n the six years that we have done this program, this was probably one of the most challenging plays to do, because of the ending . . . [W]e had to make huge decisions about who Katharina and Petruchio were, as people . . . [D]id they really love each other, did they not love each other, in the end? . . . There were huge decisions of interpretation, and we had so many discussions . . . we staged the end of the play . . . in about 18 different ways. And it was great . . . we decided on the one way that we ended up liking, and that meant some people didn't get their opinion out in this production, but they may go see another production with an entirely different interpretation. But even until the night before we opened, there were people fighting for different interpretations of Kate's journey, especially.

Some of the students who performed in the show also expressed their opinions on this final scene. One girl, who played Kate in the last scene and therefore delivered the final speech (in CPS Shakespeare, each character is played by several different actors throughout the play), strongly agreed with the interpretation that was ultimately chosen, which was to do the speech sincerely and not make it sarcastic or a wink to the audience. She pointed out that, for her, it was important that Kate found happiness, and she felt that the way that they ultimately staged that final scene showed that Kate was indeed happy. Another young woman, whom Marilyn Halperin lauded for being especially brave in the heated discussion the day before the first performance, strongly disagreed with the way that the company staged the ending. She felt that the ending was sexist; although she said that she had come to terms with the choices that the ensemble made, she felt that the line “thy husband is thy lord” was, in her words, “a bit much,” emphasizing that she still found the speech to be troubling. This spirited post-show discussion demonstrates that CPS Shakespeare encourages students to think deeply and analytically about the plays they are working on—the students mentioned above understood the play and had thought about it, debated it, and discussed it enough to develop their own individual informed opinions. This debate also shows the openness of this program: while I am sure some students may have stayed quiet if they had opinions that dissented with those of their peers, the education staff and directors clearly supported students who did wish to express strong opinions that ran counter to what others in the room were saying. This kind of open environment, made possible in part because of the time devoted to building ensemble and safe spaces, discussed above, means that

students are more likely to speak honestly about their feelings and experiences with (in the case of *Shrew*) gender discrimination, oppression, and even violence, which can lead to productive processing and exploration of these themes.

I want to acknowledge here that the CPS Shakespeare production of *Shrew* did still include moments of violence between Kate and Petruchio (though, for the most part, Kate and Petruchio were evenly matched, rather than Petruchio being physically dominant), and scenes in which Petruchio was clearly manipulating Kate. These scenes could potentially emphasize the uneven power dynamic between men and women in Shakespeare's text without pointing out that such an imbalance is problematic. But, while the performance alone may have seemed to gloss over these kinds of troublesome moments, the ensemble clearly discussed them extensively in rehearsal. Furthermore, students and teachers had a chance to share at least part of their discussion about these gender representation issues with audience members in post-show Q&A sessions, which meant that audiences got to hear several points of view about representations of women in *Shrew*. I would also argue that, for this program, student participants' experience and learning are, rightly, the top priority, and participants did leave this rehearsal and performance process aware of the many problems present in the way that Shakespeare wrote Petruchio and Kate's relationship. They may not have solved every problem through their performance of this play, but they did discuss these troublesome moments of gender discrimination, unpacking what made them problematic, their own connections to these moments, and various ways that an actor might approach these moments.

In *Othello* rehearsals, on the other hand, students did not engage as much with the themes typically considered the most loaded and problematic in this play: race and racism. Halperin said:

We thought it was going to be very present all the time through the rehearsal period . . . [but] it was hard for [students] to talk about the prejudice and hatred in this play in racial terms. We didn't want to harp on it, but we also felt like they needed to connect with it in some way in order to do that play. So that surprised us . . . we thought it was going to be more on their minds . . . I don't know if it wasn't on their minds, but it wasn't on the tip of their tongues. (2015a)

Lillian Kass echoed this sentiment, noting that students connected much more deeply with the themes of jealousy and betrayal. She suggested several possible reasons for this. First, she pointed out that jealousy and betrayal are “much more true to what most teenagers are experiencing in their daily lives,” and that while “as adults we focus much more on [racism] in *Othello*, and we lose some of the other themes, or we take some of the other stuff for granted,” for the students, “the discrimination piece was one of the things that they sort of took for granted . . . and [they] focused much more on the more relational stuff in the play” (2015a). She also mentioned that, at least for Friday, the student who she brought into the program, racial discrimination was “not concrete,” because he lived in “a homogeneous community” (2015a). Her student, and presumably the other students who participated in CPS Shakespeare, were certainly aware that discrimination existed, but because it did not affect them on a daily basis as much as sexual tension or betrayal, it was not the most potent or compelling theme in *Othello*. It is also important to note that race was not taken into consideration when casting—as noted earlier, students always play multiple characters in CPS Shakespeare, so the

actor who played Iago in one scene might play Cassio in the next, and vice versa.⁷¹ This meant that all characters were played by students of all races, which further downplayed the theme of racial discrimination in the performance.⁷²

The fact that race and racism in this play did not spark heated discussion brings up a few questions. First, how important is it to bring up themes like race, if they are not the issues that students are most eager to talk about? Do educators have an obligation to lead extended discussions about these topics, if students connect more deeply and personally with other themes in the play? And, perhaps more importantly, why are students not eager to discuss these themes? Do they truly not relate to these ideas, or is race such a taboo topic that they are hesitant to discuss it openly? If the issue is that race feels taboo, how do teachers and directors help students feel comfortable discussing race? And if the issue feels irrelevant for young people, how can we crack open these themes and help students explore the ways that racism manifests today, even if these ways are very different than what is presented in *Othello*?

In thinking about these questions, it is first important to know that the production being discussed here was rehearsed and performed in fall of 2013. It therefore took place before the August 2014 events in Ferguson, Missouri, and, perhaps more salient to this particular program, before the November 2015 release

⁷¹ Kirsten Kelly also cast some female actors in male roles: Othello and Iago were both played by young women in some scenes. This choice, like the choice to cast roles across race, changed some of the play's power dynamics by lessening the feeling of men (Othello, Brabantio, Iago) staking a territorial claim on a young woman (Desdemona).

⁷² Marilyn Halperin noted that this decision had nothing to do with students' hesitation to discuss race. Since, for all CPS Shakespeare shows, casting crosses, "all boundaries," Halperin and Kelly knew from the start that they would have students of all races playing Othello (2015c).

of the video of a Chicago police officer shooting Laquan McDonald. This begs the question of whether the discussions in the rehearsal process would have been different had the production taken place one or two years later. Lillian Kass believes that they would have been: in an e-mail to me, she wrote, “The media and social media attention to the killing of black people by police and the Black Lives Matter movement definitely opened a door to discussions about race in classrooms at Austin and around the city (and country), and I'm sure this would have also been reflected at CPS Shakespeare [had we done *Othello* in 2014 or 2015]. It would be very interesting to see how students would interpret the play differently now” (2015b). If, however, students were still reluctant to discuss race, even in a production taking place post-Ferguson and, now, post-Laquan McDonald, one route teachers might take is to utilize some of WPY’s strategies, outlined in the previous section of this chapter. Using physical, on-your-feet activities like social mapping, or Boal-esque exercises like starting a scene and stopping it to intervene partway, might encourage students to think about what it means to them to identify (or not identify) with a specific race. These exercises could, in turn, open up more possibilities for discussion about racism and the ways that it manifests in students’ own lives.⁷³

These conversations at CPS Shakespeare, whatever topics they span, are the first step in students developing their own interpretation of the play. Lillian Kass pointed out that, from the very beginning of the process, the CPS Shakespeare

⁷³ For specific exercises, teachers and artists might also consult teaching resources such as Adams, Bell, and Griffin’s *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, Boal’s *Rainbow of Desire*, or Sharon Grady’s *Drama and Diversity*.

director asks students open-ended questions about the text that “inspire them to make choices” (2015a). The material that comes out of those discussions indicates what students are focusing on and what they find most compelling in the play, which helps guide the director’s final adaptation of the script (2015a). Once students have that script, it is their responsibility to decipher and interpret the text. There is no glossary provided in the adaptation, and the director and CST education staff members present at rehearsals do not give students definitions or interpretations. Instead, as I saw when I observed *Macbeth* rehearsal, there are dictionaries and Shakespeare Lexicons scattered around the rehearsal space. If a student (or teacher) is unsure of a word, it is his or her responsibility to seek out that word’s meaning. Challenging students to understand and interpret the play on their own has several benefits. First, it means that students cannot “sneak by,” pretending to understand the text when they do not; if they have to make interpretive choices and then justify them, they must know the meaning of each word they are saying (Kass 2015a). Also, the fact that there is no one right way to interpret the play gives students the freedom to “engage with [all the possible interpretations], and to think about all of the themes much more deeply” (2015a). This freedom allows students to “bring themselves to the play, their own personalities, their own experiences, their own connections” (2015a). By deciding for themselves how to stage scenes, and how to play each character, students make the play their own and therefore connect more deeply with it.



Figure 11: Ensemble member Zhanelle consults a reference text to deepen her understanding of Shakespeare's *Othello* during rehearsals for Chicago Shakespeare Theater's *CPS Shakespeare! Othello*, directed by Kirsten Kelly, with performances November 1 and 2. Photo by Liz Lauren.

The CPS Shakespeare directors have also added in an additional way for students (and their families) to connect with the plays, by finding moments when characters can speak Spanish. Many of the students who participate in the program are English Language Learners, and many of these students' families only speak Spanish. Marilyn Halperin said that Kirsten Kelly has made a point to use Spanish in certain moments of each production, because "it's really important that [the families

in the audience] hear their language even . . . a little bit” (2015a).⁷⁴ In the archival videos of both *Taming of the Shrew* and *Othello*, it was clear that these bilingual moments increased audience enjoyment of the play; in *Shrew*, for instance, the audience laughed uproariously at Hortensio’s speech, performed in Spanish, in which he describes teaching Kate to play the lute. These moments not only allow students’ families to understand the play more easily, they also encourage a few students in each year’s production to become even more intimately familiar with the text by giving them the opportunity to do the translation themselves. Because most published translations of Shakespeare tend to be what Halperin called “high Spanish” or “academic Spanish,” the students and a teacher retranslate the scene or scenes being used so that the text is in everyday or “street Spanish” (2015a). Making these plays bilingual, even just in certain moments, is yet another way that CPS Shakespeare helps students develop a deeper understanding of Shakespeare’s text, while simultaneously giving family members greater access to the play.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Hawkins continued this practice in 2015; when I observed *Macbeth* rehearsal, Halperin mentioned that one of the students would be working on translating the “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” speech into Spanish.

⁷⁵ WPY has also used bilingual performance. Chris Anthony mentioned in our interview that the program will sometimes bring in translators who “simultaneously translate the play [being performed] into Spanish” (2014). Elizabeth Tobias, School Programs Director at Theatricum Botanicum in Los Angeles, also mentioned having heard about a WPY production of *Romeo and Juliet* in which audience members could opt to receive headphones, through which they would hear teaching artists translating the text into Spanish as students performed it in English (2015). Tobias herself has utilized translation as a way to help students access Shakespeare, as a small part of a classroom residency focusing on *Macbeth* (2015).



Figure 12: CPS high school student Alma Vargas as Hortensio in *CPS Shakespeare! The Taming of the Shrew*, Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s arts-in-education partnership with Chicago Public Schools. Photo by Liz Lauren.

Because students take on so much responsibility in this process—making interpretive and staging choices, and sometimes even helping in translation—they, in many ways, have a collegial relationship with the adults in the room. Students and teachers all act in scenes, and so, according to Lillian Kass, they are “treated as equals by the director” (2015a). Teachers never tell a student that his or her interpretation or definition of a word is wrong; instead, if there is debate about what a word or phrase means, participants consult the Shakespeare Lexicon and discover together the different possible meanings of that word. As Kass pointed out, sometimes the adults in the room will think they know what something means and then realize, when they look in the Lexicon, that Shakespeare was using it differently (2015a). Or, sometimes, Kass said, “the kids have an interpretation that none of the adults would have had, but it’s eye-opening for us . . . and it’s a new way of looking at

this particular character, this particular scene” (2015a). This learner-centered practice helps empower students, giving them the chance to form their own opinions and interpretations of the play without worrying that they will be shot down or told that their thoughts are wrong.⁷⁶

In addition to the many benefits of the rehearsal and tablework process, the experience of performance is helpful for students in engaging with plays and their themes, including (but not limited to) plays with challenging themes like sexism or racial discrimination. One of the important elements of CPS Shakespeare, mentioned above, is that students perform multiple roles throughout the course of the play. By doing this, students can connect with several characters in a way that they would not if they were merely reading the play, or if they were playing just one part (Kass 2015a). This deep, personal connection with many characters in turn leads to a deeper connection with the play overall (Halperin 2015a).⁷⁷ Lillian Kass also mentioned that there is “something about being in a real theatre, and using real costumes, and real sets, that is really powerful for the kids too, and so that pushes them to a different level of engagement, because they’re doing something that’s really special and they want to do it right” (2015a). CST gives this program substantial resources—the shows are performed in CST’s Courtyard Theater and costumes come from CST costume stock. Lillian Kass emphasized that, for her

⁷⁶ For more on learner-centered practice in the theatre classroom, see especially Chapter 2 of *Signs of Change*, by Joan Lazarus; and Viola Spolin’s *Improvisation for the Theater* (1977), especially Section XIII: Understanding the Child. Although Spolin does not use the term “learner-centered practice,” the principles she describes are in line with the tenets described by Lazarus.

⁷⁷ This strategy is similar to the idea of text-to-self connection, used by many K-12 teachers. For just one discussion of the strategy, see Keene and Zimmerman, *Mosaic of Thought* (1997), Chapter Four.

student, this unique experience of doing a fully mounted performance in a real theater space was key: she did not know if he ever would have reached the deep level of understanding in a classroom that he did at CPS Shakespeare.⁷⁸

Students also find motivation in the fact that Shakespeare is challenging. Marilyn Halperin mentioned that many young people who come into the program struggle with reading, and that there is huge benefit to the fact that “there’s this goal at the end, and they struggle, and they find success in that struggle as opposed to being shut down by that struggle” (2015a). This idea came up again and again, both in interviews and in watching students talk about the program in archival video. Lillian Kass said that for Friday, the student that she brought into CPS Shakespeare, his success in the program gave him a confidence that “he didn’t have in a lot of other places in his life, and it was confidence that came out of struggling through something, and being successful, as opposed to” succeeding in something he already knew he was good at (2015a). In post-show Q&As, many students mentioned that, before starting CPS Shakespeare, they were the quietest students in class, but after going through the program, they were much more likely to speak up in class, voice their opinions in discussions, or even just introduce themselves to new people.

This is not to say that students never struggle, or that there are not difficult rehearsals. When I observed the rehearsal for *Macbeth*, some students were still struggling with lines, even though they were supposed to be off-book. Hawkins, the

⁷⁸ For another interesting take on the benefits of student performance in processing and understanding complicated issues, see “An Arts-Based Approach to Teach Social Justice: Drama as a Way to Address Bullying in Schools,” by Dr. George Belliveau, published in the *International Journal of Arts Education* (2005).

director, was very upfront about this issue with the group, explaining why it would be difficult to move forward without lines being memorized. He also adjusted the schedule to work on a scene featuring a student who did have most of his lines memorized. After this rehearsal, he asked the whole group to think about and discuss the significant acting gains that they had seen being made, gains that they could also make once they had their lines down. I learned from a later discussion with Marilyn Halperin that at least one role would likely be re-cast, due to a student struggling with memorization (meaning that the student would appear in fewer scenes and have fewer roles, not that the student would be removed from the program altogether). She noted that such switches happen almost every year and are framed in terms of students' success: the CPS Shakespeare director and CST education staff want all students to succeed, and if that means that a student needs to focus on the roles that he or she plays in two scenes and really shine at those, rather than struggling to master roles in four scenes, that is what will happen.

CPS Shakespeare's focus on individual students' success in the face of challenges has positive effects that extend beyond the program itself. When I spoke to Lillian Kass in April 2015, Friday was on track to graduate high school on time, which was "questionable" in fall of 2013 when he acted in *Othello*. She attributed this change, at least in part, to the confidence and independence he gained at CPS Shakespeare (2015a). Marilyn Halperin also mentioned a young woman, Lucy, who participated in CPS Shakespeare and then came back to visit after she had graduated from high school and had been in the Air Force for about a year. As she was leaving the theatre, she turned to Halperin and said, "This is the place that made me brave"

(2015a). The bravery and confidence that CPS Shakespeare fosters in students is a huge part of why participants can talk honestly and openly about the challenging and complicated themes present in many of Shakespeare's texts.

CPS Shakespeare has a unique and intensive model of rehearsing and performing Shakespeare with students. Many elements of their practice, especially during the initial summer session, are aimed at building an ensemble and helping participants feel comfortable taking risks. Tablework discussions, made possible by students' comfort with each other and subsequent willingness to let their guard down, allow students to debate the issues contained in whatever play they are working with. These conversations also help students begin to connect with and develop interpretations of characters, which they continue to do as they interpret text and stage scenes. Ultimately, CPS Shakespeare's tablework, rehearsal, and performance process has huge benefits for students, including, but certainly not limited to, the ability to have mature, informed, intelligent discussions about issues like sexism and racism.



Figure 13: CPS students and teachers from neighborhoods across Chicago perform in Chicago Shakespeare Theater's *CPS Shakespeare! Othello*, directed by Kirsten Kelly, with performances November 1 and 2, 2013. Photo by Liz Lauren.

PROJECT38

PROJECT38, run by Cincinnati Shakespeare Company (CSC), is the newest of the three programs discussed in this chapter. This initiative, a partnership between CSC and several area schools, launched in the 2014-2015 school year, and will be run every year for the foreseeable future. 38 schools participated in the project's inaugural year. Each school was assigned one of Shakespeare's plays, so the entire canon was covered.⁷⁹ Each school was also assigned one or two teaching artists who visited the school multiple times during the year to help students work with their play, and to assist students and teachers in "bringing that play to life in various ways" (PROJECT38). The final product that each school came up with was then

⁷⁹ CSC included the two plays not in the First Folio (*Pericles* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*) as a part of the canon.

showcased at the PROJECT38 Shakespeare Festival in Cincinnati in April 2015. What is notable about PROJECT38, and unique among the programs discussed here, is that students had a lot of freedom in deciding what their end product would be—they were not required to create a live performance. Some schools did choose to stage all or part of their assigned play, but others chose to use outlets such as visual art displays, stage combat demonstrations, film adaptations, and multimedia presentations, to name just a few. In keeping with this study's focus on plays that deal with themes that are difficult to discuss, like discrimination, this chapter will focus primarily on the PROJECT38 schools that worked with *Othello*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Merchant of Venice* during the 2014-2015 school year. The presentations that these schools created also demonstrate a wide variety of the different types of end products produced for the Festival.

Ensemble Building

Like the directors at CPS Shakespeare, PROJECT38 teaching artists often begin their work with students by helping them feel safe taking risks and stepping out of their comfort zone. Rader said that one way she and her teaching artists foster this kind of environment is by encouraging teachers to participate in activities. According to Rader, the more that students see teachers willing to “get up and look silly and look goofy,” the better (2015). By really committing to activities and being “big and brave” in their participation, teachers give students, even those who may initially be reluctant, “the freedom and responsibility” to go all out in their own participation (2015).

Another aspect of PROJECT38 that helped participants feel comfortable and let their guard down was the fact that they were able to develop a relationship and build trust with teaching artists. Previous CSC education programs were mostly “one-off” encounters, in which teaching artists worked with students one time and then most likely never saw them again (Rader 2015). With PROJECT38, however, teaching artists visited classrooms several times over the course of the school year and kept in touch with teachers between visits.⁸⁰ Since students got to know and feel comfortable with the actors visiting their classrooms, these students were often more willing to take risks and make big choices in their work with Shakespearean text.

Othello

One group of students who took risks and ventured especially far outside of their comfort zone was an alternative education class from Lakota East Freshman School, who worked with *Othello*. A large percent of the students in that class were “non or reluctant readers,” so tackling a writer like Shakespeare, whom many perceived as very challenging, was intimidating for students (Rader 2015). Their teacher (Heather Campbell) and teaching artist (Darnell Pierre Benjamin) decided to find non-text-based ways to introduce students to the play. One of the strategies that Benjamin used was “movement-based character exploration,” asking students to move around the room as if they were Emilia, Iago, Othello, etc., going through a

⁸⁰ The number of times that teaching artists visited classrooms varied based on logistics and the needs of the teacher and his or her students. Based on Rader’s description, it seems like classrooms that received fewer visits were often those where the teacher was very comfortable with Shakespeare and/or theatre, or where the school already had a thriving arts program.

day in his or her life (Rader 2015). These movement exercises led to deep analyses of characters' journeys through the play, which in turn helped students make personal connections with characters. Rader mentioned that one girl talked about Emilia's "But I do think it is their husbands' faults/If wives do fall" speech, relating it to "the women in her family" (2015). This young woman said that she had "seen that happen, that good women in her family have terrible lives now, because of the men that they've associated with" (2015). Additionally, many of the boys identified with Othello and his feelings of betrayal, saying that "they could understand how Othello got to where he does by the end of the play," and "they could identify with him in the beginning, and they were alarmed at how long they identified with Othello's choices and actions" (2015).⁸¹ It was difficult to tell if race and racism were themes that students connected or identified with in this play. Rader said that, for students at Lakota East, the topics discussed were "all across the board," from race to sexism to jealousy and betrayal (2015).⁸² Based on the examples she identified, though, it does seem like students at Lakota East, like those at CPS Shakespeare in Chicago, focused more on sexism and betrayal.

⁸¹ Although the examples mentioned here discuss a girl identifying with Emilia and boys with Othello, Rader emphasized that students connected with characters across gender—she said that "the male students picked Emilia [to focus on for their final project], and a lot of the female students picked Iago" (2015).

⁸² Lakota West High School also worked with *Othello* and staged a full production of the play. The Lakota West students did not discuss race much, according to Rader. She said that, while she did wish the discussion had been more about race with them, since there is only a very small African American community at the school, it was not something that came up naturally. Her perception was that all of the students at the school, including those of color, felt "so comfortable in their own skin" that they did not connect with the themes of racism, and instead connected most with themes of jealousy and sexism (2015). With the resources available for this study, it is difficult to identify the precise reasons behind students' reluctance to bring up race, and if it truly was motivated by their own comfort and confidence. However, since the Lakota West production is not the focus of this chapter, I will acknowledge but not delve into the themes that these students did and did not discuss during their PROJECT38 work.

After exploring various characters' journeys through *Othello*, the Lakota East students created their final product for PROJECT38: masks based on the character with whom they most identified. These masks were not strictly realistic representations of the characters, and therefore allowed students the freedom to express their interpretation of and connection with their chosen character. Rader noted that "some of them looked like animals, some of them didn't even look like people, some of them just cut half the face away," indicating that students clearly had free rein to express their interpretation of Iago, Emilia, Othello, Desdemona, or whomever they chose, in any way that they saw fit (2015). Also, the simple fact that this class's end product was masks demonstrates the freedom allowed to PROJECT38 participants: they did not have to create a performance as their end product, giving students the liberty to express their assigned play in the way they felt best suited the text and their own aptitudes and interests.

Although students from Lakota East did not perform *Othello* at the PROJECT38 Festival in April 2015, they did do a presentation about their masks. During this presentation, many students discussed the way that their attitudes towards Shakespeare had changed throughout the school year. Rader described several kids saying something along the lines of, "I was actually really mad when we found out we were going to have to do Shakespeare, because I don't like reading . . . especially reading something that I thought was going to be . . . hard . . . [but] it wasn't" (2015). In fact, many students ultimately said that working with *Othello* "was their favorite part of the year" (2015). I do want to acknowledge that these testimonials from students do not mention the themes of race and racism, which I

have discussed as the particularly challenging issues in *Othello*. There may well have been the opportunity to expand some of the movement-based work that Benjamin was doing, in order to add in exploration of the theme of racism, as suggested above in my discussion of CPS Shakespeare. But, while these challenging themes may not have been the focus of Lakota East's study of *Othello*, Darnell Pierre Benjamin and Heather Campbell did overcome a big challenge: engaging a group of initially reluctant readers in a complex text. These students not only became absorbed in a play that they were initially upset about having to read, they also made deep, meaningful connections with that play's characters and themes.

The Taming of the Shrew

Unlike Lakota East, Butler Tech School for the Arts, working on *Taming of the Shrew*, did choose to do a performance for the PROJECT38 Festival. They, however, chose a unique and unexpected style for their piece: live performance in the silent film style. As the school's name implies, Butler Tech is focused on the arts: students must apply and be admitted to the school, and the primary admission criteria is "passion for the arts" (2015-2016 School of the Arts Campus Guide)⁸³. Students take core academic classes at Butler, but they also major in either Visual Design or Performing Arts and take several classes in their area of concentration (SOA Guide). This meant that their teaching artist (Darnell Pierre Benjamin, who also worked with Lakota East) had the challenge not of working with students who were reluctant to perform, but of trying to figure out how to incorporate a wide range of students' talents and abilities into one final project. He came up with a list of

⁸³ Hereafter cited as "SOA Guide."

options, including a silent film adaptation, which students ultimately chose (Rader 2015). Interestingly, commedia dell'arte ended up being a big part of Butler Tech's project. Benjamin wanted to find "a way to [help students] work on . . . storytelling without words," and the stock characters of commedia helped him do this (Rader 2015). Rader noted that many stock characters, like Pantalone, are still recognizable today, even without dialogue: if an audience sees "someone coming in clutching their purse, and they're hunched over and older," the audience automatically knows what that character is like before he or she says a word (2015). Rader also noted that stock characters are already present in *Shrew*—Lucentio refers to "the old pantaloon," for instance—so exploring these types felt like a natural way to help students find the exaggerated, over-the-top physicality that they needed for the silent film style.

Although the main purpose behind Benjamin and the Butler Tech students' use of exaggerated physical choices and heightened theatricality was to tell a story without words, I would argue that such stylistic choices may have had an additional effect. As mentioned in Chapter Two, techniques like slapstick comedy make violence feel less harsh or disturbing for audience members.⁸⁴ While Rader did not specifically mention the link between violence in *Shrew* and this stylistic choice, I suggest that the silent film style may have had the effect (intended or not) of making

⁸⁴ See Lucy Nevitt's *Theatre & Violence* (2013); Barrie Gunter and Adrian Furnham's "Perceptions of television violence: Effects of programme genre and type of violence on viewers' judgements of violent portrayals" (1984); Dennis Howitt and Guy Cumberbatch's *Mass Media Violence and Society*; and James W. Potter and Ron Warren's "Humor as Camouflage of Televised Violence."

the fights between Kate and Petruchio feel less harsh or disturbing for audience members, thus potentially mitigating some of the sexism present in this play.

A very intentional choice that students made to mitigate the sexism in *Shrew* was to change Kate's final speech. Though the students did call their live performance a "Silent Film Treatment" of *Shrew*, there was some spoken dialogue: Kate and Petruchio spoke some lines throughout, and then at the end of the play, the rest of the ensemble joined Kate and spoke her final speech chorally (*PROJECT38 Festival Guide*, Rader 2015). In addition to having the whole group deliver this monologue rather than Kate speaking it alone, students also altered the language: rather than referring to husbands or wives, they used the gender-neutral "partner," suggesting that their adaptation of this play was about empowering all people, and encouraging everyone to be kind and generous to each other.⁸⁵

Even though Butler Tech's version of the final speech steered the focus away from gender, some of their in-class exploration and discussion did center on this topic, particularly the ways in which young women in the class identified with Kate. Rader mentioned that, for one of Benjamin's workshops, he asked students to "bring in clothes that made them feel like their character" (2015). The young woman playing Kate brought in a corset, a low-cut shirt, and a Victorian-style skirt, but the first time she put them on, she seemed uncomfortable and out of place in the costume (2015). As the class continued to work with the play, however, this student found confidence by connecting with the character of Kate, whom the Butler Tech

⁸⁵ This interpretation is not unlike Molly Glynn and David H. Bell's version of the speech in CST's 2007 Short Shakespeare! production of *Taming of the Shrew*, discussed in Chapter Two.

students interpreted as someone who was very “comfortable . . . in her own skin” (Rader 2015). Many other girls in the class also identified with Kate, discussing the fact that she exuded self-confidence, even though she was living “in a world run by men” (2015). They transferred these ideas over to their own lives, talking about how they often did not feel the kind of self-assurance that they saw in Kate, and that they thought it was important for them, like her, to take charge of their own bodies and their own lives (2015). Not everyone would agree with this reading of the character. Malloree Hill, for instance, who played Kate in the Shakespeare-in-the-Schools tour discussed in Chapter Two, interpreted Kate as insecure, asserting that she used harsh language and actions to cover up these insecurities, at least at the start of the play (2015a). But for Butler Tech students, reading Kate as confident helped them to connect with her and, perhaps most importantly, to find their own strength and confidence.

The Merchant of Venice

For all of the PROJECT38 schools discussed here (and, I would venture, for many of the other schools as well), the process of working with their assigned play throughout the year was as valuable as their final presentation, if not more so. For Mother of Mercy high school, an all-girls Catholic school whose students focused on *Merchant of Venice*, this was especially true. Greg Bouman, the teacher at Mother of Mercy who applied for PROJECT38, specifically requested *Merchant*: the class would be studying the Holocaust, and he felt that *Merchant* would be a good text to study

alongside that history unit.⁸⁶ Rader mentioned that Bouman “was really brave” in wanting to take that play on and in having candid discussions about anti-Semitism not only in the text of *Merchant*, but also during the Holocaust and at other points throughout history (2015).⁸⁷ The class discussed the ways that “Christians have abused the teachings, and abused their power and status, in various places in the world” (2015). They linked these discussions back to *Merchant* to explore Shylock’s side of that story, a perspective not explicitly presented in Shakespeare’s text. They also looked at the Christian perspective, examining how Antonio or Bassanio would perceive the events taking place within the play (2015). Their final project, based off of these conversations, was filmed news coverage of Antonia’s (Antonio, played as a girl here) trial. They ended with breaking news of Shylock’s (also female in this version) suicide, and a discussion of the ramifications of that event (2015). Rader emphasized that the students tried to use this news conference format as a way to show both sides of the story and present the various perspectives that they had discussed throughout the year (2015).

This final video, however, was far from the most important part of Mother of Mercy students’ work. Rader mentioned that, in presenting the class’s final video, Bouman said, “You know, our final project may not look as great as a lot of others, but it has spurred the most wonderful conversations with this class all year long” (2015). For Rader, these “wonderful conversations” are really the point of this work:

⁸⁶ For more on cross-curricular use of theatre and drama, see Chapter 4 in *Signs of Change*, by Joan Lazarus.

⁸⁷ Because I was only able to interview Maggie Lou Rader and conduct other research for this study after the inaugural year of PROJECT38 had concluded, I unfortunately do not have more detailed information on discussions that took place in Bouman’s classroom.

she feels that “PROJECT38 is a culmination of work that’s been happening all year, and [what we saw at the Festival was just] the tip of the iceberg” (2015). This attitude, of the primacy of process over product, is one that pervades PROJECT38, and indeed seems to be a large part of the other two programs discussed in this chapter, what with WPY’s facilitated discussions surrounding students’ identity, and CPS Shakespeare’s fruitful tablework conversations. I would suggest that this kind of focus on process and meaningful discussion can be beneficial even for groups that are putting on a play for young audiences rather than with young performers. In addition to concentrating on creating excellent performances, companies might make a concerted effort to encourage young people to engage in candid discussions of issues like anti-Semitism, providing audience members with the historical context to have such discussions through online resources or study guides. I would argue that having these discussions and focusing, if not on process then on the *processing* of these themes, might serve any production, whether done with young actors or for young audiences.

PROJECT38 Teaching Artists

Even if a teacher or educator is committed to having discussions about difficult issues like gender, racial, or religious discrimination, it can be tough to broach these challenging subjects. When thinking about how to begin these conversations, Maggie Lou Rader really encourages her teaching artists to “ask the questions” about challenging issues, “see to what level [students] want to respond,” and then gauge from there where the discussion can go (2015). This philosophy, of seeing to what level students want to respond in discussion and using that as a

guide, can be tricky. On the one hand, topics like racism, sexism, and religious discrimination are often uncomfortable, and it is only natural that students might not be eager to discuss them without a bit of a push. But, on the other hand, it is vital to remember that, unlike a program like CPS Shakespeare or Will Power to Youth, where students work on their show at the theatre's premises, PROJECT38 teaching artists are entering a school with a culture and boundaries already in place, which they must figure out and navigate. And every school's culture is completely different: as Rader noted, the schools participating in the first year of PROJECT38 ranged from conservative Christian schools to Butler Tech, where students have a ritual before every show of gathering in a circle, putting their hands in the middle, and yelling, "Fuck yeah!" (2015). There certainly may be ways for teaching artists to push a little bit past simply gauging how far students are willing to go in discussion: they might utilize exercises or strategies from resources like Adam, Bell, and Griffin's *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, or from Sharon Grady's *Drama and Diversity*. It is important to acknowledge, however, the challenge inherent in entering a school with an established culture and expectations and starting a conversation about a tough topic like discrimination, even if the teaching artist plans to visit that school five or six times.

Though it may be difficult to initiate such conversations, having these tough discussions and working on plays about challenging themes like sexism or racism helped students grow immensely. Rader observed that those schools that worked on plays like *Merchant* or *Shrew* "seemed to get a lot more out of" PROJECT38 than other schools and had "a more memorable experience than most" (2015). Working

with a play that required in-depth discussion and navigation of tricky, thorny themes seemed to help students find a deeper level of engagement with the text itself, and with the experience of PROJECT38 overall.

This also seemed to be true for students working in a difficult environment. Rader mentioned that the students from Aiken High School, which she described as one of the most challenging schools in the program, also got a lot out of their experience working with *Macbeth*. She singled out one specific student, a young man named Nathan, who played Macbeth in the school's final presentation. This student had worked with CSC during the 2013-2014 school year, prior to PROJECT38, on a short performance in which 38 students from 38 schools each spoke a few lines of Shakespeare. Because he had this prior experience with CSC, he took on a leadership role in his class during PROJECT38, and the other students really admired and respected him; Rader described them looking at "Nathan like he'd hung the moon" (2015). Nathan had been struggling in school, and the principal told Rader at the start of the school year that they sent him to CSC because "he was a good kid, but he was going down a really bad path, and . . . he needed something good. He needed a win" (2015). It seems that he definitely got a "win" at PROJECT38: the principal told Rader, later in the year, that Nathan "would have dropped out of school if he hadn't had [PROJECT38]" (2015). This program, like CPS Shakespeare and Will Power to Youth, has powerful effects for participants. It empowers students, whether by showing them that a complex text like *Othello* is not as intimidating as it might seem; giving them the self-confidence that the young women at Butler Tech found through

Shrew; helping them discuss both sides of a complicated story of discrimination; or keeping them in school and giving them a “win” when they need it most.

Conclusion

Each of the three programs discussed here has its own model and strategies for tackling Shakespeare with students. Although they have some aspects in common (a focus on ensemble building, discussion of themes, some sort of end product created by students), it is in the unique aspects of each program where, I would argue, the most interesting strategies can be found. Will Power to Youth is alone among these programs in their focus on presenting a fully mounted production inspired by a Shakespeare play, but not presented in Shakespeare’s original context. Instead, through facilitated discussion and theatrical exploration, students find connections between their own lives and the themes of whatever play they are working with—in *Merchant of Venice*, for instance, the issues of religious and racial discrimination—and then create their own adaptation. By using these conversations about identity as a springboard for adaptation, WPY students not only engage meaningfully with Shakespeare’s plays and themes, they also often feel empowered by being able to take their place in a lineage of great storytellers.

While CPS Shakespeare does not change the setting or context of Shakespeare’s plays, they do place heavy emphasis on tablework discussions and on everyone, teachers included, being ready to let their guard down and take risks. The ensemble building during the summer helps the program accomplish this goal, which in turn leads to more meaningful conversations during rehearsal—students are much more likely to share their personal connections with characters and with

complex themes like sexism or betrayal if they feel safe with their ensemble. This sense of community and safety also helps during text work and blocking: students are given a lot of power in text interpretation and staging choices, so it is imperative that they feel comfortable taking risks and trying out different performance options, even if their attempts might fall flat. These complex, analytical discussions, and the control that students are given in the rehearsal room (even being put on equal footing with their teachers) helps CPS Shakespeare participants to invest in and deeply understand the text they are performing, as well as its themes.

PROJECT38 differs most obviously from the other two programs mentioned here in its end product. Participating classes have the freedom to choose what they want to create for their final presentation, thus allowing students to choose the means that they feel best suits their assigned play and their own interests. The fact that Cincinnati Shakespeare Company does not specify a desired final project points to another important element of PROJECT38: although process is important in all three programs discussed, PROJECT38 places the most emphasis on the primacy of process over product. For PROJECT38 coordinator Maggie Lou Rader, the important part of this program is that students engage with the text, whether through discussions about the history and enduring relevance of religious discrimination; exploration of commedia stock characters and conversations about gender; or movement-based character discovery.

All of these programs offer a wealth of strategies for teachers and teaching artists interested in exploring Shakespeare with young actors. Although Will Power to Youth, CPS Shakespeare, and PROJECT38 all work with many of Shakespeare's

plays, I contend that their strategies are especially useful when working with plays containing themes like sexism and racism, which can be difficult to discuss with young people (or indeed, with anyone). And such strategies do not need to be confined to rehearsing for a fully mounted production with young actors: many, such as movement work or theatrical exploration of identity, to name just two, could transfer to classroom work as well, opening up many doors to meaningful discussions of Shakespeare's text.

Chapter 5 The Work Being Done and a Glimpse Forward

After presenting a paper on *Taming of the Shrew* for young audiences at a recent conference, I was asked, “If this play is so problematic, why do companies still choose to do it?” I gave a brief answer, mentioning that the play sells well and that young people sometimes relate to the bickering aspect of Kate and Petruchio’s relationship, which, for better or worse, mirrors some middle school courtships. But the reasons for producing this play and other challenging texts for young audiences or with young performers go deeper than that, as the previous chapters have shown. Plays like *Shrew*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *Henry V* can become a way for educators and artists to begin conversations with young people about issues like sexism, discrimination, and violence. As I have examined the work of the various companies and programs discussed in this study, certain trends and best practices have become apparent, which I will outline below, and hope may serve as a resource for other practitioners.

Creating Engaging Performances and Downplaying Violence

Although creating interesting and engaging productions is a goal for most theatre artists, no matter what age their audience members, it has emerged as a particularly important consideration for directors and actors working with Shakespeare for young audiences. One strategy that directors have used to grab audience’s interest is incorporating elements that feel contemporary. In the 2007

Short Shakespeare! *Shrew*, David Bell added the running gimmick of characters waving a pennant and cheering “Padua!” every time the word Padua was uttered onstage. Shelly Gaza used a hip-hop inspired soundtrack for the 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival tour of *Shrew*, and Megan Sanborn Jones similarly utilized twenty-first century music like My Chemical Romance’s “Welcome to the Black Parade” in the BYU Young Company version of *Henry V*.

All of these productions also used movement or physical aesthetic to engage audience members. Both Bell and Gaza’s versions of *Shrew* used commedia dell’arte as an inspiration, which resulted in over-the-top physicality being a big part of both productions, particularly in combat scenes. Such exaggerated physical choices held audience interest by making the story of the play clear—even if a student got confused by the text, he or she could follow what was happening by watching the actors’ faces and bodies. Megan Sanborn Jones also used movement as a way to keep student audiences engaged in *Henry V*. She, along with her cast, created stylized, dance-like battle scenes and used a movement sequence to create an emotionally compelling portrayal of the death of the Boy during the Battle of Agincourt. Based on Jones’s description of audience reaction, these movement sequences helped keep young viewers focused and invested in the scenes they were watching.

But Jones’s movement sequences, and Bell and Gaza’s commedia aesthetic, did not just increase audience engagement. These choices all also downplayed the potentially problematic moments of violence present in each show. For both productions of *Shrew* discussed above, staging fights in an over-the-top, cartoonish or comical style made the violence feel less real and thus less harsh for audience

members. Similarly, for BYU's *Henry V*, by using stylized battles and eliminating any weapons, Jones made the fight sequences more artistic than violent. Although there may be drawbacks to downplaying violence, as discussed in previous chapters, the end result of the choices made by Bell, Gaza, and Jones, is that young audiences remain engaged in the play, and do not check out or feel removed from the action because of sudden horror at an unexpected and severe act of violence. And this audience engagement is vital, whether it comes through adding in twenty-first century elements or downplaying violence: if students watching a play are not interested enough to pay attention and absorb what is happening onstage, or if they are taken out of the action by harsh violence, they will not be ready to begin a discussion or other exploration of the play's themes. By finding ways of making shows interesting for audience members, practitioners can not only create enjoyable performances, they can also open a door for potential discussion of themes like violence or discrimination.

Changing the Story

Another trend that showed up time and time again was altering the story of the play being performed. These alterations ranged from shifting the focus of a play to removing significant elements or storylines. A common choice in productions of *Taming of the Shrew* was to shift the focus of the play away from conflict between Kate and Petruchio and instead emphasize the love and genuine relationship between these two characters. This choice spanned multiple types of productions: both of the abridgments discussed in Chapter Two focused on the love story rather

than the conflict, as did the 2011 CPS Shakespeare production, performed by students, that was examined in Chapter Four.

Along similar lines, Kate's final speech became a common site of revision, either by making changes to the text or through interpretive choices that gave the speech a new meaning. To give just two examples, Molly Glynn, Kate in the 2007 Short Shakespeare! production addressed her speech to Gremio and Hortensio, and the 2015 PROJECT38 students (working with a Cincinnati Shakespeare Company teaching artist) changed the pronouns in the speech to make them all gender neutral. Although neither of these choices involved huge textual changes, both served to make the speech about people being kind to each other, rather than about women being subservient to men. The 2014 Utah Shakespeare Festival tour of *Shrew* did cut some lines from the speech, but acting and blocking choices had the biggest effect on Kate's final lines in this production. Mallore Hill, as Kate, decided to address some lines to the audience, to assure them that she was making the choice to speak these words. She also tried to kneel before Petruchio as she finished the speech, but he brought her to her feet to stand beside him. Both of these choices were made to empower Kate and to demonstrate her equality with her husband in the show's final moments, a message that contrasts starkly with Shakespeare's words.

The BYU Young Company directors and adapters also sometimes make changes in play's storylines, or shift focus to a specific theme within a play. Megan Sanborn Jones chose to focus on the theme of coming of age in *Henry V*, which led her to focus solely on Henry's experiences of war and entirely cut his marriage to

Katharine. She also cast Henry as a woman, a significant departure from Shakespeare's original play. Teresa Dayley Love made a big alteration by removing religion from *Merchant of Venice*, and instead making the play about the general theme of a "Dominant" group that discriminates against a group considered to be "Other." Another group working with *Merchant of Venice*, Will Power to Youth, also changed the religious aspect of the play, although rather than removing religion entirely, they made the character of Shylock a Muslim businessman rather than a Jewish moneylender.

These changes, particularly those discussed in the last paragraph, are significant modifications to each of these plays. I am certainly not saying that these revisions are perfect, and I have outlined many of the potential problems associated with these specific changes in previous chapters. But there are two important takeaways from these aforementioned adjustments.

First, it is vital for theatre artists to know that they *can* make these changes. Although some may consider abridging or adapting Shakespeare to be sacrilege, the fact is that his works are in the public domain and, as mentioned in Chapter Two, there is no authoritative version of his texts. When artists make changes, adaptations, and revisions with a specific purpose (which is true of all of the changes described above), they can potentially use these plays to help young audience members or performers focus in on specific aspects of the text, or find relevance in the play's portrayal of themes like discrimination or violence.

This relevance is the second important takeaway from these alterations. Many of the changes mentioned, particularly those for *Henry V* and *Merchant of*

Venice, were made in order to help student audiences or student performers connect personally with the plays. Love felt that students would understand and engage with the play better if they chose the “Dominant” and “Other” groups themselves, and even hoped that their choices might reflect the school culture. Jones wanted audience members to see themselves in the female Henry as she grew up and gained adult responsibility; Jones hoped especially to give young women a chance to relate directly to a female protagonist who was coming of age. And WPY’s *Merchant* was adapted in 2003, in the midst of a spike in hate crimes against Muslims and shortly before the U.S. entered into war with Iraq. The change in Shylock’s religion, therefore, helped students to connect this play directly with their own lives. These personal connections offer a plethora of ways to process and grapple with these plays, something that many of the artists interviewed for this project mentioned as a particularly important aspect of their work.

Finding Relevance to Young People’s Lives

Changing storylines is not the only way that the artists studied here have helped young people make personal connections to the plays that they see or that they perform. Post-show workshops and discussions often play a big part in helping students find ways that Shakespeare’s work is relevant in their own lives. Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s workshops on status in *Taming of the Shrew*, for instance, offer a hands-on way for students to explore what it feels like to be high or low status, an activity that they can connect not only to Kate’s experience in the play, but also to their own experience with peers at school. Similarly, although Utah Shakespeare Festival’s touring production of *Taming of the Shrew* did not explicitly

ask students to connect the play to their own lives, the questions that the cast asked of audiences in post-show discussions often led young people to share ways in which they connected with the themes and characters in *Shrew*.

Finding this kind of personal relevance and connection is a huge part of the programs discussed in Chapter Four. WPY's *Merchant*, mentioned above, changed the context of the play to make it more relevant for students, but even programs that did not change plays' stories or settings focused heavily on exploring ways in which students could connect meaningfully with Shakespeare's characters and themes. CPS Shakespeare devotes their first days of rehearsal to tablework, not only exploring the basic plot of the play and meanings of words, but also discussing how students can relate their own life experience to the struggles faced by the characters in the work being discussed. These conversations do not end when students get up on their feet to block and run through scenes: Chicago Shakespeare Theater directors and education staff continue to push students to find these moments of personal relevance throughout the rehearsal process. And, although students' experiences in PROJECT38 vary from classroom to classroom, since students, teachers, and teaching artists have so much freedom in their final product, all of the groups that I discussed with Maggie Lou Rader found some kind of personal connection to the play that they were studying.

I do want to pause here and note that, over the past few years, there has been something of a backlash against "relatability," the idea that it is important to be able to make personal connections to a work of art. One highly visible instance of this debate was sparked by Ira Glass's 2014 tweet about *King Lear*, which included the

following sentiment: “Shakespeare: not good. No stakes, not relatable. I think I’m realizing: Shakespeare sucks.” Glass’s tweet prompted an outcry. Some, like *National Review*’s Tim Cavanaugh, argued that Shakespeare is, in fact, relatable. But others, most notably Rebecca Mead of *The New Yorker*, questioned whether it is really important for audiences to find personal relevance in a play, claiming that the focus on relatability makes “for a hopelessly reductive experience.” While there is merit to this argument—dismissing anything that does not immediately and obviously mirror one’s own life and knowledge would certainly result in a “reductive” experience of art—the search for personal connections in programs like CPS Shakespeare, WPY, and PROJECT38 expand and enrich students’ experiences rather than reduce them. By finding the ways in which Shakespeare’s work is relevant to their own lives, students deepen their understanding of the text and are able to have meaningful, insightful discussions of the plays’ themes, a claim supported not only by observations from artists and educators like Marilyn Halperin and Lillian Kass (both of CPS Shakespeare), but also by education scholars.⁸⁸

Creating Safe Spaces

Another element common to several of the programs discussed here is a focus on creating safe spaces. This kind of environment, defined in the first chapter of this work, is particularly important for CPS Shakespeare and WPY, programs in which students from several different schools or areas of a city come together to perform Shakespeare and, significantly, in which emphasis is placed on making and

⁸⁸ See, for example, Fred Newmann’s work on authentic learning, particularly Newmann, Secanda, and Wehlage, *A Guide to Authentic Instruction and Assessment* (1995) and part one of Newmann’s *Authentic Achievement* (1996).

sharing personal connections to the play being performed. Although each of these programs (and PROJECT38, to some extent) has its own process for building trust and collaboration among participants, I was able to learn the most about CPS Shakespeare's process, due simply to a larger amount of access to participants and staff, and the opportunity to attend a rehearsal.

One of the main purposes of the early ensemble-building work at CPS Shakespeare is to help students feel comfortable taking risks, even if they might fail or look foolish. One way that group directors accomplish this is through exercises that all students and teachers must take part in, with no choice to opt out; one notable example was the activity in which students and teachers must dance enthusiastically across a room while wearing a red clown nose. Directors also incorporate mechanisms that celebrate mistakes rather than condemn them, such as the practice of yelling and waving your arms in the air if someone makes an error in a game or warm-up. While my research did not offer the same level of specific descriptions of WPY and PROJECT38 exercises, both groups do utilize various theatrical activities in order to help students take risks and feel confident. PROJECT38 in particular encourages teachers participating in the program to take big risks and be willing to look a little foolish in front of students, so that students feel the freedom to take risks themselves.

Although safe spaces were most important for those programs in which students were the primary performers, they also came into play in the BYU Young Company's work with audience participation and in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival theme-based workshops. BYU's shows focus on setting up a system for

audience participation. These systems are created in a variety of ways, but whether it is through actors chatting with students beforehand, or a pre-show speech explaining how participation will work, the purpose is the same: to ensure that students know what is expected of them and feel comfortable volunteering to participate. Teresa Dayley Love has also prioritized audience safety and comfort in her adaptations: she mentioned in our interview that she always instructs actors never to make a joke at a child's expense. She made the same note in the text of her *Merchant* adaptation: in the scene when Nerissa and Gratiano ask permission to marry, Love wrote in the stage directions that actors must "[a]llways, always, remember to make it a positive experience for the children . . . do not sacrifice their feelings for a good joke." (2015, *Merchant* 23). Although such caveats may seem obvious, the fact that they are explicitly noted indicates that establishing some sort of safety and trust with audience members is an important part of successful audience participation.

The same can be said of participation in workshops like those at Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Although Christine Albright did not mention specific exercises or processes that teaching artists use to create a safe environment for students, she did describe conversations in which she encouraged students to engage with challenging material while still feeling safe. She also noted that OSF teaching artists may help students find further resources if needed, whether it be a teacher, a counselor, or a friend, to make sure that whatever conversations students begin at the theatre will continue with an individual that this student trusts and feels comfortable with. The kinds of safe spaces discussed here, created through the

exercises, activities, and mindsets outlined in the previous chapters, can be a crucial part of best practices in preparing students to discuss and grapple with challenging themes in Shakespeare's work.

What Next?

Each of the plays explored here undeniably presents difficulties when working with young people, whether theatre practitioners hope to create a performance of that play for young audiences or collaborate with students to craft and perform an adaptation of a text. These challenges are not easy to conquer, for a plethora of reasons: not only is it tricky to bring controversial issues into the classroom, we also live in an age of budget cuts and high stakes testing, when arts are often the first thing to be deemed superfluous. One thing that I hope this study has shown is that it is not only possible for challenging issues like sexism and discrimination to be discussed meaningfully and safely with students, but also that theatre is an extremely effective way to enter into such important discussions.

The fact is that these plays are not going anywhere: as mentioned in Chapter One, Shakespeare has endured for centuries and continues to be a staple of culture and the secondary school curriculum in the United States. For proof, just look to the numerous events taking place in the U.S. and around the world throughout 2016, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. And, perhaps more importantly, the issues that are present in *Taming of the Shrew*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *Henry V* endure as well: at the time of this writing in 2016, for instance, a candidate for the presidential nomination declared his intent to ban Muslims from the United States, hesitated to disavow a former Ku Klux Klan leader, and still

remained the frontrunner for the nomination, suggesting that discrimination continues to be an issue faced daily in the U.S. I hope that the best practices collected here will empower theatre artists and educators to dive into meaningful explorations of these important and difficult themes with young people and, ideally, to continue collaborating and sharing their own best practices well into the future.

Bibliography

- 2015-2016 School of the Arts Campus Guide. Butler Tech. N.d. Web. 17 Jan. 2016.
- "About the Young Company." *TMA: Department of Theatre and Media Arts*. Brigham Young University, n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2015.
- Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, ed. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Agness, Karin. "Dear Universities: There Should Be No Safe Spaces From Intellectual Thought." *Time*. Time Inc., 11 May 2015. Web. 25 Jan. 2016.
- Aguilar, Jill, Chris Anthony, and Dani Bedau. *Will Power to Youth Program Manual*. Los Angeles: Red Hen Press, 2007. Electronic copy.
- Albright, Christine. 2015 FaceTime interview with the author. 28 Jan.
- Anthony, Chris. 2014. FaceTime interview with the author. 16 Dec.
- Ashworth, Julia. 2015. Phone interview with the author. 13 Apr.
- Ayckbourn, Alan. Interview by Mo Bhula. "The Boy Who Fell Into a Book: Interview with Alan Ayckbourn." *Alan Ayckbourn*. Alan Ayckbourn and Simon Murgatroyd, 2001. Web. 3 Nov. 2015.
- Bahr, Michael. 2015. Skype interview with the author. 5 June.
- . Excerpt from Shakespeare-in-the-Schools NEA Report. n.d. Shared with author via e-mail. Web.
- Ball, David. 2015. E-mail to Marilyn Halperin, forwarded to the author. 23 June.
- Barooah, Jahnabi. "Most and Least Jewish States in America." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc., 15 June 2012. Web. 15 Oct. 2015.
- Barrie, J.M. *Peter Pan or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up*. London: n.p., 1901. *Project Gutenberg Australia*. Web. 6 Oct. 2015.

- Barstow, David. "A New Form of Reform." *St. Petersburg Times*. Times Publishing Company, 28 Jan. 1996: 1A. *NewsBank, Inc.* Web. 2 Jan. 2016.
- Baxter Magolda, Marcia B. "Teaching to Promote Holistic Learning and Development." *New Directions for Teaching & Learning* 82 (2000): 88-98. *Electronic Journal Center*. Web. 24 Jan. 2016.
- Bedard, Roger L, and C J. Tolch. *Spotlight on the Child: Studies in the History of American Children's Theatre*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989. Print.
- Bell, David H. 2015. E-mail to Marilyn Halperin, forwarded to the author. 23 June.
- Belliveau, George. "An Arts-Based Approach to Teach Social Justice: Drama as a Way to Address Bullying in Schools." *International Journal of Arts Education* 3.2 (2005), 136-165. Web. 30 Aug. 2015.
- Beresin, Eugene and Steve Schlozman. "Violent Video Games and Movies Causing Violent Behavior." *Psychology Today*. Psychology Today, 22 Dec. 2012. Web. 8 Dec 2015.
- Boal, Augusto. *The Rainbow of Desire: the Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*. Trans. Adrian Jackson. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.
- . *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Trans. Charles A. & Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985. Print.
- Bosley, Cicely Jo. "The Economics of a Young Audience." Thesis. U of Central Florida, 2010. Web. 15 Jan. 2016.
- Botelho, Keith M. Rev. of *The Merchant of Venice*, dir. Jeff Watkins, perf. Doug Kaye and Dikran Tulaine. The New American Shakespeare Tavern, Atlanta, GA. *Shakespeare Bulletin* 25.2 (2007): 65-70. *Project Muse*. Web. 30 Apr. 2014.
- Bulman, James C. *The Merchant of Venice*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991. Print.
- Burdett, Lois. "All the colours of the wind: Shakespeare and the primary student." *Reimagining Shakespeare for Children and Young Adults*. Ed. Naomi J. Miller. New York: Routledge, 2003. 44-55. Print.
- Burwell, Julie and Robert Stone. "Powerful versus Popular: Definition and Distinction of Social Vocabulary in the Middle School." *Schools: Studies in Education* 9.1 (2012): 73-89. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 Oct. 2015.
- "BYU Young Company." *Facebook*. Web. 15 July 2015.

- "BYU Young Company's 40th Anniversary." *Department of Theatre & Media Arts*. Brigham Young University, n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2015.
- Cavanaugh, Tim. "Does Shakespeare Suck, or Is He Relatable?" *National Review*. NR, 8 Sep. 2014. Web. 26 Feb. 2016.
- Chansky, Dorothy. *Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. Print.
- Cohn, Ruby. *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976. Print.
- Cowhig, Ruth. "Blacks in English Renaissance drama and the role of Shakespeare's Othello." *The Black Presence in English Literature*. Ed. David Dabydeen. Dover, NH: Manchester UP, 1985. 1-25. Print.
- CST Education Department. "A Look Back at The Taming of the Shrew in Performance." *Chicago Shakespeare Theater on Navy Pier*. Chicago Shakespeare Theater on Navy Pier, n.d. Web. 1 Dec. 2015.
- Daileader, Celia. *Racism, Misogyny, and the Othello Myth: Inter-racial Couples from Shakespeare to Spike Lee*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2005. Print.
- Dean, Gabriel Jason and Lindsay Amer. "Queer Narratives in Theatre for Young Audiences: A Call to Action." *Howlround*. Emerson College, 25 June 2014. Web. 25 Oct. 2015.
- Desmet, Christy and Robert Sawyer, ed. *Shakespeare and Appropriation*. New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.
- Dewey, John. *The School and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1915. Print.
- Diegmüller, Karen. "Harnessing the Power of Positive Peer Pressure." *Education Week*. Editorial Projects in Education, 8 June 1994. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.
- "English Language Arts Standards>>Reading: Literature>>Grade 11-12." *Common Core State Standards Initiative*. Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016. Web. 20 Jan. 2016.
- Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc: 1963. Print.
- "The Famous Victories of Henry V." *RSC: Royal Shakespeare Company*. Royal Shakespeare Company, 2015. Web. 6 Oct. 2015.

- Fentiman, Michael. "Q&A with Michael Fentiman." Teachers' Pack for First Encounter *The Taming of the Shrew*. By William Shakespeare. Edited and directed by Michael Fentiman. Royal Shakespeare Company, 2014. Web. 25 July 2014.
- Ferris, Lesley. "Staging Violence against Women: A Long Series of Replays." *Theatre and Violence*. Ed. John W. Frick. Vol. 7. Tuscaloosa, AL: Southeastern Theatre Conference and University of Alabama Press: 1999. 31-40. Print.
- Fischlin, Daniel and Mark Fortier, ed. *Adaptations of Shakespeare*. London: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Fisler, Ben. Rev. of *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Russel Treyz. Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, Labuda Center for the Performing Arts Main Stage Theatre, Center Valley, Pennsylvania. *Shakespeare Bulletin* 25.4 (2007): 101-106. *Project Muse*. Web. 10 Sep. 2015.
- Foakes, R.A. *Shakespeare and Violence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print.
- Foote, Amber. "Women take center stage in BYU Young Company's 'Henry V.'" *Daily Herald*. Daily Herald, 7 Feb. 2013. Web. 7 June 2015.
- Fristensky, Misha. 2015 Telephone interview. 28 Jan.
- Gay, Penny. *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Gayle, Barbara Mae, Derek Cortez, and Raymond W. Preiss. "Safe Spaces, Difficult Dialogues, and Critical Thinking." *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 7.2 (2013): Article 5. Web. 25 Jan. 2016.
- Gaza, Shelly. 2014. Skype interview with the author. 8 Dec.
- . 2015a. E-mail to the author. 8 June.
- . 2015b. E-mail to the author. 30 Dec.
- . "Taming of the Shrew Script Notes." n.d. Shared with author via Dropbox. Web.
- George, Nelson. *Hip Hop America*. New York: Penguin Group, 1998. Print.
- Gershkoff, Amy and Shana Kushner. "Shaping Public Opinion: The 9/11-Iraq Connection in the Bush Administration's Rhetoric." *Perspectives on Politics* 3.3 (2005): 525-537. *JStor*. Web. 11 Jan. 2016.

- Glass, Ira. (iraglass). "@JohnLithgow as Lear tonight: amazing. Shakespeare: not good. No stakes, not relatable. I think I'm realizing: Shakespeare sucks." 28 July 2014, 12:12 a.m. Tweet.
- Grady, Sharon. *Drama and Diversity: A Pluralistic perspective for Educational Drama*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. Print.
- Green, Douglas. Rev. of *The Merchant of Venice*, dir. Michelle Hensley. Ten Thousand Things Theater Company, Minneapolis, MN. *Shakespeare Bulletin* 25.2 (2007): 45-49. *Project Muse*. Web. 28 Apr. 2014.
- Greene, Jay P., et al. "Learning from Live Theater." *EducationNext* 15.1 (2015): 55-61. Web. 25 Feb. 2016.
- Gross, John. *Shylock*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992. Print.
- Gunter, Barrie and Adrian Furnham. "Perceptions of television violence: Effects of programme genre and type of violence on viewers' judgements of violent portrayals." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 23.2 (1984): 155-164. *Wiley-Blackwell Psychology Backfiles*. Web. 2 Dec. 2015.
- Hagerman, Anita M. Rev. of *Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Laura Grace Godwin. New Mexico State University and the American Southwest Theatre Company, Hershel Zohn Theatre, Las Cruces, New Mexico. *Shakespeare Bulletin* 27.2 (2009): 322-326. *Project Muse*. Web. 10 Sep. 2015.
- Halperin, Marilyn. 2015a. Interview with the author. 23 Feb.
- . 2015b. E-mail to the author. 3 June.
- . 2015c. E-mail to the author. 25 Aug.
- . 2015d. Phone call with the author. 27 Oct.
- Hardiman, Rita, Bailey Jackson, and Pat Griffin. "Conceptual Foundations for Social Justice Education." *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. Ed. Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin. New York: Routledge, 2007. 35-66. Print.
- Haring-Smith, Tori. *From Farce to Metadrama: A Stage History of The Taming of the Shrew, 1594-1983*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. Print.

- Harrison, Anthony Kwame. Hip-hop and racial identification: an (auto)ethnographic perspective." *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*. Ed. Justin A. Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015. 152-167. Print.
- "Hate Crime Statistics, 2001." Uniform Crime Reporting Program: Clarksburg, West Virginia, 2002. Web. 9 Nov. 2015.
- "Hate Crime Statistics, 2002." Uniform Crime Reporting Program: Clarksburg, West Virginia, 2003. Web. 9 Nov. 2015.
- Heathcote, Dorothy. *Collected Writings on Education and Drama*. Ed. Liz Johnson and Cecily O'Neill. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1984. Print.
- Henry V*. By William Shakespeare. Adapted by Megan Sanborn Jones et al. N.d. TS. E-mailed to author. 21 Sep. 2015.
- Hill, Mallore. 2015a. FaceTime interview with the author. 6 Feb.
- . 2015b. E-mail to the author. 2 June.
- Hilsman, Hoyt. "Does Youth Theater Really Have to Be So Pandering and Simple-Minded?: Questions and proposals from a Los Angeles roundtable co-hosted by Center Theatre Group and 24th Street Theatre." 24th Street Theatre, 20 Aug. 2015. Web. 15 Jan. 2016.
- Hodgdon, Barbara. *The Shakespeare Trade: Performances and Appropriations*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998. Print.
- . "Shrew-Histories." *Shakespeare Theatre Company*. Shakespeare Theatre Company, 12 Sep. 2007. Web. 10 Oct. 2015.
- Holderness, Graham and William Shakespeare. *The Taming of the Shrew*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989. Print.
- The Homestretch*. Dir. Kirsten Kelly and Anne de Mare. Spargel Productions and Kartemquin Educational Films, 2014. DVD.
- Horowitz, Arthur. "Shylock After Auschwitz: *The Merchant of Venice* on the Post-Holocaust Stage—Subversion, Confrontation, and Provocation." *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 8.3 (2007): 7-19. *Directory of Open Access Journals*. Web. 29 Jan. 2016.
- Howitt, Dennis and Guy Cumberbatch. *Mass Media Violence and Society*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975. Print.

- Hughley, Marty. "Problem play 'Merchant of Venice' less of a problem in OSF production." Rev. of *The Merchant of Venice*, dir. Bill Rauch, perf. Anthony Heald. Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ashland, OR. *Oregon Live*. Oregon Live, LLC, 19 June 2010. Web. 20 Sep. 2015.
- Isherwood, Charles. "Love Curdled Through a Malevolent Scheme." Rev. of *Othello*, dir. Arin Arbus. Theatre for a New Audience, Duke on 42nd Street Theater, New York. *New York Times*. The New York Times Company 23 Feb. 2009. Web. 20 Jan. 2016.
- Isherwood, Charles. "What Price a Pound of Flesh?" Rev. of *The Merchant of Venice*, dir. Darko Tresnjak, perf. F. Murray Abraham. Theatre for a New Audience, New York. *New York Times*. New York Times, 4 Mar. 2011. Web. 3 Aug. 2015.
- Jackson, Anthony. *Theatre, Education, and the Making of Meaning*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007. Print.
- Johnston, David. "David Johnston remembers Brian Way." *Brian Way*. Unfinished Histories, 2010. Web. 15 Sep. 2015.
- Jones, Chris. "This 'Shrew' offers adults and children plenty to shout about." Rev. of Short Shakespeare! *Taming of the Shrew*, dir. David H. Bell. Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Courtyard Theater, Chicago. *Chicago Tribune*. Chicago Tribune, 7 Feb. 2007. Web. 4 June 2015.
- Jones, Eldred. *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama*. London: Oxford UP, 1965. Print.
- Jones, Megan Sanborn. 2015a. Phone interview with the author. 13 July.
- . 2015b. Email to the author. 15 Oct.
- . 2015c. Email to the author. 19 Dec.
- Kass, Lillian. 2015a. Phone interview with the author. 6 Apr.
- . 2015b. E-mail to the author. 6 Aug.
- Kaul, Mythili. "Background: Black or Tawny? Stage Representations of Othello from 1604 to the Present." *Othello: New Essays by Black Writers*. Ed. Mythili Kaul. Washington, D.C.: Howard UP, 1997. 1-19. Print.
- Keene, Ellin Oliver and Susan Zimmerman. *Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997. Print.

- Kidnie, Margaret Jane. *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*. Oxon: Routledge, 2009. *Taylor & Francis e-Library*. Web. 8 Dec. 2015.
- Kipnis, Laura. "Sexual Paranoia Strikes Academe." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 27 Feb. 2015. Web. 25 Jan. 2016.
- Kleiman, Kelly. "The Taming of the Shrew." Rev. of *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. David H. Bell. Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Chicago. *Chicago Reader*. Sun-Times Media, LLC 18 Sep. 2003. Web. 3 Dec. 2015.
- Ko, Yu Jin. Rev. of *Othello*, dir. Tony Simotes. Shakespeare and Company, The Founders' Theatre, Lenox, MA. *Shakespeare Bulletin* 27.2 (2009): 295-303. *Project MUSE*. Web. 20 Jan. 2016.
- Lazarus, Joan. *Signs of Change: New Directions in Secondary Theatre Education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004. Print.
- Lelyveld, Toby. *Shylock on the Stage*. Cleveland, OH: Western Reserve University, 1960. Print.
- Lewcock, Dawn. "Once Upon a Time: The Story of the Pantomime Audience." *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance*. Ed. Susan Kattwinkel. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003. 133-147. Print.
- Lindfors, Bernth, ed. *Ira Aldridge, the African Roscious*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007. Print.
- Love, Teresa Dayley. 2015. Phone interview with the author. 13 Mar.
- "Love, Teresa Dayley." *Department of Theatre & Media Arts Faculty and Staff Profiles*. Brigham Young University, 2015. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.
- Lukianoff, Greg and Jonathan Haidt. "The Coddling of the American Mind." *The Atlantic*. The Atlantic Monthly Group, Sep. 2015. Web. 25 Jan. 2016.
- Maguire, Tom. "There is no audience: meeting the dramaturgical challenges of the spectator in children's theatre." *Theatre for Young Audiences: A Critical Handbook*. Ed. Tom Maguire and Karian Schuitema. London: Institute of Education Press, 2012. 9-21. Print.
- Maguire, Tom and Karian Schuitema, ed. *Theatre for Young Audiences: A Critical Handbook*. London: Institute of Education Press, 2012. Print.

- McBee, Robin Haskell. "Can Controversial Topics Be Taught in the Early Grades? The Answer is Yes!" *Social Education* 60.1 (1996): 38-41. Web. 10 Oct. 2015.
- McCaslin, Nellie. *Theatre for Children in the United States: A History*. Studio City, CA: Players Press, 1997. Print.
- Mead, Rebecca. "The Scourge of 'Relatability.'" *The New Yorker*. Conde Nast, 1 Aug. 2014. Web. 10 Nov. 2015.
- Mento, Joan. Rev. of *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Daniela Varon. Shakespeare & Company, Founders' Theatre, Lenox, Massachusetts. *Shakespeare Bulletin* 24.1 (2006): 128-129. *Project MUSE*. Web. 3 Mar. 2015.
- Mentz, Steve. Rev. of *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Beverly Bullock. ShakespeareNYC, The Clurman Theater, New York. *Shakespeare Bulletin* 25.2 (2007): 49-51. *Project MUSE*. Web. 4 Apr. 2015.
- Merchant of Venice*. By William Shakespeare. Adapted by Teresa Dayley Love. N.d. TS. E-mailed to author. 13 Mar. 2015.
- The Merchant of Venice*. By William Shakespeare, adapted by Teresa Dayley Love. Dir. Lindsay Adamson Livingston. Brigham Young University. Margetts Theatre, Provo, UT, 2013. Play Program. Web. 2 May 2014.
- Metz, Allison M. *Applied Theatre in Schools in the United States: The Triangulation of Education, Art, and Community Practice in Theatre in Education (TIE)* Diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008. Web. 10 Jan. 2014.
- Metz, Nina. "A modern, possibly PC look at 'Shrew.'" *Chicago Tribune*. Chicago Tribune, 5 Sep. 2003. Web. 3 Dec. 2015.
- Miller, Naomi J., ed. *Reimagining Shakespeare for Children and Young Adults*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Mills, Jane. *Womanwords*. Essex: Longman Group UK Limited, 1989. Print.
- "The Mission of Brigham Young University." *Brigham Young University*. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d. Web. 29 Feb. 2016.
- Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility*. N.p., 2012. Web. 30 Sep. 2015.
- Mowat, Barbara A. and Paul Werstine. "Appendix: Framing Dialogue in *The Taming of a Shrew*." *The Taming of the Shrew*, by William Shakespeare, ed. Barbara A.

- Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. 233-246. Print.
- Neelands, Jonathan, Sheila Galloway, and Geoff Lindsay. "An evaluation of Stand up for Shakespeare: The Royal Shakespeare Company Learning & Performance Network 2006-2009." Coventry: Center for Educational Development Appraisal and Research, 2009. Web. 9 Sep. 2015.
- Nesbit, Edith. *Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare*. Project Gutenberg, 1998. (First published 1907.) Web. 10 Oct. 2015.
- Nevitt, Lucy. *Theatre & Violence*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.
- Newman, Karen. "The Taming of the Shrew: A Modern Perspective." *The Taming of the Shrew*, by William Shakespeare, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. 247-256. Print.
- Newmann, Fred M. and Associates. *Authentic Achievement: Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1996. Print.
- Newmann, Fred M., Walter G. Secada, and Gary G. Wehlage. *A Guide to Authentic Instruction and Assessment: Vision, Standards and Scoring*. Madison: Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 1995. Print.
- Nodelman, Perry. *The Hidden Adult*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. Print.
- Orkin, Martin. *Shakespeare Against Apartheid*. Craighall: AD. Donker, 1987. Print.
- Osborne, Laurie E. "Rethinking the Performance Editions: Theatrical and Textual Productions of Shakespeare." *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*. Ed. James C. Bulman. London: Routledge, 1996. 171-188. *Taylor & Francis e-Library*. Web. 8 Dec. 2015.
- Othello*. By William Shakespeare. Dir. Kirsten Kelly. CPS Shakespeare at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. 2 Nov. 2013. DVD.
- O'Toole, John. *The Process of Drama, Negotiating Art and Meaning*. London: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Philpott, Sarah, et al. "Controversial Issues: To teach or not to teach? That is the question!" *The Georgia Social Studies Journal* 1.1 (2011): 32-44. Web. 15 Sep. 2015.

- Pittman, L. Monique. "Big-Shouldered Shakespeare: Three *Shrews* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater." *Shakespeare Survey* 67 (2014): 244-264. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.
- "Pocket Merchant." *Propeller*. Propeller Theatre Company, 2015. Web. 8 June 2015.
- Porter, Tony. "HENRY V at BYU stays faithful to Shakespeare." Rev. of *Henry V*, dir. Megan Sanborn-Jones. BYU Young Company, Nelke Theatre, Harris Fine Arts Center, Provo, Utah. *Utah Theatre Bloggers Association*. Theatrebloggers, Inc., 12 Feb. 2013. Web. 8 Sep. 2015.
- Potter, Lois. *Othello*. New York: Palgrave, 2002. Print.
- Potter, W. James and Ron Warren. "Humor as Camouflage of Televised Violence." *Journal of Communication* 48.2 (1998): 40-57. *Electronic Journal Center*. Web. 2 Dec. 2015.
- Powell, K.A. "Framing Islam: An Analysis of U.S. Media Coverage of Terrorism Since 9/11." *Communication Studies* 62.1 (2011): 90-112. *Academia.edu*. Web. 10 Nov. 2015.
- Price-Styles, Alice. "MC origins: rap and spoken word poetry." *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*. Ed. Justin A. Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015. 11-21. Print.
- Ramnanan, Angela. "Introducing Shakespeare Early: Why, When, and How to Teach Shakespeare to Elementary and Middle School Students." Thesis. Georgetown U, 2013. Web. 15 Jan. 2016.
- "Production History." *Chicago Shakespeare Theater on Navy Pier*. Chicago Shakespeare Theater on Navy Pier, 2015. Web. 30 May 2015.
- "PROJECT38." *Cincinnati Shakespeare Company*. N.d. Web. 10 Apr. 2015.
- PROJECT38 Festival Guide*. Cincinnati, OH: Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, 2015. Print.
- Propeller*. Propeller Theatre Company, 2015. Web. 3 Apr. 2015.
- Rader, Maggie Lou. 2015. Phone interview with the author. 20 May.
- Reason, Matthew. *The Young Audience: Exploring and Enhancing Children's Experiences of Theatre*. London: Institute of Education Press, 2010. Print.

- Riherd, Mark with Gwendolen Hardwick. "The Creative Arts Team in the United States." *Learning Through Theatre: New Perspectives on Theater in Education*. 2nd ed. Ed. Tony Jackson. New York: Routledge, 1993. 205-222. Print.
- Rocklin, Edward L. *Performance Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2005. Print.
- Rohd, Michael. 2015. Interview with the author. 20 Feb.
- . *Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue: The Hope Is Vital Training Manual*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. Print.
- . "Translations: The Distinction between Social & Civic Practice and Why I Find It Useful." *HowlRound*. Emerson College, 1 Sep. 2012. Web. 30 Jan. 2013.
- Rokison, Abigail. *Shakespeare for Young People: Productions, Versions and Adaptations*. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2013. Print.
- Rose, Jacqueline. *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. London: Macmillan, 1984. Print.
- "Say It Loud: African American Spoken Word." *Smithsonian Folkways*. Smithsonian Institution, n.d. Web. 2 Jan. 2016.
- Schafer, Elizabeth. *Ms-Directing Shakespeare: Women Direct Shakespeare*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Henry V*. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. The Tech, n.d. Web. 10 Sep. 2015.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2010. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Taming of the Shrew*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice*. Ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1993. Print.
- Shapiro, James, ed. *Shakespeare in America*. New York: The Library of America, 2014. Print.
- "Shelly Gaza, Taming of the Shrew Tour Director." *Utah Shakespeare Festival*. Utah Shakespeare Festival, 8 Jan. 2014. Web. 10 Aug. 2014.

- Silverstone, Catherine. *Shakespeare, Trauma, and Contemporary Performance*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Ebook.
- Slovacek, Simeon. "Impact Report. Will Power to Youth: Youth Transforming, Play by Play." Los Angeles: Shakespeare Center Los Angeles, 2010. Web. 11 Jan. 2016.
- Smith, Christopher. "Anti-Islamic Sentiment and Media Framing during the 9/11 Decade." *Journal of Religion & Society* 15 (2013): 1-15. Web. 11 Jan. 2016.
- Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1977. Print.
- Stevens, Andrea. Rev. of *The Taming of the Shrew*, new Induction scenes written by Neil LaBute, dir. Josie Rourke. Chicago Shakespeare Theater at Navy Pier, Chicago, Illinois. *Shakespeare Bulletin* 28.4 (2010): 491-495. *Project MUSE*. Web. 2 Feb. 2015.
- The Taming of the Shrew*. By William Shakespeare. Dir. David H. Bell. Perf. Molly Glynn and Ben Viccellio. Chicago Shakespeare Theater. 30 Jan. 2007. DVD.
- The Taming of the Shrew*. By William Shakespeare. Dir. Kirsten Kelly. CPS Shakespeare at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. 5 Nov. 2011. DVD.
- The Taming of the Shrew*. By William Shakespeare. Adapted by Shelly Gaza. N.d. TS. Shared with author via Dropbox. Web.
- The Taming of the Shrew*. By William Shakespeare. Dir. William Ball & Kirk Browning. Perf. Fredi Olster, Marc Singer, and Stephen St. Paul. Kultur, 1976. DVD.
- Taylor, Philip. *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003. Print.
- Thoman, Elizabeth. "What Parents Can Do about Media Violence." *Center for Media Literacy*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Dec. 2015.
- Tobias, Elizabeth. 2015. Phone interview with the author. 13 Apr.
- Turner, Oliver. "A History of Theatre in Education at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry." *Belgrade Theatre Coventry*. The Belgrade Theatre, Nov. 2010. Web. 5 Oct. 2015.
- Underdown, D.E. "The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England." *Order and Disorder in Early Modern*

- England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson. New York: Cambridge UP, 1985. 116-136. Print.
- Vine, Chris. "TIE and the Theatre of the Oppressed." *Learning Through Theatre: New Perspectives on Theater in Education*. 2nd ed. Ed. Tony Jackson. New York: Routledge, 1993. 109-127. Print.
- Way, Brian. *Audience Participation: Theatre for Young People*. Boston: Walter H. Baker Co, 1981. Print.
- Why Shakespeare?* Dir. Lawrence Bridges. National Endowment for the Arts, 2004. DVD.
- Winston, Joe. *Transforming the Teaching of Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company*. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015. Ebook.
- Worthen, W.B. "Staging 'Shakespeare': Acting, Authority, and the Rhetoric of Performance." *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*. Ed. James C. Bulman. London: Routledge, 1996. 13-30. *Taylor & Francis e-Library*. Web. 8 Dec. 2015.
- Wynne-Wilson, Peter. "The Peter Pan approach: creating plays for children from children's play." *Theatre for Young Audiences: A Critical Handbook*. Ed. Tom Maguire and Karian Schuitema. London: Institute of Education Press, 2012. 47-58. Print.

Appendix: Interview Transcripts

Christine Albright 2015

Interview with the author via FaceTime

28 Jan.

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): I know we talked a little bit about the school visit program and what that consists of, but I'd love to learn a little bit more about it. I was wondering if you could maybe walk me through what a school visit program experience would be like for students from the preshow workshop to the performance to the post-show or post-performance workshop.

Christine Albright (CA): Absolutely. There are two different that I'll talk about, because there are two different kinds of visits. So the most typical would be two actors, with very limited sets and props, come to a school. They're there for one day. They can have up to four events, so usually that's two performances and then two workshops. What happens is we like to have them perform first, because it gives the kids a chance to see a play or scenes from a play, to experience the actors, in a way that's usually—it's usually more exciting for the kids to watch that. We find if we give a workshop first they have this sort of—"Well, who are you, and why should we care." But if they see a show, then they go, "Oh, wow, this is actually kind of exciting, and I didn't know I could understand Shakespeare and enjoy it and think it was funny, and now these people are also going to come into my classroom and share with me some curriculum." So, usually they do two performances, and they're assembly style, and they can be done, depending on what the school is, on an auditorium stage or in a cafeteria, and so they run the gamut, and then we do workshops. The school visit workshop is kind of cool in that it's an accordion style workshop. It can be as long as two hours or as short as 35 minutes, and that's all based on—a lot of schools are going to block schedules now and sometimes their classes are only 40 minutes long, (*connection cut out*) an afterschool workshop and we can actually have the kids for two hours. And what we do is, we create curriculum based on the program that we send out there. We have a Shakespeare program and then a program that our teams come up with on their own, which is usually a combination of contemporary scenes, scenes from movies, and Shakespeare scenes. But we base our curriculum on the program that we send out there. So the year that we took a 45 minute *Julius Caesar*, then we did a workshop based on the themes in *Julius Caesar*. When we did a *Romeo and Juliet*, we did a *Henry V*, then we do workshops based on those, and we look at the themes within them and then do exercises to expound on the themes in the play that they already saw, so that we can have a conversation of "Well, now, you saw this on stage, and

you just experienced this here, can we have a conversation of now what you know." So that's one. The other is, we have what are called partnerships with some schools in Oregon, and that means we can stay there for up to five days—we can be there for 2 to 5 days depending on the size of the school, and then we go for three years, in a row. So, that's how that works. So that the partnership is a little bit more in depth. They get both performances, we give as many kids as possible the workshop. In the first year, they get an extra workshop that focuses on—I believe the first year is *Macbeth*. Then the second year, we look at *Hamlet*, and then the third year, we look at—there's a progression of those. So we look at the big ones that they do—David, the partnership programs? It's *Macbeth*, then *Hamlet*, then what's the third?

David [*off screen*]: I think *Hamlet* is third.

CA: *Hamlet* is third year?

David: So it must be—maybe a *Romeo and Juliet* in there?

CA: Or maybe it's—

David: There's a year I've never done.

CA: Okay. So, I'll find that out. (*EH laughs*). But we do the three, there are three. The *Macbeth* we pull apart the scene after the killing of Duncan. So, we give them the scene, and we say, "Okay, now, the murder happened offstage, but (*connection cut out*) what these two characters have, can you recreate what happened in the other room." And then they talk about it, they investigate—we call it "sleuthing Duncan's chamber." And so they investigate the scene, as if they're detectives, and then they have to come up with, sort of, the photographic images of what happened, so the beginning, the middle, and the end. And it's great, because there are so many different ways they could interpret it. So there are three years of that, and then their fourth year in the partnership, they come to Ashland—and it's paid for by donations, by grants, there's an Oregon Arts Council who gave—there's a fund that makes it so that these schools that are underprivileged can come here, and then get the OSF experience at the end. So those are the two different ways. But I think the, the theme-based stuff is probably what you're most interested in. So they see a 35 to 40 minute version of a play, and then they get a workshop based on the themes in that play.

EH: Yes. And, so, one of my big questions on that is—because I know we talked a little bit about, there's some active language exploration, so I was wondering, when you're looking at creating a workshop or doing a workshop, how much focus is on the language, and how much is on thematic, or does it kind of work together?

CA: They totally work together. So, we did *The Tempest* two years ago. And so we sent out a 35-minute *Tempest*, and then we explored the themes of slavery and

mastership and we did that by—there's an exercise, we call it "babbling." And so it's just a sort of warm-up, right: "Walk around the space. And, you know, nod at the people that you pass, shake hands with people that you pass, freeze, lie on the floor, stare at the ceiling, and just start to free-associate. The word is, 'Master.' So what does it mean to you to master something, to be a master, to have somebody mastering you, right, just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. Great! Up on your feet, now walk around, walk around, walk—shake hands, da da da da da, freeze. Stare at the ground. Talk about slavery." And it's just them, saying these things out loud, and then we give them a scene between Ariel and Prospero, in which they work in pairs, and first they just read it through, and then we talk about what's being said: "Are there any confusing words, are there any words or phrases that you really like, that stick out to you in a way that sparks your imagination. Is there something that you know what that means, just because of the way they say it. Now, we want you to do the scene, and this time, Prospero, every time you speak, you walk. And Ariel, you must follow." Right? So that's what that is. "Okay, now we're going to switch. And this time, every time Ariel speaks, Ariel walks around, and Prospero has to follow. Now what did you learn about the master/servant relationship here?" Then we look at the Caliban speech, this—(*recording cut out*) we have them go through the whole speech, and then, in pairs or threes or fours, they each get a line, and they have to figure out a way to physicalize what's in that line. And they work on it by themselves and then we all come back to the circle, and we go around and do the speech in order, and then we talk about, "Okay, so what were the images that really heightened the idea of this guy—he is a slave to Prospero. How do we know? What does he say? And then how did we see that physically embodied, how did you learn that even more because you embodied it?" And then there are little exercises in between as well. We started that one by creating a storm, was sort of how we focused them. So we began the whole—the whole dang thing takes five minutes, but you sit in a circle, and you collectively create a storm by using your hands, and creating sounds, and then the room is really nice and focused. I think we even—what did we call that? We said—there are storms within people. And that's another thing too—the storm itself is thematic, right? The play begins with a storm, but how are there storms within these characters, are there stormy relationships? And so then, as we looked at the master/slave relationships, we could also talk about, "Okay, who's got a storm inside them? How is Ariel's storm different from Prospero's storm? How is Caliban's storm different from all of them?" And those things weave their way into that material. That make sense?

EH: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. That's so interesting, cause it is so reminiscent of—our theatre department did *The Tempest*, with a lot of school matinees, and they did that storm soundscaping, so it's so reminiscent of that. That idea is really cool (*laughs*). I did have a question—I know, on the website for the School Visit Program, I think it mentions at some point that students need to have done a Shakespeare workshop before the school visit. Is that—am I misreading that?

CA: I don't know. I'll look at that, but I don't know that there are any prerequisites

like that. We do offer to our partnership schools, so those schools that we partner with every year, their teachers are also scholarshipped to come to Ashland and take classes with us. And then we go out to the schools and we visit them, and we give the teachers curriculum, so that they can also, if they choose, use some of the exercises that we have in our arsenal in their classrooms. So, as you're exploring any play, here's a way to look at character. And so, here's a line that we believe is really the heart of Beatrice, and now you can give that to your kids, and they can work in teams to figure out—okay, what's being said, what does this say about her, and then answer a series of questions—what's Beatrice's favorite hobby? What's her favorite food? You know what I mean (*laughs*)?

EH: Yeah.

CA: Like what does she do—what's her bedtime ritual? Whatever that might be, and then they have to then create something from there, just based on a line of text. So what can you find in a line? And we give them tons of stuff like that. So, that might be some of it. I think, before we can partner with a school, their teachers do have to come and work with us, just so that we know we're all on the same page, and that we're going to—the goal with the partnership schools is that we give them all the tools that they could possibly need, that the students get the tools, and the teachers get the tools, and they can use our curriculum, use our style of teaching, to keep exploring Shakespeare in an exciting, physical way. Sort of demystify it, and make it (*word unintelligible*).

EH: Yeah. That's really cool.

CA: But that might be what that is. But I can look at that, and find out what that is.

EH: Yeah, and that may be what I read, and I may have misinterpreted or misread something, so I was just curious. So, it sounds like when you do either a condensed play or a collection of scenes, there's always some sort of thematic connection between the scenes or a theme that gets focused on. How do you go about selecting the themes or choosing what to focus on? I know the Shakespeare's birthday one was recently, but in general, how are those themes selected or picked out?

CA: I think we look for themes that are universal. I think we look for themes that we think the kids will be excited about. So, we have a program that's all about Shakespeare's fools. So there is the—how does comedy run through these plays, even—and we look at the porter from *Macbeth*—even the more tragic awful plays, where is the comedy in that? Where is the foolery? And so I think that there is something that kids recognize in a fool. Somebody who is maybe a little bit blundering but also those characters who speak the truth to power, what that means, so, I think we look for themes in that way. Big ones, I think, that always rise to the surface are love, conflict, (*laughs*), love/hate. I see a lot of that. There was a great team of two this year that came up with a program called "Love Hate On," and

everything they did was about people who love each other so much they hate each other, or hate each other so much they love each other. And it was so great, because the scenes that you can choose for that are just incredible. And so they had—their Shakespeares, they looked at Lady M and Mac, they looked at Hermia and Demetrius, right, so the couple that's not supposed to be together, and then they had some contemporary stuff, too. A scene from *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, a scene from a new fun play called *The Gruesome Playground Injuries*, right, that kind of thing, and so—but again, kids really can latch on to that. They know what that is. They know, right? I think it's why when I read *Romeo and Juliet*, I thought, "Oh my God, how did Shakespeare get this, a mind of a teenager?" And I think that is a goal, to find something that they recognize, that they know, so they understand that this isn't antiquated, it's not outdated. We also, always, when creating these programs, we recognize that humor and physicality are so key that kids love it when they finally get to see the swords come out. Kids love it—they love it! It's thrilling, it's exciting, it's a fantastic physical representation of the things that they can't do, but they see on TV, and now all of a sudden they're watching it right in front of them, but also the humor is really important, because we have to earn the more dramatic scenes, we have to find a way to really hook them: "Shakespeare's funny, Shakespeare's alive, Shakespeare's hilarious, look at how funny Bottom is, oh my gosh, Pyramus and Thisbe is so great, and now here's *Romeo and Juliet*. Oh my gosh, they have the—it's the exact same story. You know that, right? Pyramus and Thisbe, Romeo and Juliet—same thing!" And then we can talk about what that theme is. But we have to hook them with the physical humor first and then bring home some of the other elements. Then when we do stuff here, I think we look at the plays and say, "What do they have in common?" Because we don't get to decide what the plays are of the OSF season when we create curriculum here. We have to go, "Okay, what is the theme of this play? How can we make sure that they understand that before they walk into the room, or have an ability to talk about it after they've seen the play?"

EH: So, I had one other quick question, about the school visit, and then I have some questions about the in-house stuff that you do with the MainStage. But for the school visit scenes, since I'm focusing on plays with difficult themes or complex themes, I was just wondering if you'd done scenes from shows that are, I guess—they all have some difficulty, but especially difficult, like *Taming of the Shrew* or *Merchant of Venice* or *Cymbeline*—I just talked to somebody who did a YA *Cymbeline*—but anything like that, and how you've addressed the more complicated, sticky themes in there.

CA: Sure, we just did *Shrew* a couple years ago. We didn't take it out on the road, but we did it here in-house. One that we did which was really exciting and very successful, was we had the kids look at Kate's speech, the very last one, and read it "as if," right? So, the first thing we did is say, "Okay, read this as if you mean everything you're saying." Right, and they do it in a group, we never ever single a kid out, it's not acting exercises, it's all about understanding the themes of this play. "Great, now, let's all read it as if this was the funniest joke we ever told in our lives.

Great, now let's read it as if we hate the person we're talking to. Great. Now let's do it as if we're trying to educate the person that we're talking to." And then we could explore how, "This speech may at first seem like it's one thing, but wow, when we explore it in all these other ways, it's actually much more complicated, isn't it? And the relationship between men and women in this play is really complicated. And it's not just complicated for these two characters. When you go into the theatre today, watch for how the relationship between father and daughters is complicated, and how it's different between each of his two daughters. Why is that? Then look for the relationship between Bianca and her suitors. What is complicated about that and how is it different from how it's complicated for Kate? We have two very different ways that women view the world in this play. What are they, and can you recognize that in the people you see? Can you recognize that in yourself?" That's one way that we handled that. Another thing we like to do with Kate, which is so fun, we've done this twice now, is to—what's good about here, it's a Shakespeare Festival, so we can look at Kate in conversation with others. So, the first time I was here and we did *Taming of the Shrew*, we did it the same year we did *Romeo and Juliet*. And so, an exercise that we did, was to look at the journeys of these two women. And so we went through the play, and had—I think there were 18 lines for each of them. And they were in the order that they appeared in the play. So everything from Juliet (*recording cut out*) "move" to "Tell me not of fear" where she takes the potion, "Tell me not of fear." And I'm making that up right now, and I should know it, cause I did it that year! But to see what happens to her, and what we had them do is look at those lines, and put themselves in a physical shape, right? So is it a low shape, is it a high shape? Is it strong or is it weak? Is it forward or on the back foot? Just come up with a physical shape, say that line, and then they created sculptures of Juliet. And then we did the exact same thing with Kate. We start with her, where she's got those lines, you know—her whole scene with Petruchio, any of those like really great, you know, like, "My tongue in your tail," you know, like that—"I'll try—" those great things, where she has those at the beginning, and at the very end, she ends with, "Place your hand beneath your husband's foot." And then she has everything in between, and her journey—suddenly you see it for all of its complications, but she starts in a bigger, scarier, sort of, a more open place, and then we start to see her become somebody who could do that, who could soften in a way. Depending on how they look at it, how they view it, it could be a positive thing or a negative thing, and we tell them, "You know, you can judge it here in this moment, but you're also going to get to see it, and see what the actress does with that. And is that something that you—do you think she finds strength in that last moment? Or do you think that she actually becomes powerless? What is the power dynamic between the two of them?" It's also really fun—the second time we did *Shrew*, we didn't just look at the female journeys, we looked at Kate's journey and Petruchio's journey. We looked at Kate's journey next to Bianca's journey, which is really interesting, and we started to see, Bianca's a lot more shrewish than you think. She's manipulative, she can be. And the lines that—she can play it, she knows how to work a room. And these kids who have one opinion of, "Oh, this girl's so frilly and fluffy," they start to see her for her strengths, and see how it contrasts with Kate and her strengths. And so it was really

cool to look at those journeys, but also to see Petruchio soften, right, he's got these—"I come to wive it wealthily in Padua," and then he has to end—the last line we gave them—he has a line about having to—what's the one where he says, basically, "I believe in her, I know that she's gonna stand for me"—when the men say, "Oh, we're gonna bet on this," and he says, "Sure, cause I know, I trust her, I know who she is," and these other men don't. So it's fun to look at that complicated relationship. *Cymbeline*—because you're focusing on *Shrew*, and what are the other ones you're focusing on?

EH: Well, my initial idea was *Shrew*, *Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet*. One of the people that I'm talking to who's adapted a bunch of work over at Brigham Young just adapted *Cymbeline* and directed it for young audiences, so I'm potentially looking at that as well, or maybe sort of restructuring a little bit to be able to look at a number of plays. So that one may come in (*laughs*).

CA: Mm hmm. With *Romeo and Juliet*, we did a really fun workshop just exploring the themes of *Romeo and Juliet*. The most recent one we did was in two thousand—it was eleven or twelve, I can't remember, but we did what was—we called it our "interpreting *Romeo and Juliet* workshop," because our production was set in California and the conflict was between the Californios and the Mexican families. So the Spanish and the Mexican conflict—those were the two sides. And so, to help the kids understand, that "Here's this play that was written over four hundred years ago, and we're looking at it in our contemporary lives, but in a history that's somewhere in between," how all of that could be possible—we did a whole two hour workshop of exploring different ways to interpret that play. And one really fun exercise—we gave them the party scene—it was way edited down, but we broke up the whole party scene into something like eight to ten sections, and so groups of four or five would get a section. So, "Oh my gosh, here are the servants, they're setting up," "Here's Dad when he says, 'All right, if you've got corns, you know, sit down, but if you don't, get up and dance, prove to us that you can move,'" and then, "Here's Old Capulet talking to his son," then "Here's Juliet and Romeo meeting for the first—" right, and so we had them read the sections, explore what they were about, and then they had to come up with five freeze frames of the things that happened in that scene. And they had to create it sort of on a loop, so if Romeo—one group had the sonnet, had the "palm to palm," and so the idea of what happens to those two characters, who's watching, can we tell from the text who's around them, and what's being witnessed. So everybody had their own little section, they did it, they figured out how to do it on their loop, and then we had a CD with four different pieces of music. One was a really fun sort of classical guitar piece that was used in the play. Another was, like a klezmer band, it was sort of like "Ya, da da da da" (*EH laughs*), really zany, crazy. We had some Enya music, and then we had a contemporary sort of hip-hop piece, and they had to run through their loops, and we would play the music. And then they got to decide as a team, "All right, which one did we like the best? So which one actually informed the way we moved more, and was kind of like, 'Oh, wow, that really worked! This thing that we did, who knew that

suddenly the dance could become this?" Or "Actually, no, the zany-ness of the, of the servants getting all of their stuff together suddenly, this like, they're tossing plates," and they like the klezmer music. Or "Oh, this love moment is really great with this slow, gooey Enya music." And then they got to share, and they would just tell us, piece one, piece two, piece three, piece four, and we became the DJs, and they got to share what their version of *Romeo and Juliet* would be. And it was really fun. And it was great for them to see that it's possible to put another lens on it, that it doesn't have to look like Franco Zeffirelli, in order for it to be *Romeo and Juliet*. That you can find a way for this to resonate, in many different ways, and places. So that was a fun, fun workshop, just as another way to explore that play.

EH: Yeah. And that, to clarify, just want to make sure I'm keeping all the workshops straight, so that's something they would do before they came to see the show, to prep them? (CA nods) Okay.

CA: They could do either way. They could do before or after. When they come here, it all depends on how it works out with their schedule. So, if *Romeo and Juliet* is the first thing they're seeing, and then they're going to see *Taming of the Shrew*, and they're going to see *Streetcar Named Desire*, and then the last thing they do is take a workshop with us, then we find a way that that workshop then speaks to their experience, so we take the curriculum as is, but then find a way to have the discussions about, "So when you saw it, what did you see? And now that you've done this, how does that inform what you saw, can you reflect on that?" If they do the workshop before they see the play, then the conversation is, "When you go in there today, watch for this, this, this, and this." So that's a way that we have it so that it can be in any order. Because it's really up to the box office to arrange all of that, and then we have to gauge, based on where they are in their journey, what information we give them. The conversations are different, right, because there's some things you don't want to give away, if they haven't seen the play, and they don't know it, then you don't want to say that Kate and Petruchio get together. We stop at a certain point, and don't give all of that away, but if they have seen it, then we can have those discussions, which—it works well that way. But then there is—we offer a lot of curriculum. The other thing we do are these 30 minute Prologues, which are just interactive lectures, and that's really—it's theme and character. That's what we give to them. So, "When you go into the theatre today—" we never have a Prologue after they've seen—it's a prologue, it comes before (CA and EH laugh).

EH: Yeah.

CA: So, we make sure—"These are the characters you're going to meet, these are the things you need to look for," right? "In *Taming of the Shrew*, you have to look for commerce, you know, love and money, how are they related, because there's so much language about love and money, this is a businessman, and how is he dealing with his daughters—it's a business, this is also part of a business. You're going to

hear the word dowry, you're going to hear the word jointure. What do those things mean, what do they mean then, and how can we look at it now? You're going to watch a struggle of the sexes, you're going to see male and female conflict, there's going to be competition in here. Watch and see—we'll give you a couple of examples but you need to see how that pays off as we go." We're doing *The Tempest*, "You need to look for the idea of freedom vs. captivity, and I'll tell you, everybody in that play is trapped, because they're stuck on an island." So, we start right there, but in what ways are these people trapped? How can you look at that? So that's those, and they're so great, because they're thirty minutes long, we get them reading some text, and talking about what they're going to see.

EH: Yeah. I know you'd mentioned specifically, or you mentioned the study guide for *Merchant of Venice*, from a past production, and I looked at that online, and it seemed like it talked a lot about researching the history of the Jewish people in England during the Elizabethan times, and I was wondering if you could talk a little more about the work that went along with that production, or any past production, in terms of Prologues, study guide, and if there were any workshops that went with that.

CA: There wasn't a specific *Merchant of Venice* workshop, because it was a summer show, and so not a lot of kids saw it. But there was a Prologue that we did, and that focused on—that was an interesting—the production itself needed a lot of talking to, because it was one of those where we had elements that were very contemporary and elements that were very, very Elizabethan, and so it was interesting to see how those things worked side by side, so we had to talk a little bit about that, but the things that we talk about for that play—we talk about family, we talk about pride, we talk about, love, and again, money, what is money in that world? And status—status was very important in that play, and so those were the things that we explored in that prologue, because they were so important to the production. I'm trying to remember if we did—the study guides are fun, because we get to come to them every time a Shakespeare play comes back, so I just did the update of the *Much Ado* Prologue for this year. And it was great to sort of go, "Oh, wow, the previous production was set during World War II, and so there was all of this research—'Research Italy during World War II,' that kind of stuff, which we don't need now. This is going to be a very contemporary American-feeling production, so we could lose all of that. We could lose all of the, 'What is screwball comedy?' because they wanted to really have Beatrice and Benedick be like Kate Hepburn and Cary Grant, that was sort of their template for that one. This is not the case, right. So now we can look at other fun things." There was a lot less production-specific on this study guide and much more just the themes of the play, you know—"What is the definition of 'betrayal,'" and then a post-question of "Who is betrayed? In what ways are people betrayed? In what ways do people react when they are betrayed?" But that—betrayal, deceit, disguise, in *Merchant of Venice*, all of those things become really important—to anything that the kids get beforehand. When we did that last, we didn't have anything in the workshops for them, because it was a summer show, and

we focus more on the things that run all year. And that year, it was—*Pride and Prejudice* was that year, and *Hamlet*— that was a *Hamlet* year, so we had a whole *Hamlet* workshop, and then the other workshop was a more—what was that one, God, it was so long ago. It was one of, sort of those golden key workshops.

EH: Okay. So, I know you mentioned that there's—a school might come to *Romeo and Juliet*, *Streetcar*, and *Taming of the Shrew*, and then get a workshop afterwards. If that was the case, how would you create a workshop thematically linking all of those things, or, would it link those things, or would it—what would happen?

CA: Last year was—it wasn't status last year, because we did *Taming of the Shrew* the same year—oh, it was status. We did *Taming of the Shrew* the same year we did *Streetcar Named Desire*, and there was one other one where it was super complicated, it's like, "Oh my gosh, what are we saying about women this year?" *Cymbeline*. And so all of those were in the same year, and that was the year we did—I think it was status, and we looked at the status of characters throughout all of the plays, and so—because we did something really cool—yeah! Okay, so that was a status workshop, we did a ton of, you know, the card game exercises—(*mimes holding a card to forehead*)—but we could then talk about the card games. We looked at "What does it mean to have a status that everyone else knows that you don't? What does it mean to have a status that you know that nobody else knows, and then what does it mean to have two? Something that you believe you are, and something that people perceive you as?" Which was really cool to look at all of those plays, and look at those women—"What does Kate think the—how does she think the world sees her? What does she feel about herself?" Same thing with Stella, right—"How are these women perceived, how are they treated," but then also "What is the value that they give themselves?" Looking at Stanley and Petruchio is fascinating, it was just such a really interesting year for those kinds of, in a way, machismo men, and how they function in these worlds in different times. We included, in that workshop, an archetype exercise, in which we looked at the archetype of the leader, or the king, the archetype of a protector, a nurturer, and then the archetype of the defender, and so, sort of looking at how you can see those archetypes in individual characters, but how a more complicated character could contain all of those. And so we gave students speeches from the plays. So there was this Stanley speech, there was a Bianca speech, we looked at Bianca for that, to see which elements of these archetypes are contained in these more complicated characters, and it was really fun to watch kids go, "Oh, wow, Bianca does a lot of defending. Bianca can be a leader, I didn't think that." Or, "Stanley has one moment where he's kind of a fool, where he's a little goofy and he tells a joke, but the rest of the time he wants to be the leader," and then, you know, "What's the shift in that?" We also gave them, in that same exercise, "Now, imagine that they have an internal and an external status. How can you show those in this group exercise that we're doing?" So when we looked at those plays in conversation, that was how we did it. We did it through status that year, which was really neat.

EH: Yeah, that sounds really, really cool, and I'm curious, I guess—especially for that one, my question was sort of generally about challenging themes, but it seems like that's a workshop and underlying theme that is challenging, because there's such complicated and difficult situations with the women in the play and other characters, and I'm curious just how students responded to dealing with that kind of complex theme. How did they grapple with that kind of thematic work that you were doing with them?

CA: I think the goal of all of our workshops is always to find out how these plays relate to them. And so, in especially those workshops that are more theme-based—so we're not just doing *The Tempest* workshop, which looks at the themes of *The Tempest*, but now we're looking at, "Here's a big theme, and how can you find it in all of the plays that we're doing this year." When you look at status, suddenly you get kids who are actually—they know what that is, because they deal with it on a daily basis. And it's really great to be able to say, "All right, so we've just done an exercise in which this is the way you're perceived, this is the way you believe you are," right, so, "I feel like I'm a king on the outside, but everyone was treating me like a two, gosh, that felt weird. Have you seen that happen before in your own life? Can you relate to that? Now let's look at our plays. Is there a character who does feel that way," right? "Is there a character who believes they are everything, but are treated like they are an absolute second-class citizen?" "Oh, wow, well, in *Lear*, you know, King Lear feels this way about himself, but all of his daughters keep putting him down, keep putting him down, you know, he believes he's still a king, but they're treating him like a child." "Yes, that's so interesting." And so that they can see that their own experiences with something like status are reflected on the stages. And they can get really personal, and I think there are some kids who are totally willing to go there, and then there are times where that's just not what it is, it's more about, "We're going to explore the work on the stages, I recognize, you know—we see that, we see it in the hallways," you must, you're in high school, you know, (*laughs*) "and that somebody who's a king one day suddenly can become a two the next day. How does that happen? Well, look how it happens in *King Lear*. Look how it happens to Stanley, look how it happens to Blanche," you know, that we can talk about those journeys in a personal way and in a way that's theatrical. But it can become very profound. We did a mask workshop one year, and I always find that one to be—I've done it twice now, these workshops come back every five years or so, if they're good ones, and the mask workshop is so great, because we can look at these characters in these plays and find out, "What are they covering up? What is the face they want to show to the world around them, and then when are the moments where we actually get to see the mask fall, what does that do?" And they get to create these little goofy paper masks. We give them a sheet of white paper and just their fingers, right, you have to be able to tear, rip, bend, whatever, create your own mask. And then (*connection cut out*) that for the whole workshop, and we explore moments of, "Here's what it is to confront somebody with a mask, here's what it is to back away, here's what happens when two people look at each other and see who they really are. All right, where did you see that in a play? Do you know of—does that happen in

real life?" You know (*laughs*) those kinds of questions, and then they go, "Oh, yeah." Right? This is such a universal experience, and it can become—there are those groups that come here, the seventh grade class that's been together since they were five years old, and suddenly they're actually willing to share those things, and they're all going, "Yeah, I agree with that, I agree with that," and "Oh my gosh, it happened to Juliet too," you know. And those are the juicy moments, that's why I want to teach.

EH: Yeah. That's really cool, because I feel like so much of the thematic stuff is about—things that get them excited is connecting to what they actually know. And my last question—this is kind of a big question, but I'm just curious, because I think something that I struggle with in thinking about dealing with the really complicated themes that come up in some of the plays, and some of the problematic themes, is concern about encountering a difficult moment that I don't know how to deal with necessarily, if a student is really profoundly affected by something. And I'm wondering if that experience has come up or that question has come up, or if it hasn't necessarily gone there.

CA: I think any time you're dealing with theatre, that's such a real possibility. And I've had a handful of those, and the one that comes to mind right away is, we did, the Hudes play last year, *Water by the Spoonful*. And I was talking to a group of kids, and I said, "There are a lot of themes in here surrounding family, particularly mothers. And the relationship of mother to child becomes really important, and so you look in this play, there's a character named Haiku Mom. Who does she mother, who does she not mother? Here's a boy who doesn't know his mom, and there's one person that he talks about who was like his mom, who should be like—" you know, these questions that we ask, "Who should be his mom, who does he have that connection to, who does he not? These are things you're going to look for." This boy came up to me afterward, and he said "You said that there's a lot of stuff about moms in here." And I said, "Yeah. And it is something to really watch for, it resonates through the whole play, through every character, the idea of a parent-child relationship is really important." He goes, "Is it okay if I have to leave the theatre?" And I said, "For what reason?" And he said, "Well, I mean, if I should become emotional, is it okay if I get up and go?" And I said, "You know what, it absolutely is. And if you feel like these themes could result in some kind of a response where you need a moment for yourself, make sure that you switch seats and you're sitting on an aisle, so that it's not at all disruptive to the people around you—" Because we have to also teach how to be a good audience member—"but also I would challenge you to actually keep watching what happens. Because if you walk away when it gets hardest, you might not see the payoff. You might not see where this is going that could teach you something. If this is something that you actually have in your own life, sometimes when confronted with something, you could look at it. And here are other people that are going to let you look at it. You don't have to be them up there. You can watch how other people deal with it. And maybe you could learn something about your own situation," I said, "But also, you need to feel safe. So if you have to go, you

tell a teacher, and you can go ahead and exit. Do whatever you need." And I found his chaperone the next day, and I said, "I just want to check in, because I know you guys saw the play last night, and there was a boy who came up to me afterward and he asked me this question, and I just want to know what happened." She said, "He was so emotional through the whole play that he was crying, but he stayed there, and he watched it. And afterward—he really loved the play." And she said, "This is not a kid who goes to the theatre," right? I mean these are kids who probably don't even get to go see movies, you know, unless it's at home and somebody's rented a movie from Redbox. He did it and he made it through, and she said it was very profound for him. And she said, "He's been very quiet today, because he had this—" and he had this experience in a room with other people. I mean, can you imagine how terrifying that is? But he did it, you know? And I said, "Well, just, please let him know if he sees me he can talk to me, and if you see him, tell him I'm proud of him that he did it." And I didn't see him again the rest of the time that he was there, but I was like, that's really—there is magic to what we do, and there is a value to it, and I think for that boy, in that moment—here he is, dealing with a theme that exists in his own life, and he got to experience that in a way that nobody else in that room did. So, it can happen. And we leave the space for it, and also we have total permission to say, "Wow, I don't deal with you on a day-to-day basis, let's talk right now, and then I want to include your teacher in this conversation, so that it can keep going, and that you don't feel cut off, but at some point, I'm going to have to leave the room, you're going to have to drive 3 hours back to Eugene, (*laughs*) and then, and that we can't really continue the conversation—we can do it right here, but, but let's make sure we include your teacher in on this, or a friend in some way, so that it doesn't just end here."

EH: Wow. That's a really powerful story.

CA: It was a cool, cool moment. He was just so dear. It was exciting.

EH: That's wonderful. Well, I think that is the end of my questions (*laughs*) for you. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me.

CA: Sure.

EH: It was so helpful, I really, really appreciate it.

CA: Have a great day.

EH: Thank you, you too. Bye.

CA: Bye.

Chris Anthony 2015
Interview with the author via FaceTime
16 Dec.

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): I know there were two sets of productions that we'd talked about over the phone. There was the *Merchant* that Ben Donenberg adapted and directed, and then the Will Power to Youth productions that have been done.

Chris Anthony (CA): Yes.

EH: I was wondering if we could talk a little bit about the one that Ben Donenberg directed, and then the Will Power to Youth productions, if that's all right. You both mentioned that part of that production that Ben Donenberg directed and adapted involved you interviewing students afterwards, for some of their takeaways and how they received the production?

CA: Yes

EH: And I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit about that, and what kinds of responses you saw from students.

CA: Right, so, just to frame it for a second, every student who came to see the play had a pre-show workshop, with a teaching artist in their classroom. So the post-show conversations were really following up from some of the questions that we asked in the pre-show. There were things that we asked them to look for: look for this symbol, what does it mean, and that kind of thing. So, in the pre-show workshop, we made a point to introduce the Star of David, as a symbol of Judaism, because the production hinged on that symbol signifying to the Crypto-Jews who was and who wasn't Jewish. So in the post-show discussion, part of the conversation was about—how do you know who's in and who's out? How do you know who's with you or not with you, and what does it all mean. So, for the students that we work with, who are primarily LAUSD students, so they're going to LA public schools in Central, or, well, what is called Midtown LA now, East LA, and South LA. And, so it's a largely Latino group. Mostly they don't know anybody Jewish. They have a vague notion of what Jewish is, so a lot of the conversation and a lot of the taking away was about whether or not it was right to take Shylock's religion away from him. That was a really big conversation, but if Portia is Crypto-Jewish, if she's just passing as Christian, what does that mean, then? Did they really take it away—so there was a lot of conversation about that. But a lot of our students know people who don't have papers to work. Or, who are not, for lack of a better term, legally in this country. There is some level of difficulty there. So, when I was working on the post-show, this idea of religion, for a lot of our students is actually fairly abstract. A lot of our students either come from really religious families, there's a huge Born Again Christian population among Latinos in LA, or there's a big Roman Catholic population. But a lot of students are really questioning this idea of religion, and

don't really have a lot of heat around it. But when I asked the question, as in Queen Elizabeth's England, what does it mean when it's illegal to be who you are, that question resonates very differently. So, if it is illegal for Shylock to be Jewish, if the court takes away his religion, what choices are left to him? What kind of hiding happens when it's illegal to be who you are? What are you willing to tell people or not tell people? So there was conversation around that, that I feel helped students connect with this idea of religious discrimination in Renaissance Europe, and with this idea of having something torn away. Because a lot of them have families that are divided, or family members who can't work, or whatever. So, that was a lot of the conversations in the post-show.

EH: Sort of jumping back to the pre-show work, you mentioned the Star of David as something that was really big. Were there any other symbols or choices that were covered in the pre-show workshop, or—could you just speak, I guess, a little more generally about what the pre-show workshops were for students.

CA: The pre-show workshops really covered the plot and the characters, and so it was really a roadmap, like, this is what you're going to see. (*laughs*) This is who these people are. This idea that Portia doesn't have a choice about her husband is a very odd thing, and sort of being chosen by lottery (*laughs*), or chosen by a test is—it's an odd thing. They were really into it, the students, actually, for the most part, really embraced it. I did several of the workshops myself, and, they were into it. You know, the business of Venice is business. (*laughs*) Just like the business of America is business. So there was a lot of conversation about that, about what it is to be a merchant, about what it is to have to borrow money, and what does it mean for Antonio to go to Shylock and borrow money. What does it mean for Shylock to go to his friend and borrow money? Yeah, so mostly it was plot and characters. A little bit of the idea that not everybody's religion was legal, you know. Kids here don't have that idea that the state could tell you what your religion has to be, or the state tells you you have to go to church. So we covered all of that in the pre-show workshop.

EH: Okay. And was that mostly discussion, was there writing, or activities, or was it mostly just discussing with the students?

CA: We did some getting up on our feet and speaking text. And we did sort of an interactive get everybody on their feet and assign characters, and make little mini-tableaus, really quickly, and that kind of stuff to convey the plot. And then the religious parts were—the thematic parts were generally "We're running out of time, we've just gotta talk" (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) Okay, so, on your feet stuff more for the plot, and then discussion for the thematic stuff? Generally?

CA: Yes.

EH: Okay, cool, and then, I think I got a sense of this when we spoke on the phone before, but I just kind of wanted to follow up. In terms of the production being given for a lot of high school audiences, I know Ben had mentioned that part of that was because he had this totally new concept and wanted a lot of audiences who hadn't been exposed to the show, necessarily, before. In terms of adapting for a younger age group, was there anything else that was taken into consideration, or was it mostly just this concept of Crypto-Judaism?

CA: You know, I think that there was an acknowledgment of audience participation, and so Lancelot Gobbo got kids up onstage, and there was the fiend, and there was the angel (*EH laughs*), and so there were those elements in play. I think the choices about the three suitors, about, well, Morocco and Aragon, I think were played very broadly, I think played more for laughs. And I think that was part of the consideration of a younger audience. But I think in terms of the rest of the production, though—those were the main production choices, I would say, that might have been different if there were going to be no student audiences.

EH: Okay. And just to clarify, it was primarily student audiences with some public performances, yeah?

CA: There was one public performance.

EH: One public performance—okay. All right. So moving on, I guess, to the Will Power to Youth program—and thank you so much for sending that manual, because that—was really helpful to get, just a sense of the overall program. So, speaking about—it sounds like *Merchant of Venice* was done—you've done that play a couple times, a few times, recently?

CA: We did it once—and I'm trying to remember if that was the year that Michael worked with us—no, I think he worked with us before that. We did it once in 2000, as part of a community arts camp program, and so we took 40 kids away for a week to write two new plays. They were in two groups of 20, and one wrote a play about justice and fairness, and one wrote a play about money and power. Actually, one wrote an opera, as I recall. (*EH and CA laugh*) Of the neighborhood.

EH: Cool

CA: Yeah, so that was a theme-based exploration. And then, interestingly, in 2003, we did two productions—we spent the year looking at *Merchant of Venice* and in the spring, we were working with students who were off-track. At that time, LAUSD schools worked on three cycles, three tracks, so there was always someone in school and someone off, and so there was a—B-track group was always out of school in March and April. That was like their summer break (*laughs*). Actually, kids didn't have one summer break, they had two breaks. So there was one in March and April, and then there was one in, like, October-November or something. And so, the B-

track group started working in March of 2003, which was the run-up to the Iraq War. And so we did an adaptation in the spring that was really a reflection of their thoughts about justice and fairness and race. And they made Shylock Muslim in that production. So, in the Will Power productions, students participate in devising the concept. And so the staff begins with questions, and then the youth answer those questions and then we work to create their play. So, in the spring, there was a—yeah,, they created a character who had been blacklisted during the McCarthy Era, and he was trying to make a comeback and so he created a reality show, "Who Wants to Marry My Granddaughter?" So the Portia story got wrapped up in reality TV game show world. And Shylock was a Muslim shopkeeper, a Muslim businessman, whose daughter ran away, and the whole thing. But, so, the plot was pretty much intact, but the form of it was really different, and there was this very looming presence of war. And we actually had a student in that session who had just signed up for the military, and was about to enter and go to basic training and probably be deployed, so that was (*laughs*) all in there too. And then, that summer we did Reflections—we happened to have had a large group of returning students that summer, and so we tried something a little different, and we wrote three new plays, three short plays. One about race, one about religion, and one about power. And we did scenes from *Merchant of Venice*, and then did the new play. So the, the Shakespeare play sort of introduced the new play.

EH: Okay. So it sounds like there's been three, sort of, iterations on *Merchant of Venice* in the Will Power to Youth recently, between the 2000, and then the two 2003 versions.

CA: Mm hmm

EH: Other than the summer one, using the scenes, did either of the other two use the text specifically of *Merchant*, or were those two written based on the themes?

CA: They did use the text of *Merchant*. The first one—even when we adapt, we always weave text into it.

EH: Okay

CA: But, they were pretty full—at that time, we were doing more complete adaptations. So, we were paraphrasing a lot of the Shakespeare in the camp program. In the spring of '03—I think there were chunks of scenes that were intact, but not the whole thing.

EH: Okay. Just to ask a more general, broad question about the Will Power to Youth program—I got a lot of information from the manual, but I'm just curious, in terms of how students are chosen for the program—you mentioned that you had a lot of returning students for the one in summer of 2003, so I was just wondering if you could talk a little more about how students apply and are chosen and become a part

of the program.

CA: Yes. So Will Power to Youth is a summer job, which makes it really expensive (*laughs*) and so at different points in our history we have had different collaborations with the Work Force Investment Act system, which is the federal system for summer job money, basically. And it goes through different iterations, it goes in block grants to the states, and then local, and so that has been one of our partners in providing wages to youth. And, so, there are various requirements around residency, around age—those fluctuations have influenced who comes into the program and who doesn't. So for instance, I think that year, when we had a lot of youth leaders, we were able to hire a lot of youth leaders (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) Okay

CA: I don't remember—there was something—it might have been that they had to be a certain age. I can't remember what it was, but we were able to bring back an extraordinary number of returning students, and that number varies from time to time. Fast forward to now, 2014, that money is more and more limited to the most underserved youth. And so we're talking disconnected youth, who are—the broadest definition of that category is 16 to 24, but generally for us, we're asked to serve youth 18 to 21, who are out of work and out of school, but gonna get back in by the reporting deadline. So, it's a very narrow band, and this last summer, 2013, was the first year that we did not have wages supplemented by one of these programs. So, when we are working with a city contract, there are residency and age and income requirements. So that has an influence on who we bring into the program. But when we don't, we are generally working with youth in our neighborhood. We're on the west side of downtown LA, so we're in the middle—our building is actually located within a mile of five high schools, there's over 8,000 students within a mile of our building. And they pass by, so we just put a sign on the fence (*laughs, EH laughs*) and say, "We have summer jobs," and we get—I think last year we got 95 applications for 30 jobs.

EH: Wow

CA: Yeah. So we're looking for people who are willing to try something new. We're looking for kids who seem mature enough to be able to talk about themes. And it just so happens that they generally live at the poverty level. And they're generally contending with all kinds of things. There's been a study in our neighborhood, at one of the schools that estimates that somewhere around 40%, or 45% of our students have PTSD in the clinical range.

EH: Wow

CA: Yeah. One year we did *Romeo and Juliet*, as a play about violence and alternatives to violence, and one of the students said, "A day without violence?"

That's like, a day without clothes, it doesn't happen." (*laughs*) We've got all those things happening as well.

EH: Yeah. Going off of that, I know that one of the elements of the program is that there are facilitators there, and a facilitation director, and I'm wondering if you can just talk more about sort of the role—because I'm looking at exploring difficult themes with youth in theatre, I'd love to know more about how the facilitation works, what kinds of things facilitators might do.

CA: Right. So, the facilitation director is in charge of community building. And their job is to help form what we think of as the human relations arc. So, the job of adolescence—I think Vygotsky said, "The task of adolescence is learning to control one's will."⁸⁹ And in order to do that, you have to have a clear sense of self. We know that we're working with adolescents and that identity development is a big part of that job. And so the facilitation director works with the program director, the staff, to craft a series of questions that we're going to pursue throughout the summer, that are attached thematically to the text, or attached somehow to the play. And we are going to basically ask the question "Who are you", "What are the messages you get about who you are," "How do you feel about those messages," and "Who do you want to be". And that's the basic frame. And the facilitation director has—the first couple weeks of the program are heavy facilitation, front-loaded, at the top, because a lot of that is used for text generation, and the playwright needs—and the writing team need to have that information. When we started, and when we wrote that manual, facilitators were more likely to be only facilitators. Now, the teaching artists are the facilitators, as well. So, there's a facilitation director, who really does that job, and then we have a social worker, who's a therapist (*laughs*), is a professional, and we have dialogue groups, and the dialogue groups are led by mentor artists. So, when we tackle a difficult topic—I mean, adolescence is difficult, so when you start digging in, you start digging in, right? But if we're looking at something like gender identity, then we'll have a series of questions, and we'll have lots of dialogue group opportunities, so that youth are asked a question in some—they're generally interactive. Michael Rohd does a lot of this kind of stuff, I think Cornerstone calls it social mapping—go stand under the sign that represents your answer, or that kind of stuff. Or we may have something that's a more artistic. So, if we just talk about gender and gender roles, we might actually start by asking everybody to walk around the room, and walk like a man. Walk like a girly girl. Something that hits it really quick, and then leads into dialogue. We'll do a lot of storytelling—tell a story about a time when somebody assumed something about you, or tell a story about a time when you had to make a difficult choice. And then that storytelling moves in to some sort of tableau or image work, and then we pull out a conversation from there. Or we borrow from Boal, and we'll start a scene, and then we'll stop it, interrupt it,

⁸⁹ I have not found a definite citation for this quote; the closest I can find is Erik Erikson's identification of adolescence as a time of "identity vs. role confusion," which fits with Will Power to Youth's commitment to exploring identity with young participants (Erikson 261-263).

rework it, something like that. And so, often we'll have an experiential exercise, and then there's going to be some writing. So we'll do this thing, tell a story about this time, make some images about it, then write about it, and then go to dialogue group and talk about it.

EH: Cool. This may be a very big question, but—so, as part of my dissertation, like I mentioned, I'm looking at specific plays with difficult themes, but it sounds like, no matter what play Will Power to Youth is focusing on, there are challenging things to explore, and I'm wondering if you've found that, in a play like *Merchant of Venice*, where there are issues of discrimination, or *Taming of the Shrew* where there's gender violence and discrimination—do those tend to be more difficult to explore, or is it just difficulty in different areas depending on the play?

CA: It's just difficulty in different areas. I mean, I wouldn't say in the hierarchy of difficulty, any one is more difficult than another. Let me think about that—there are some things that are more or less complicated to talk about. So, for instance, if we're looking at race, and we—so, when we did a play about race, in *Merchant of Venice*, it was an intra-ethnic conflict that they wrote about. They wrote about the conflict between Mexicans and Salvadorans, because that was how race played for them. In the last few years, we have looked more intently at some of the things that we want them to look at, so for instance, last year we did *Pericles* as a play about resiliency, and what makes you resilient, and what are the storms in your life that, like *Pericles*, you get tossed around by, so, really the difficulty is in framing the question. The difficulty is in figuring out how we're going to approach and connect that exploration with the play itself. That's probably the hardest part. I think once we get going, it tends to follow the same sort of rhythm.

EH: My last big question is really about the audiences and who the Will Power to Youth productions are aimed at. I know we talked a little bit about it on the phone, but I know, in the brochure, you mention audience outcomes, and I'm wondering if those are for all audiences, or if there's a younger audience component, teen audience.

CA: There have been times when we specifically brought—well, not when we specifically—but when we were working with teachers, or teachers wanted to bring a student audience, but that has not necessarily been the case lately. We do not have specific outcomes that we're looking for with young audiences, but that's just part of the process, because we're really playing for family audiences. A lot of family, a lot of friends, and, really, the scariest thing for them is to perform for their peers.

EH: Yeah, I can imagine.

CA: So, that being said (*laughs, EH laughs*), there is an awareness, I think, when we do Will Power, that we are working with, or playing for audiences who are not the typical theatergoing audience, but I think more and more, we have had peers in the

audience. More and more they're inviting their friends, and they are really aware—like, last year, we did *Hamlet 2K14*, this past summer, and it was exploring community and connection. And in the Shakespeare play, Hamlet doesn't get a lot of that, (*laughs*) but they were exploring what would that look like in 2014. And so there were all these—like, Hamlet's poem was an emoji poem, and we projected it on the screen, and Hamlet had fans, and he was a YouTube sensation, and "Too, too solid flesh" went viral (*EH laughs*). So there were lots of interesting things like that, that were definitely connecting to a younger audience, and presumed a certain thing, but really connected to everybody. So yeah, I don't think that there's necessarily a prep. Whenever we know we're going to have a young audience, we try and prep them for the experience with some sort of pre-show something. We have people—we bring in translators, who will simultaneously translate the play into Spanish.

EH: Oh, cool

CA: And what else—I'm trying to think if there's anything else. I think that's about it, though, in terms of specific prep for young audiences. I think that we—we'll put special notes in the program and the writing team will often make an adjustment of some sort—not an adjustment, but they'll make a lobby display, or—we sometimes have an altar in the lobby, or we'll have something that helps the audience connect to the themes, or explains some obscure part of the plot (*laughs*). Or something like that.

EH: I had also just wanted to ask you a bit more about the pre-show workshop stuff, just because you'd mentioned for the *Merchant* directed by Ben Donenberg that that involved some on your feet stuff to explore plot, and then a lot of discussion of themes?

CA: Yes.

EH: And is that generally the same idea of what you do for Will Power to Youth, when there's some sort of pre-show component for a younger audience?

CA: Yes. Same thing. Same idea.

EH: Wonderful. I just had one last question, and it's, I guess, another broader question. Because it sounds like a lot of what Will Power to Youth does is exploring themes that are relevant to the students that are working as part of the program, and then creating theatre around it, and I'm wondering if you can speak a little bit about why you feel Shakespeare's especially useful for that. Because I know the brochure talks about, "If students can do Shakespeare, they can do anything," which is definitely true, but I'm just wondering if you can talk a little more about why

Shakespeare is especially important or useful or valuable for that.

CA: Well, yeah. For one thing, Shakespeare's just really rich, and so, a lot of the value is in engaging with poetry, with classical text. We do it because we love it (*EH laughs*), and we (*laughs*) appreciate the richness in the language, and the timelessness of the situation. There's something really human about, you know, Jessica's really upset with her father. That sort of crosses time and space. And sadly, you know, this idea of discrimination is still with us. So Shakespeare is very present for us. And because Shakespeare is very present and because it's timeless and universal, and all those things that people love about it, it offers us an opportunity to position students within a continuum. So what we're saying when we adapt Shakespeare is that you are taking your place in this lineage of storytellers. Shakespeare borrowed from mythology, and the Bible, and he found his stories, and embellished and worked from there, so now you can have your story, and add it to this heritage of the great storytellers. So there's something about being able to add your voice to this continuum, that is very empowering. And our goal is really youth empowerment—helping young people feel like they know what they have to say, and they know how to say it. So, that's why we adapt the Shakespeare. Now we are more likely to do an adaptation that's about three quarters Shakespeare text, one quarter new text. We don't really do the full adaptations so much anymore, for logistical reasons (*EH laughs, CA laughs*), it's just easier, but also it gives them an opportunity to perform more Shakespeare, which very few of them have ever done. Very few of them have actually performed onstage when they come to us.

EH: Wow

CA: Yeah. And then the last piece of it is that we do Shakespeare because it's hard.

EH: Yeah (*laughs*)

CA: (*laughs*) It's work, and part of what we are hoping that students come away with is this sense of process. A lot of education is really positioned as something for the smart kids, like, you're smart or you're not, and if you don't get it, you just don't get it and it's not for you, and you should go do something else. And so this idea of effort-based outcomes (*laughs, EH laughs*), this idea that you can actually work for something and make it happen, and one of the lessons that we want to—or, not lessons that we want to teach, but part of the experience that we want students to have is this experience of community, what is it like to be in a group of people who are all pulling for the same goal, who are all committed to each other. A lot of times in overcrowded urban schools—well, not just overcrowded urban schools, but a lot of the skills that keep you safe and make you successful in one environment are not the skills that are going to keep you safe and make you successful somewhere else. So, the ability to work by yourself and ignore other people is sometimes really, really useful. But it's not necessarily (*laughs*) going to get you ahead in the 21st century workplace.

EH: Right (*laughs*).

CA: I mean, that's just what it is. So being able to model among the staff what it is to work together collaboratively, having things like dialogue group and a facilitation director, and people who are really just about being there for you, it doesn't necessarily have to be about the job or the play, it could be that, you know, my brother (*phone cut out*) really getting a hard time, and just having somebody to talk to is a really amazing experience. And at the end of the Will Power to Youth program, they speak to the audience, they have a conversation with the audience. And very often, that's what they talk about—"We didn't know each other, and now (*laughs*) this is my family", you know, and it's stuff that you hear no matter where you go. I go see a lot of youth theatre, and that is a common refrain, but it's a really valuable experience. And, so, part of the reason why we use Shakespeare is that it gives us all something to work on. Nobody gets it right away.

EH: Yeah (*laughs*) That is very true. Great, well, thank you so much, I think those are all my questions for now. Thank you again for your help and for your time today.

CA: You're welcome, take care.

EH: You too.

CA: Bye.

EH: Bye.

Julia Ashworth 2015

Interview with the author via phone

13 Apr.

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): Because you are the artistic director of the Young Company, and have a role in season selection, I was curious—when you're selecting plays with challenging themes—because I know you've done *Taming of the Shrew*, and *Merchant of Venice* in the relatively recent past—how do you take those themes into account when you're selecting the season, or how do you think about addressing those themes as a part of the season selection process?

Julia Ashworth (JA): One of the first steps we take is on the theatre side of our department, we have a theatre production committee, and multiple times a year, this committee offers big idea proposal sessions, and so in order to prepare to propose something to go on to the season that we're looking at, the individual pitching or proposing a production has to be able to contextualize it for that production audience, or whatever other kinds of contextualization needs that it might have. So we have to answer those questions early on, is the point I'm trying to make there. And because we do two touring shows a year—and I think you know this already—every fall we do something that we call contemporary, which means it's basically not Shakespeare (*laughs, EH laughs*), and then every winter we do an adaptation of a Shakespeare play. And because we do so many a year, the pitches in those big idea meetings are a combination of directors I have asked to pitch, directors who come to me, and then sometimes it's me pitching an idea without a director attached to it yet. But in the pitching of those Shakespeare plays specifically, a lot of that conversation is often about contextualizing that Shakespeare piece, regardless of how complex the theme is, just because it's Shakespeare and Shakespeare's language, contextualizing that production for young audiences. Something that I really value about our department is that we try to have these conversations as collaboratively and as frequently and as early as possible, so that there are many voices and points of view, and some of those voices and points of view are people with a lot of TYA background, and some of those voices are people without a lot of TYA background, but they're very experienced theatre practitioners. And so I think those voices really help us as we try to shape these conversations too. So, in particular, thinking about when *Taming of the Shrew* was first pitched to us, the director, who we did ask to come up with a way to direct this show for young audiences, talked a lot about—and this is one of the beautiful things about adapting Shakespeare is that you can really adapt it (*laughs*) and do anything you want, in terms of copyright. He talked a lot about the visual component, which is always a huge consideration whenever you're doing TYA, as well you know, and how, through the visual component of the main character of Kate, he was going to choose to find visual representations of a strong woman throughout the production, and through the way the production was cut. And I talked to Teresa, but I don't know if you know about her involvement in each of these productions that you're looking at, because she was involved in each of them, to some extent.

EH: Yeah. I know that she adapted *Shrew* and *Merchant*, and then adapted and directed *Cymbeline*, I think.

JA: Yes. Oh, I didn't know you wanted to talk about *Cymbeline*, but that is true. So she adapted *Taming of the Shrew* and *Merchant of Venice*, other people directed them. And the people who directed them don't have a lot of TYA experience, and so her adaptation informed them immensely of that process. But when she adapted *Taming of the Shrew* in particular, she and the director collaborated with that adaptation from the get-go. So his idea of what he wanted to do with it—and one of the great things about having him involved is he's one of our faculty that, oversee our BFA acting program, and so all the cast were from the BFA acting program. So the acting was really strong. Sometimes it can be hard, with our touring shows, to get actors to commit to the whole semester. Of course we have a lot of students in our department who identify as actors who are not being trained in it or are going to do it professionally, and so it's not a matter of trying to find students interested, but sometimes it can be challenging, with really challenging material, to find the most qualified students, if that makes sense.

EH: Yeah. Absolutely.

JA: So with his vision of bringing an actor, particularly who could play that main role, who he felt could communicate all the nonverbal communication that was going to be crucial to his way of telling the story, paired really well with Teresa's vision of adapting the story. And finding a way to tell this really complicated story—not only complex themes, but just a complicated story—to young people. So when that all came out initially in the big idea meeting, it just resonated with everyone in the room. And the room is full of the committee, and also anyone who wants to come. We open the room to students. We love to hear their input, and anyone—sometimes, we just have theatre practitioners or community members, that have some tie-in to our university, but aren't necessarily full or even part time faculty members, who come in and pitch, and so those big idea meetings are really democratic space for voices to be heard and feedback to be given. And those conversations can happen prior to that, as well, in one-on-one meetings with myself or someone else, but I really find that meeting one of the most valuable things we do in terms of finding the best material for our touring productions, and the best way to present those materials to the young audiences. Because one of our goals is to not water down our theatre presentations for these young audiences, and part of the reason we do a Shakespeare play every winter semester, which is January through April, is because in the Utah curriculum, Shakespeare's covered in the upper grades, in 4th and 5th grade, maybe 6th grade too, in those elementary schools. And so we can partner with the schools, and we can help them understand that there are multiple Shakespeare plays that they can expose their students too, as opposed to maybe sticking to just some of the safer ones. So we take, for instance, *Henry V*, which we did a few years ago, and in a couple years we're going to do *Macbeth*, and

we take those shows to schools, and model for them ways to expose young audiences to these really complex pieces of theatre. That's another way we feel like we can serve the community and collaborate with them and their curricular needs. That's why we always do the Shakespeare plays, and that's another reason why we feel like it's really important not to repeat too many Shakespeare plays too frequently, and also not to just stay with the comedies. And frankly, the comedies, if you're really reading the text carefully, have just as many complex themes in them, they're just maybe easier to skip over.

EH: Mm hmm.

JA: And then identifying which shows are actually comedies or not (*laughs, EH laughs*) would be something that's part of the complexity of the process as well. Remind me of your initial question, because I did go in a circle there for a while.

EH: That gave a great answer, it was a lot of detail. I was just asking, when you're selecting those plays like *Shrew* or *Merchant*, that have complex themes, how do you address that in season selection.

JA: Yeah, right, okay. I think in your e-mail that you sent, you said surrounding gender and religion. And, actually—*Taming of the Shrew* was one of the first productions that I supervised and was the faculty advisor for, and it was early on in my involvement, and we did not have the workshop component with that yet, and I really wish that we had. We just hadn't really developed that until the next semester, so we were just kind of a semester short on that, because that would have given the actors the opportunity, and teachers, to defuse those complex themes around gender even more.

EH: Right.

JA: Although I think their adaptation of it did a really nice job. The visual components of the set also played a role in that. There were a lot of visual images and words on the backdrop that helped guide the students who were watching the show through the storyline. So, by the time we got to *Merchant of Venice*—I think you already know some of this—we coupled it that year with *The Hundred Dresses*. Those were our two touring shows that year, and our goal was to address similar themes of bullies and bullying in both those productions and the workshop. So we really started to fine-tune how we go about addressing some of these things, because of that experience.

EH: Okay.

JA: Are you familiar with the adaptation that Teresa made of *Merchant of Venice*?

EH: I have the *Merchant of Venice* adaptation, so I've read that, and I read a couple online reviews from theatre blogs around Brigham Young that talked about involving the kids and using kids to play Nerissa and Gratiano, and using that kind of participation as a part of the adaptation.

JA: Yeah. Okay. Because I know one of the things you asked about was how we addressed the complex theme of religion, and in that adaptation she skewed the focus of religion into dominant and other culture, so I don't know if you wanted to talk about that anymore.

EH: Yeah. One thing that I was curious about, because I know when we've done, at OSU, plays for young audiences, the teachers that it's being brought to or that are bringing their students usually have questions. Like when we did *Taming of the Shrew*, there were questions about gender, and about those themes, and so I'm wondering, when those plays were chosen, *Taming of the Shrew* and *Merchant of Venice*, what the response was from teachers, if they had questions, or any concerns about their students seeing those specific shows, or how to prep their students.

JA: Yeah. I'm trying to remember what, if any, feedback we got in that matter. Something else that our department does, through our dramaturgy, is provide the teachers with resource guides, to guide them through the production that's going to be coming to their school. And so that might preempt a lot of their questions, or answer some of them for them. Obviously, it doesn't answer every question they might possibly have, but that might be a reason why we don't get—I just don't remember getting a lot of questions like that, even though I remember wondering how audiences would react because when we do the performance on campus, it's usually parents bringing their children, and then when we do it in the schools, it's usually teachers bringing their students to a cafetorium. When you come to the campus performance, there's also an opportunity to read a lot of that same material from the teacher's resource guide in the program that comes through the dramaturg's section; there's a study guide in the middle of the program. So I'm just kind of thinking about that right now, wondering why I haven't heard a lot of feedback like that. I'm trying to think if this is the best way to word this—I don't know if this is in the particular community that surrounds this university, or this is an American culture thing, or neither, but I've noticed, because this is a very conservative community, and a conservative University, frankly, and we're often finding ourselves with conflicts from audience members, and questions and concerns with content. Even after we've tried to address it in many different ways. And almost hardly ever do we get that kind of feedback with Shakespeare. I think there's a little bit of a blind eye, or a little bit of a blind faith that because it's Shakespeare, that it's embedded, so it's something that people have less questions and concerns about, even though, as I mentioned earlier, there are just as many complex themes and ideas and content matter in Shakespeare as in any theatre production. The Utah community in general worships at the feet of William Shakespeare in a way that's really interesting. It comes out, in part, of how well-

supported the Utah Shakespeare Festival is, that's three hours away from here. There have been times when I have gone down to the Festival, and done workshops with classroom teachers on how to use process drama activities to teach Shakespeare in their English classrooms, or something like that. And I have been surprised at the resistance I've got when I try to bring up problems in the scripts. Problems with the plot, problems with the characters, problems with representations of different people and cultures, because a lot of the teachers just simply, they just love Shakespeare, and there's a little bit of a blind eye there. Is what I'm explaining something you've ever experienced in any other community, or culture?

EH: I think what I've seen from the research that I've done, and the people that I've talked to is not quite that, but close to that. I think there's sometimes been, in Shakespeare for young audiences, or for anyone, a distancing, almost, a sense that it may be problematic, but it happened a long time ago, and so we don't have to worry as much about it, because it was just what his culture was like then, and so we don't really have to worry about the fact that it's a problem or that it's challenging, or that it's complicated, because it's done. It's like a piece of history.

JA: And that's definitely true. It's just that there's a slightly added component, and my interpretation is because it's—this comes from a fairly conservative viewpoint—is that also because it's so distant, and was written so long ago, that the content isn't problematic or offensive.

EH: Yes. Yeah, I think there's sometimes an out in that, because it was written so long ago, it can't be offensive, because it was four hundred years ago.

JA: Yeah. So, because on our mainstage, we do full Shakespeare productions for adult audiences as well, and (*laughs*) we just don't have a lot of audience members concerned about content for our Shakespeare plays. It doesn't mean we, as theatre faculty and practitioners, are not highly concerned about some of the content, and so we try to take care of that content and our audience members. I'm worried that I've kind of thrown my whole community under the bus, and painted all the teachers as naïve, and that is not what I'm trying to do at all.

EH: Yeah.

JA: Your question actually just surprised me a little bit, and I'm trying to think through that. I mean, we do sometimes acknowledge, as a theatre department, that in general, the concerned feedback we get from audience members will probably never come from a Shakespeare play, because they just let it go.

EH: Yes. Yeah.

JA: Because we do get feedback on shows we do. And on Young Company shows we

do as well. Even in *The Hundred Dresses*—do you know that script?

EH: I know the story vaguely, from reading it when I was younger.

JA: I'm probably going off on a tangent, and let me know if I am.

EH: (*laughs*) That's fine.

JA: But this is interesting—we did Mary Surface Hall's adaptation of it, and I'm pretty sure it came out of Seattle Children's Theatre, and it was probably a 90-minute production, and our touring productions are 45-50 minutes long. And so our production guy wrote the publisher, and said, "Can we get permission to cut this, for a tour?" And they replied back and said, "Yes," because Harold Oaks is the one who originated this program, and you probably have come across his name at some point, and so a lot of people know him, all over the world, and Mary Surface Hall said, "Well any program that's associated with him, I trust what they'll do with the script. So you can do whatever you want," and I thought, "Well, that—I can't"—I was flabbergasted. So one of our students really cut it, and the Pledge of Allegiance is in it, and at the time of the play, in the Pledge of Allegiance, they did not say "under God." That was added in the 60s. And we have a Facebook page where people comment, and so this little group of citizens, concerned that we had taken God out of the Pledge of Allegiance, popped up. And we definitely got feedback on that. And I thought, "Oh my—" And I just refused to engage, I couldn't take it, I just couldn't even take it (*laughs*). But it was a thing. Anyhow, so we do get feedback, and people are concerned about content, but Shakespeare just has a pass, sometimes. And I totally trust elementary school teachers to know what to do with Shakespeare content in a classroom, but I think sometimes they don't choose some of his scripts, because they don't know what to do. And so hopefully, we're helping them explore ways they can choose some more of his really complicated and complex scripts. So there's my long, roundabout answer (*laughs*).

EH: Yeah. And I think it happens here too, because I'm just remembering, we've done a ton of Shakespeare in Ohio State, because we have a partnership with Royal Shakespeare Company, and just thinking back on it, I know content wise, we had a lot of teachers who were concerned with showing violence onstage in *Henry V*, but not some of the more thematic things, like Caliban in *The Tempest*, or gender in *Taming*. So I think it definitely happens here as well, that there's differing concerns, in content. (*laughs*)

JA: Yeah. Okay. (*laughs*)

EH: Yeah. (*laughs*) So you mentioned that *Merchant of Venice* was paired with *One Hundred Dresses*, and it did have a workshop with it, and I'm wondering if you can tell me a little about what the workshops for *Merchant of Venice* and *Hundred Dresses*, what those looked like, and what they consisted of for students.

JA: Yeah. I know *The Hundred Dresses* one really well. I will tell you about that one first, as I recall the other one (*laughs*)—the *Merchant of Venice* one. I supervised students of mine who are training to be teachers to work on the workshop for *Merchant of Venice*, and then I directed *The Hundred Dresses*, so that's part of the reason why I know *The Hundred Dresses* one so much better. But both of them had—with the language we used when describing the goals for the workshop, we didn't want to use the words "bullies" or "bullying," because we wanted to focus on what the opposite of that is, and then let the idea of bullying be a little more organic to the experience of the young people in the workshop. Both of them really focused on what does it mean to be a friend, and also a member of a community, what does it mean to accept and to include, and to have courage to act bravely when those things aren't happening. And so the workshops are really based in drama-based activities that were very hands-on, that are very democratic. They level the playing field. It's not an opportunity for any of the students in the class, for better or for worse, to be the center of attention, and so it's an opportunity for everyone equally to experience and be led through these activities by the actors from the show, and then probably most importantly guided through questions that connect the activities and themes to the experience that they just had. I don't know if you want details of the activities that were done in those workshops.

EH: Yeah, I would love to know what activities were used for that.

JA: Okay. I can e-mail you the workshops themselves, if you wanted to see the actual activities.

EH: Yeah, that would be wonderful.

JA: The workshops themselves are also 45-50 minutes long, and they always start out with the actors introducing themselves and letting the kids ask their immediate burning questions, because they just saw the show and the actors are still in costume, but they've come out of role—usually they come out of role, unless there's a specific reason to have them stay in role. And then some kind of icebreaker or warm-up—maybe a call and response, or some way of working with a group of students that they don't know before, and they try to involve the classroom teacher as much as possible, since he or she has the relationship with the students already, and will help them figure out ways to do the work. The actors in our shows sometimes have education backgrounds and training in pedagogy, and sometimes they don't, they're just performers. And so it's typically a baptism by fire (*laughs*) for some of them.

EH: Yeah.

JA: And we've gone through quite a few different models of developing these workshops, in terms of how much the actors play a role in developing them. And

they always play somewhat of a role. For instance, we might bring them options to choose from, but those options are already provided, and then sometimes we ask them to start from scratch. Nothing set in stone, whatsoever, when we come into the space, except for maybe the topic. It is potentially more meaningful for the actors when they develop it from scratch, but it takes a lot more time. And time is of the essence when we're already trying to get a show up in a month. So we really evolved to a place where now whoever is doing it, which could be the director, it could be myself, it could be Teresa, it could be students that we've hired who've done Young Company before and have a background in pedagogy. We've come to the place where we provide two or three options for overall workshops, individual activities in the workshops for the cast members to select from, just because it saves more time, but we still want them to have that option of selection, and feel empowered and engaged with the workshop, having ownership over it that way. So, I remember, in *The Hundred Dresses*, the students created these activities entirely on their own from scratch, and so they're not activities—some of them are activities you're going to go and find somewhere else, but they might be versions of activities you might find in Spolin or even Boal, or someone like that. And one of the first activities that they did was something that they called "The Chair Game." I have to read it to remember how it went. It involved a lot of chairs (*laughs, EH laughs*), and I think it was a version of a Boal game. So the students are sitting in a chair for a certain amount of time, and then the chair is removed, and they're asked to sit in that same position for a certain amount of time again without the chair. And so the chair then becomes representative, as the way we support each other, and then they invite other students to come up and act as a chair for each other, or find ways—strategize and find a way to support the person who doesn't have a chair. So, if you're trying to figure out what it is, it's a little bit unique, but it became something that worked really powerfully in the space with the young kids, because they came up with a lot of creative ways of supporting each other as they were trying to reach their goal, which was basically just to sit. And then as they pulled themes from that, and this is where it becomes really similar to Boal, to what does it mean to support each other in other types of goals, or other things we're trying to accomplish, whether it just means doing your homework or playing at recess or things even beyond that. And their second activity was something they called "Sacrifice to Win Relay," and (*laughs*) this involved candy.

EH: (*laughs*) Okay.

JA: It was the crux of the activity, where there was—and it was some kind of wrapped Starburst that the school would approve, that we could bring into the school. Without reading through it, I'm trying to remember the rules, exactly. The students were lined up in some kind of line, and there was a relay component. And the whole premise was, there was candy in a cup, and maybe they passed the cup underneath each other's chairs—I know this sounds so bizarre—and if everyone took a piece of candy, by the end, the kid at the end might not get any.

EH: Okay.

JA: And so they just let them know that there wasn't enough candy for everyone in the space to have any. And then they didn't say anything beyond that. And so then they would always see how that played out. And you know they did this with fifth graders, and it was always—I definitely went and observed some of these, but I was not there every time, but I always got the reports from them—they never had a time when they got to the end and there wasn't enough candy left, and there would often be multiple pieces of candy left. And so they talked about what that means in terms of sacrificing to have relationships and support each other, and take that brave step to act nobly on the behalf of someone else, as the character did in *A Hundred Dresses*. And so that was one of the activities they did too. "Sacrifice to Win Relay." You may or may not be familiar with that (*laughs*). But then they ended with a couple things that I'm sure you're familiar with. They did some machine work around concepts of friendship, connected with the play, and what they explored in their workshop that day. And then, at the end of the workshop, they asked the students to write a letter to a character in the play, and then they would tell them that they would deliver these letters to the characters, and so they were invited to focus on, really, anything they wanted to write to that character in terms of thoughts or feelings that might have risen from the performance, or the workshop, or ask questions they might have for the character. And they gave the classroom teachers the option to keep them or give them to the Young Company actors. We gave them an envelope they could mail back to us, and almost everyone mailed them back, and they came back in droves, and my cast read every single one of these letters, and especially they read the ones that were written to their character, and it became, a way for them to continue to develop their character on tour. It was really interesting to see that, and to see the stories the young audience members chose to tell them about times that they acted bravely, that they made sacrifices for people that they loved, when they supported other people, when people supported them, when they identified with the immigrant character in the play, or when they identified with the main character in the play, and so these letters ended up being something—and we kept them all—something that we thought could possibly be interesting, but ended up being a pleasant surprise, in terms of really hearing their private thoughts about the whole experience.

EH: Yeah. Wow. That's really cool (*laughs*).

JA: So that was that workshop. And I remember, Teresa and I always said—because Teresa helped me with this production as well, and so she came out in the schools with me—and Teresa and I always said, "This workshop is just this quirky, peculiar little thing that works really well." (*laughs, EH laughs*) And I think it's because we chose to let them create these activities that hadn't really been tried and true, but that they were really passionate about. It evolved a little bit over the tour, and we would help them fine-tune them, and give them feedback and all of that of course. But it really, basically, remained how it started, and the passion that they brought to

the classrooms when they do these post-performance workshops, I think in large part was because they were able to create this from scratch. And so we try to mimic that as much as possible, as we don't really still have the time to create them from scratch very often. And we do more tried and true activities from a variety of resources, but this one was kind of the little workshop that could, and it just ended up being something that everyone connected to really well.

EH: That's great. And then you said *Merchant of Venice* was something that also focused on a similar—

JA: Yeah. And theirs was probably a little bit more traditional, in terms of the workshop. And I can find it, I just don't have it in front of me right now. But I know that they pulled on the idea of dominant culture and other culture, and asked the students to think about those cultures in their own schools. And they actually did those workshops before *The Merchant of Venice*. Because—Teresa maybe told you part of this—because they wanted them to pull those cultures—and they didn't have to be cultures from their own schools—but cultures that they could identify with, or that they chose in some way, and they understood how they were dominant and other, and then *The Merchant of Venice*, the way it was written, was kind of meant to be a little bit Mad Lib-ish, in terms of then they would insert those ideas of dominant and other culture into their actual production, and there were certain people and places and names that they would fill in based on what those pre-performance workshop students came up with, and then that ended up being part of our production.

EH: Yes. I did talk to Teresa about the Mad Lib quality, where they inserted those in. I didn't realize that the workshop was right before, and that's where that came from.

JA: Yeah. We usually do our workshops afterwards, but, because of the nature of this one, we did it before, and I think we did the one before for *Henry V* as well, in part because the director cast Henry as a woman, and she wanted to have pre-performance workshops about gender with the young audience members on what does it mean to cast—and tied with gender—but she cast a woman and referred to her as a woman as well, as opposed to casting a woman and referring to her as a man. So we've done pre-performance a few times, but almost entirely we do post-performance.

EH: Right. That's really interesting. I didn't realize that Henry was a woman in that production, because Teresa had mentioned it to me. That's really interesting.

JA: Yeah. She was fabulous, that was a really cool production too, and the director is also a choreographer, and so all the violence was really represented through stylized movement and—but I'm going off tangent, again. I love this Young Company work I do, so I can just, unfortunately, say too much (*laughs*).

EH: No, I'm really interested in all of it. It's fascinating, because we do a touring show here, and you guys have been doing it for longer, there's, it sounds like, a richer tradition of it, and it's really cool to hear about. So I love learning all of it.

JA: Yeah. And that helps with our partnerships with these schools, that we've been touring for, we just celebrated a fortieth anniversary.

EH: Right. Wow.

JA: So there is this kind of embedded partnership and relationship that we do not take for granted and we really value. I think you actually maybe also contacted the director for *Henry V*. Megan Sanborn Jones is the one who directed that.

EH: I did, yes, and I think I'm going to talk with her—she said after classes end, so after the 15th. I wasn't sure if it was the same *Henry*, that's great. I'm excited to get to talk to her.

JA: Yeah. And she'll probably tell you that I basically asked her to do it, and she was like, "What?" (*EH laughs*) "You want me to do what? For Young Company?" I'm like, "I know you can do it" (*laughs*) And I said, I just thought it'd be more pertinent to explore issues of war right now, when these young kids are just growing up in a global community that is just drenched in war and she did a great job with it.

EH: That's great. It's relevant, for sure. So I guess my next question's kind of getting away from Young Company specifically, but, because I know we talked a little bit about your experience with applied theatre when we spoke before, and I'm just wondering if you can talk a little bit about how, for you, how applied theatre and TYA might be combined to kind of create a new or richer or deeper experience for audience members for TYA productions.

JA: Yeah. I came to this University with more applied theatre background than TYA. And so I think that kind of naturally happened that way for me, plus I noticed there was a trend of these two fields marrying in a lot of other places across the country, and I really respected the tradition and history that Young Company had, but I also noticed that in their tour, every semester, the company was going, sometimes, really far away from the school, and so these students were leaving—I mean, it is still a huge commitment, so I don't want to downplay what the students are doing now—but they were leaving, maybe at 4 or 5 in the morning to go two plus hours away to schools quite a distance from here, and since they'd gone so far, they would go to multiple schools in one day in that area, and then they'd be gone all day, and they would get back at 5 or 6 pm or later, and so part of the question just came from that logistics of finding students who'd be willing to do that, and then also trying to ask ourselves if replicating that kind of brutal aspect of the tour, which is realistic, was the most valuable thing that we could do for our undergraduate students, or if there was something else that we could find that would be of equal value, or maybe

greater value. And so I just started thinking about—and I'm not sure how familiar you are with Theatre in Education, and the various evolutions of that model, and what it can be and is today. Originally with TIE, the workshop and performance is one thing. They didn't separate them, but because of logistics and funding, basically, over the years, it ended up being separated frequently, where the performance and workshops are not at the same time. And so, I just started thinking about that model, and how a post-performance workshop can just deepen our partnership that we're trying to make with communities and with schools around here. So what we ended up doing was—and this was hard, and complex in some ways, and if you want to know about that, I can tell you about that too—pulling out of some of the schools that were further away, and some of those schools that were further away really had great need for this kind of programming, so we didn't want to remove ourselves without replacing it with something, and so that's a longer story that I can tell you about what we endeavored to replace this with. And so we stay more local, so students aren't traveling further than an hour to get to a school. And instead of performing multiple times in a day—this is twice a week, Tuesday and Thursday—and going to multiple schools, even up to 3 or 4 a day, we go to one school each day, and the tour is done by 1 or 2 in the afternoon, as well. We go to one school each day, and we stay at that school longer, and we try to create a deeper relationship with the administrator and parents and teachers, and students at those schools, because we do these hands-on workshops. So, you probably can tell we're not perfect, it's not ideal, there's so many things we're learning all the time, there's so many questions we constantly have, so many things we're still trying to figure out, but that partnership that we've been able to make with these schools has been something that has been really evident in the past however many years. Let's see—we kind of started the workshops, the pilot program, in 2009, when we did our first pilot program of the workshop, and at that time we didn't even have the actors in the company doing the workshop. We had some students that had volunteered to—well, they got credit for this, but (*laughs*) they didn't need the credits to graduate—to do this pilot program with us, to see how the schools reacted to having a workshop that was in conjunction with the show. And that first time we did it, it wasn't a pre or a post-performance workshop, per se, because the workshop that these teaching artists were doing, separate from the production, might happen before or after the school sees the production.

EH: Okay.

JA: And so that went well enough for us to start to consider to do it more often, and so the next year, we did it in conjunction—and I tried it out with the first play that I directed, and I did it with my actors, and then the next year is when we started doing it for every show. So, applied theatre is really about allowing all the audience members to feel like participants in the theatre experience, and so that was the goal that we were trying to pull in by having these workshops to engage the young audience members so they could feel—to some extent, because it still is TYA, but it definitely has this hybrid with TIE in terms of getting that experience where they

can affect outcomes and make choices, and realizations, and possibly be in role themselves, and all that kind of stuff that can possibly come along with a TIE experience. So that's the short story of how that happened.

EH: Yeah. That's really interesting. So do the workshops—are they always based in a theme of the play, or are they sometimes more—because I know Teresa was saying that the *Cymbeline* ones, I think, were based in genre—some were genre, and some were design-based, so does it kind of depend on the show?

JA: That's a great question. I think, instinctively, when we started them, I just thought, well, these will address social issues, and that's what these workshops will do, because that's what we should do (*laughs, EH laughs*). Because that's where I came from with my thinking in applied theatre, but that has evolved a little bit too, and now we're to a place where we're trying to think about what would be the most authentic hands-on experience a young person could get with this actual production. And so some of them have a more heavy focus on a social component, where others of them are more curricularly tied to what students are maybe doing in schools as we look at whatever they're exploring from the Common Core, or what we now call the Utah Core. And I remember with Teresa, when she did *Cymbeline* and she brought that up, and she said, "I don't know if it's really genuine to this process if I try to pull in a social theme with this workshop." And we talked about what other things that she might do, and so she did definitely focus more on something that's a little more academic. And we just finished a puppet version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and those workshops also focused a little bit more on theatre making and puppetry. So it's a blend. (*laughs*) We're still figuring out what it is and who we are, but I think it's added a level of excitement to Young Company in general throughout the department. I think that it's gone through a lot of ups and downs over the forty years, and for the students, hands down, over and over again, their favorite part are these workshops. And a lot of them come in going, "What? I have to do a workshop? I just wanted to act." And so that's been really nice to see how they take that role as artist and citizen and combine them and take more responsibility on themselves than they had initially thought about doing by engaging so specifically with the young audience members. And I think it's been good for our faculty too, to talk about TYA in the same way we talk about adult theatre (*laughs*). And so finding where we have more commonalities has been nice for me to experience.

EH: Yeah. Looking forward, if Young Company were to do a *Taming of the Shrew* again, in a few years, do you think that that might be an instance where a thematically based workshop would come in to help students process those themes? Is that something that you think might come up, or how do you think you might address a play like that, if it came into the season again?

JA: Yeah. Great question. As always, I would want to start from that initial pitch in the big idea meeting, because, for me, that's so important, because that's the passion of whoever has the vision. That's where that passion is coming from, that vision of

what they want to do with the production, but they would definitely be asked a lot of questions about why this production and now, and we would definitely do a workshop with it. We don't skip shows anymore, we've been doing workshops with every show since 2011 consistently, and we would also talk about the last time we did this show, and how it would be different, and why do it again. We don't like to repeat a Shakespeare show any closer than six years, or maybe it was seven years. Every once in a while, we do a Shakespeare show for a whole elementary school, which is K-6. They're almost always for the older grades, but Teresa probably told you about how she did two productions for *Cymbeline*, and so there was the K-3 component, and the 4, 5, 6 component for audiences, and, so just to make sure that we don't repeat anything six or seven years out, and ideally more like ten (*laughs*). So there would have to be that same vision and passion where someone comes and says, "This is what I want to do, and this is why I want to do it for young audiences, and this is how I think we could make it work," and then go from there in terms of what we would do for a workshop.

EH: Okay. I actually had one clarifying question. You mentioned the last time you did it, there was a lot of the visual stuff, that helped audiences through the story. Can you tell me a little bit about what some of those images or words were that helped the audience or helped the viewer through the story?

JA: Yeah. So the theme was, it was set in—oh, I can't remember. Probably the early 1900s, in a circus setting. And so the backdrop that they traveled with had that kind of vintage circus-y look and feel. So there were a lot of canvas scrolls that could be—a string could be pulled and they would roll down on the backdrop, that would have verbal clues as to what just happened, or what's going to happen. I don't really remember what any of them said, but someone might know (*laughs*) if you wanted to find that out. I think they were written into the script. I could be wrong about that, though. Because like I said, Teresa and the director worked so closely that I wasn't always sure where some of the ideas in the production came from. One of the concerns of that production, which was a beautiful thing about that production too, when we went on tour, was there were so many props, we didn't know if they'd all fit in the touring van. But they did, just barely. (*laughs, EH laughs*) But that was another visual component, so the costumes were really dramatic and rich in color and texture, and that historical kind of feel, from the early part of the 20th century. And the props also played a big visual role that way. Some of the visual images on the backdrop—we have pictures of all this, too, so that's good. You're asking me to reach back in my mind, 5 years ago. I can't remember the specifics, but they included images of the characters and their relationships to each other. So that was visually helpful. I can't really remember exactly what, though. (*laughs*)

EH: Okay (*laughs*). That's good to know. Yeah, I knew about the circus theme, I didn't know much about the visual element.

JA: Yeah. I thought that was very helpful.

EH: Yeah, that's really interesting. I'd gotten copies of the scripts for *Merchant* and *Cymbeline* from Teresa. She couldn't find a copy of the script of *Shrew*. Do you know if there's any archive at Brigham Young or for Young Company where that script might be? I would just love to read her adaptation, if I could.

JA: I could look into that.

EH: Yeah, if there's any way, or if there's anyone that I should get in touch with over there.

JA: I'm very surprised Teresa doesn't have it, but I can look into that.

EH: Yeah. I will double check, but that was the one that she couldn't track down on her computer, when she was looking for them.

JA: Okay. Well, I'll talk to her and see what we could possibly figure out.

EH: Okay.

JA: Yeah, that's a good question, because I just looked on my computer, because I have most of them too, and I'm like, I do not have that either. (*laughs, EH laughs*) This is one of the ways we can improve, obviously (*laughs, EH laughs*) I'm just saying it's this thing we're all passionate about, but we also all have dozens of other responsibilities, and so, sometimes things fall through the cracks. Another person who's heavily involved with Young Company is a part-time employee, and she's the Outreach Coordinator. I don't know if you'd want to talk to her about anything, but she's actually been participating in this longer than any of us.

EH: Is that Rebecca?

JA: Yeah. Rebecca Wallin.

EH: Yes, I think Teresa sent me her contact information. I may have sent her an e-mail. If not, I will definitely e-mail her, just because I'd love to know from her, more about how it's developed, and the workshops and stuff. Great. Those are all my questions, thank you so, so much for taking the time to talk with me. It was incredibly helpful, to learn more about the Young Company and about these specific shows. I really appreciate it.

JA: Well, I hope you're finding what you need, what you're looking for, and it's good for us to kind of think through some of these things, also (*laughs*).

EH: Yeah, it's really helpful, and it's really interesting to learn about, just because it's been rare that I've found anyone who's doing *Merchant of Venice*, or doing any kind

of theme-based workshop with it, so it's really cool to hear about what Young Company did with that. It's really interesting.

JA: Well, like I said, we don't always come up with a perfect way, or the perfect solution. I don't know if that even exists, but I think something that's nice that's been built around this, is people are willing to take risks, and that's where we've come up with more discoveries than anything else, in my opinion.

EH: Yeah. It sounds like it's been a really good and fruitful development of what's been happening over the past few years with those, which is really cool.

JA: Yeah.

EH: Thank you again, so much, for taking the time to talk with me, and for all of your help. I really, really, really appreciate it.

JA: Yeah. My pleasure. Good luck with everything.

EH: Thank you. Thank you so much.

JA: Okay. I'll talk to you later.

EH: Okay. Bye.

JA: Bye.

Michael Bahr 2015

Interview with the author via Skype

5 June

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): The first question that I had, I think it was on the list that I sent you, and kind of just a general logistical thing about the tour, because Shelly had mentioned that you rotate through several plays for the tour, and that she thought that corresponded with the Utah curriculum.

Michael Bahr (MB): Yes, and it doesn't. There are schools that teach it in the curriculum. I like the question, and she's not the first director to ask that. The assumption is because we're in schools, that we're on a curriculum track, or things like that. It is true that the plays that we select are those that are more inclined to be studied. And so the shows that we take out on tour, are *Macbeth*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and we took *Twelfth Night* and we're taking *Hamlet* out. And those are all plays that are generally—the most popular being *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*. And generally, ninth grade curriculum in the state of Utah has an English component, and there's generally a Shakespeare component. *Taming of the Shrew* is not studied that much—it's generally *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I know of a number of schools that do *Midsummer Night's Dream*, I know a number of schools that do *Romeo and Juliet*, and a number that do *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. And so we started that rotation just on our own, and there are five, six titles that rotate through. It's not the same show that we take out. In other words, if we do—and I'm sure you talked to her about this—her *Taming of the Shrew* was very, very different from the one that she did years before, the one that they did later, and as we talk about some other things—sometimes the schools will see them four years or five years before, and there will be comparisons between those as well. But we're not doing *Coriolanus*, it's a shame, and we're not doing *Winter's Tale*, or some other really great things. They're titles that schools are familiar with that either they perform, or that they choose to study.

EH: Okay. I'm guessing you get a generally positive response from teachers. I know teachers seem to enjoy being able to see the play as part of their teaching.

MB: Correct. Yeah. And in fact—so your question is half correct, we do it because we want to do plays that a teacher will prep for and will be familiar with and will make a part of their curriculum. We have many, many resources online—study guides, lesson plans, and these plays we have, you know, modules built for. And there are a lot of people who are very familiar with this. But, you'd be surprised—I don't know, maybe you wouldn't be surprised. In our area, Shakespeare's pretty popular on the elementary level, and we have fourth and fifth and sixth grade performances that will happen after school or during the school day, all of the sixth grade will have a little Shakespeare festival, and *Taming of the Shrew* actually is a pretty popular title that is performed on the elementary level here. And part of that has been a carryover from the sixties and seventies, when it was very popular to do elementary

school performances during that time. The Festival serves kind of as a model. In other words, because the Festival is so popular, there are many elementary schools that will do plays, and these are little 45 minute versions of the plays. Sometimes they'll use Lois Burdett—I'm not sure if you're aware of Lois Burdett or not.

EH: Yeah. I've read a little bit about her.

MB: Lois Burdett has versions that second grade—I have not seen any Lois Burdett versions—I've seen lots of *Taming of the Shrew*. But "Brush Up Your Shakespeare," and there's a number—"Shake Hands with Shakespeare" is another version that's popular over here, but they are adapted elementary school versions, so people are at least familiar with *Shrew*. And then there's also a lot of contemporary references, *10 Things I Hate About You*, things like that as well.

EH: Yeah.

MB: So, yes, I would say there is a curricular component that matches what the schools are doing, but not necessarily required. They're required to study Shakespeare—*Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *Midsummer* and *Hamlet*, but not necessarily *Shrew* itself.

EH: Okay. And I'm guessing—do you find that a lot of teachers take advantage of the preparatory materials that you put out?

MB: Oh, yes. They'll get online, primarily, they'll grab synopses, all of those. On our website—and you'll have to go to our study guide section. We have websites, and articles, and that type of stuff as well.

EH: Yeah. That's great. Yeah, Shelly and Mallore, and someone I spoke to at Brigham Young, actually, mentioned, just that in Utah in general, it seems like there's a lot of work with Shakespeare, and knowledge about Shakespeare.

MB: Correct. And I think—oh, I'd love to talk about that. Do we want to talk about that?

EH: Yeah! I had it as one of my questions (*laughs*), yeah, I would, I would love to talk about that.

MB: I think—oh, wow, where to go with this. I would love to do a doctoral dissertation on the number of schools in the state of Utah that perform Shakespeare compared to the rest of the nation. But it would be huge, and it's a dream—my staff is behind me here, they've heard me talk about—I have this dream of this electronic map, where you can click on a school, and you can find out where in the state of Utah—I think that's for a couple of reasons. Number one, the Festival was established in 1961, and Fred, when he created the Festival, tapped into the whole

state, specifically the Wasatch Front, which is close to BYU, Salt Lake City, etc., which is about four hours away, which is bizarre, if you go outside of the state, that you think the majority of our audience, about 65% of our audience, comes from four hours away. But it's a destination, and Utah, while very, very large and expansive, is quite connected. And so he got governors involved, and the local newspapers involved, and connected very early, '61, '62, '63, in getting them down here. Well, that connection to patrons got the teachers involved, got students involved, and so suddenly in elementary schools, etc., there were little tiny festivals. They had green shows similar to the green show that I described the other day—so you'll come and play recorders, and you'll play a violin, and you'll do sonnet presentations, and then you'll do a play. One particular school, Longview Elementary, there is a teacher who's been there for a good 25 years, who in the 6th grade, all three 6th grade classes do a Shakespeare play. One does *Much Ado About Nothing*, one does *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the other one does *Taming of the Shrew*. And as the students move up, they know that if they get in this teacher's class, "Oh, I'll be doing this show." So there's this tradition and this culture of doing that. And especially where you have teachers that have been there for a long time. When No Child Left Behind came along, and then there were other educational challenges, more testing that was happening, more adherence to the standards, we felt, at the Festival, kind of a pushback from that, and they said, "Well, we can't spend as much time doing these great plays." There were teachers that said, "This is how I reach my students, this is how I teach this." So, number one and foremost, I think the model of the Festival actually kind of empowered teachers to do that. Now, I think there's other things that's happened too. The High School Shakespeare Competition, which I alluded to—1977, when that started, Fred is fond of saying that at the time, there were only ten productions of Shakespeare going on in the state, and within five to ten years, there were high schools all over the state that were doing this. I can't back that data up. That's all anecdotal. And that's why I'd love to do a study that way. But we know it's in the culture. We know that there's a lot that's going there. I think there's three other issues, which I don't think your dissertation is about, but call me any time you want to write another one. The other things that made it happen is there is a strong Mormon culture here. As in the LDS, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. And in the early days of the church, in 1847, when this area was founded—so the church was started back east, and then they came across the plains, and 1847, they came into the valley. Theatre was really important to Brigham Young. And one of the first buildings that was built in Salt Lake was the Salt Lake Theater. A lot of people don't know this, it became a major whistle stop, and major actors from the area would perform in it. Mormon Tabernacle Choir performed as a witch's chorus, when they did a production of *Macbeth*—this is in the late 1800s, Shakespeare was done in small communities, and you can look at the Folger, and you can look at other studies that have been done, that, how, in addition to coming across the plains with a Bible, they came across with the complete works of William Shakespeare. And that kind of tamed the West, and so there were primers, in the early—not just in the Mormon culture, but in multiple cultures that was done. So, now, the connection to that is, if you're working with the King James version of the

Bible, that's very similar, and the same time that Shakespeare spoke, as well. So you're reading Shakespeare—there's another work, the Book of Mormon, which, the Mormons' faith is based on, is written in that kind of King James style. So it's a language that falls easily on the ear, and because you read that, and they're used to that—so there hasn't been a lot of work that's been done on that, but Don Weingust—he came out, and he was talking—and he's had some other students work and explore that connection, between that. So I think there's numerous reasons, but I think Shakespeare helped settle the West, and theatre in particular, while there were—in the 1880s, while there were many other Christian faiths that were downplaying, you know, "Stay away from theatre, theatre is nasty, bad, etc.," the Mormon faith was actually encouraging involvement in the theatre, and so I think that kind of helped with that too. So it's in the culture, basically. That was a rabbit hole that I don't think we're going down. (*laughs*)

EH: No, it's great, that's really interesting, because, like I said, I've heard it from many different people, that it's a unique thing.

MB: Well, and you'll find the American Shakespeare Center—Ralph Cohen, etc., they have a Master's program, and he makes recruiting trips specifically to BYU, and actually to Utah, because they love it so much out here. It's in the water out here, so much. Which might get into why we probably have less problem with *Shrew* than perhaps other areas do, because we're acquainted with it and don't see it as the problem. We can talk about *Merchant of Venice* in that same regards, too, because I think *Merchant of Venice*—I think there's an identification that I think the culture has with that specific play, as well. So there's—but again, you may not want to talk about that. You could run down a huge rabbit hole that way. (*laughs, EH laughs*)

EH: Yeah. Speaking of *Taming of the Shrew*—so we talked a little bit about how Shelly looked at the play, and the focus on the love story between Kate and Petruchio, but I imagine that, even with the familiarity that people in Utah have with the play, it still gets brought up that there are thematic challenges. So I'm just curious, with Shelly, and also with past directors, since you've done this repeatedly for Shakespeare-in-the-Schools, how have you handled the challenging elements, or the perception that there are very challenging elements?

MB: Right. Super. So I've been in this position for 16 years, I directed it. It was the second, touring production that I did, so I guess that was about 15 years ago. We did a *Macbeth*, and then we did a *Taming of the Shrew*, and we set it in kind of a classic, traditionalist, high Renaissance, Elizabethan—that. I think that's a device that some people use a lot—you know, "Oh, those crazy Renaissance people,"—so you can do that. You don't necessarily have to modernize it. Again, did not get a lot of pushback. The actors who played Kate and Petruchio, a wonderful guy named Fletcher McTaggart—what was her name, as, my Kate—this was a long time ago. And again, the focus was basically on two misfits that are not accepted in the world. If you noticed, in that play, everybody else wears masks. Everyone is wearing, and playing

a character that they are not. The most authentic people in that show are Petruchio and Kate. You've got Bianca playing what she thinks her daddy wants, and what the suitors want. The suitors themselves are literally playing different characters to get the hand, and so we've got the authenticity, or the reality, of those two characters. So that was that production. Another production we did, we had a director—her name is Jan Shelton, and Jan Shelton set it in the old West, which is, I think, a common theme. The Morgan Freeman, Tracey Ullman—I'm not sure if you're acquainted with that, but Morgan Freeman and Tracey Ullman—look it up, I believe it was done in Central Park, the Central Park series, that they had for free, Shakespeare in the Park. And in fact, there's a wonderful series that just came out on PBS about Shakespeare, and Morgan Freeman narrates that. That'll be very easy for you to find. But he actually talks about—I wish I could remember—(*to coworker*) Do you remember the name of that series, Holly? I think it's Shakespeare Uncovered. If you look up PBS, Shakespeare Uncovered, there's a series that's on PBS right now, and Morgan Freeman did an hour-long program on *Taming of the Shrew*, he serves as narrator, there's old footage of he and Tracey Ullman. It's really, really cool. Set in the old West. So, again that West—and I think it's the whole Wild West, the whole taming thing is taking it—and I think that allowed her to have a rough and tumble Kate. Girl who has a gun, ropes, you know, that type of stuff. Again, it was very popular, because of the concept, and also, kind of allowed that to have happened. And then we did the commedia telling of the story, which I think was really more of a device, less to handle the problem of Kate and Petruchio, but the device of having multiple characters who have to change in front of you. So the theatricality—a show that you pull out of a crate, and you're able to do things out of trunks. I think that device happened that way. I wanted—you asked me on the questions, and I know you're going to get to this, but I think talking about this will tell you what the reaction was. When we did it, the talkback questions that we followed—because I had forgotten. I knew what they were about. This is coming from a report that I did for the National Endowment for the Arts for our funding, and I sent an e-mail to you, so you have all of this, via copy already. But the questions were, "What is a shrew?" "What does it mean to 'tame' someone?" and "Was Kate tamed?" And those three questions—oh man. It just, (*makes explosion sound*) it just really exploded. First of all, a lot of them didn't necessarily know what a shrew was, and so we were able to get that. "What does it mean to 'tame' someone?" I mean, that's a loaded question already. And then was Kate, quote, tamed? And there's a number of—we take daily performance reports, and as we take those daily performance reports, the stage manager would record the responses. And so what I sent to you was actually the date and the school where students made these comments. And I'm sure Misha and also Mallorie talked to you about some of the comments that we got from there too. So, with this initial one, (*reading from report*) "A student mentioned that Kate changed, because at first she felt alone, but then she realized that she was loved." Which I think tells you something about that production. "Taming doesn't mean to control someone, but to be gentle and kind to them, so they want to change." Well, that's not what taming means, but it's interesting that the student says that. "I saw this production the last time it came here, and this *Taming of the Shrew* is much

better than the *Taming of the Shrew* Western version." And that's a reference to the other production that I was just talking about. "When asked why Kate changed at the end, a student said, 'She changed because she realized that she was loved.'" And that's in two completely different—I mean, those towns are forty miles away from each other. So, it's an interesting thing. "When asked what a shrew was, a young man replied, 'My sister!'" (*laughs, EH laughs*) "A teacher commented, 'I've seen the show many times before, and I loved this one so much more. It's a love story, and she teaches us what she needed, and what she eventually found.'" Which I think tells you the success that she had on that. You have those copies.

EH: Yeah, I saw the e-mail, so I scrolled through some of the comments, and I actually wanted to ask you specifically—because one of the comments, Malloreë actually mentioned to me. The second to last one, the, "Do you REALIZE that this show is about Petruchio torturing his wife"

MB: Yes.

EH: And I was just wondering, because I'm guessing there's at least one or two of those comments every couple performances, and I'm just wondering if you talk to the actors about how to respond, if you know how the actors do respond to comments like that, when that kind of thing comes up.

MB: Well, I was really—and the fact that that came from Duchesne, Utah. I don't know if you know where Duchesne, Utah is, but it's rural. It's the eastern side of Utah, it's about twenty minutes outside of a larger city called Roosevelt. I was thrilled, because I would say that those comments were the minority of the responses that we got. But when I get one of those, that tells me I have an informed student who's watching this, right?

EH: Yeah.

MB: Or someone who knows what it's about. And it thrills me. So, when they got that, I mean, we told them that they may be getting comments like that, and to embrace them. And to say, "Well, what do you think? Do you think this present production reflected what you saw?" I think the best response to that is, "Why do you think it's about that? Why do you see this as, that's what this play is about?" And engage in that type of stuff. Because when I see someone coming up with that, I mean, she's going to write her dissertation on that. There's a future, as opposed to, "Oh," you know, "It's a love story." And you'll notice, I put a sampling of all of the comments that we got through there, but I wanted to make sure that that issue was brought up too. And, I'm sure Malloreë and Misha said that they did have people who brought that up. Now, I don't think they thought that's what their show was about, necessarily. But that idea is out there, and any time I get a phone call from a newspaper, they say, you know, "Why are you doing this?" Why are you doing this show, and what is it about?" And there are some you know—"This is a show that we

need to not do anymore, because it talks about this." Which I, as an educator, completely disagree with—no, it helps us talk about those issues, and helps us do that sort of stuff. Have you read what Harold Bloom has to say about the show?

EH: I read the excerpt that was in the report, the, "If we have this problem, then it's your problem watching it," yes?

MB: Correct. He's very, very, very, opinionated about—well, he's very opinionated.

EH: Yes (*laughs*)

MB: And he has that right. He's Harold Bloom. But I actually think you'll find a lot of really great stuff, in, *The Invention of Being Human* is the name of the book. Have you read it?

EH: I have not. I'll have to look it up.

MB: Yeah, Harold Bloom, *Invention of Being Human*, and he basically takes every Shakespeare play, and—you can read it in a quick half hour, *Taming of the Shrew*, and then you just read through each of it. And he brings up a number of really, really great issues. But that's his take. I mean, his take is that these are modern sensitivities that we are trying to push on to the play, and that the play is much larger, and more universal than that. And deems it a love story. So, I skirted your question. The answer is, yes, we received comments like that. And whenever you have a sixteen or seventeen year old bringing those up, those are intelligent sixteen and seventeen year olds, who know the performance history of this show, or they have heard about this. The fact that our production didn't bring all of those up, in other words—and I think, as you read it—I am always surprised, I think we forget that most of these student audiences, this is the first encounter they're having with this play. And as evidence of that, I'll list other plays—*Romeo and Juliet*, they have no idea. When Paris comes into the tomb, I know a lot of times that part is cut out, there's films that that part is cut out, too. I wanted to make sure that the versions that we do look uncut, that they are getting the whole play. And so when Paris comes in, there are gasps, you know, they don't know—you know, she wakes up—they don't know! They've never seen this, at all, and so, what I was continually impressed with with this show—we know it. We—oh, look, she's going to go offstage, and then they're going to be denied, and denied, and denied, and then she's going to come in and obey, and I had never thought of it this way until I saw Shelly's show. And I directed it numerous times, but I went, "This is a surprise. They don't know." We don't know how Kate's going to react, and we don't know how the others are going to react. And even though it's a trick—it's really just a trick, you know, Shakespeare's using a piece that had been used in other pieces, and then he puts this in here. But the audience wants Petruchio and Kate to win, and when you focus on that aspect, then it's not a succumbing, it's them winning. And the audiences giggle and they laugh, and they'd, "Yeah!", and they'd—and when she comes out dragging

her sisters, and throws those sisters down, there's a—it's a good piece of theatre. And I think we forget that this is a really good piece of theatre. And so when you do that to an audience that has never seen this show before, it works. Now, the piece I have the biggest problem with is refusing to feed her. And he rips apart a dress in front of her. And abuses, in comic fashion, a tailor. That's my biggest problem with it. And I've heard these justifications—he never hits her. You know, he never does, well—good for you. And, you could say he's starved, and there are versions that I've seen that he never, you know, takes his marital privilege. (*laughs, EH laughs*) He, you know—"This way, the bolster, this way, that," and then he comes and talks to the audience at that time, and says, "I will—", and I thought what Shelly did, and also what Jan did, and also what I did with the production—that's a really important monologue. And it's a direct address moment, where he comes out, and he does not have a lot of direct address moments. And so he comes out, and makes this, you know, "Thus have I politically begun my reign." Uggghhhhh!!! "Reign, reign, uggghhhh, reign, reign, reign, that's a terrible, terrible thing." And then, I'll see, if I'll do this, and then he goes on through the speech, and compares her to a—I think the falcon imagery is really, really important, how important a falcon was. You don't beat a bird, otherwise the bird will never come back to you. All those things that we don't understand, and we actually talked about that in every production that we sent out on tour, we talked about how he loves her. But that girl in Duchesne? "So, she's a bird." You know? "She's a hooded, leathered, thonged bird that you spare food from?" And she's got a point. You know, she's got a point. But that is very, very important. And then he stops, and he says, "He who knows better how to tame a shrew—" And he looks to the audience, and he asks. We got one response from a weird audience member, who was just, "Ha!" You know? Then he looks at him, and then they just calmed right down. And I was hoping, when I directed the production, that—you know, "To be or not to be? That is the question?" I was hoping that you would get—but audiences are taught to sit and keep their arms folded and not respond, and all that type of stuff. This last production, he sat there, with his ear (*cups hand around ear*), you know, "Anybody? Anybody?" just to, kind of, get it. So, again, I think Shakespeare provides us, many times, with more questions than he does answers. I am not advocating for his training methods. Nor do they. And the other thing that I talk about, and we talk about, we've talked about it in each, it's called, *The Taming of the Shrew*. Who's the shrew? Is Petruchio the shrew? Is Kate the shrew? Is Bianca the shrew? Who is the shrew? Now, we all know. I mean, that's also a modern thing that we're trying to superimpose on it. When we did our most recent *Taming of the Shrew*, and we've got *Taming of the Shrew* coming up again this summer, but prior to that, it was set in post-World War II Italy, and Petruchio was a GI, and she was an Italian. And we didn't do Italian—we did some Italian accents with the more zany characters. He does not go into the tent, you know, obviously, she goes in and she's in the tent, and you know, he's this American GI, short haircut. It was a really great concept. There's something about the conquerors, who are not just conquerors, but are liberators, as in you've got this Allied force in this Italian town, and the Italian town is happy that they're there. There's not a lot of talk about that. I mean, we didn't talk about that necessarily in that, it was brought up a couple

of times, I heard, in literary seminars, primarily, just because I went, "Isn't this interesting, that this director's concept chooses an army and here is this army guy, and he's a liberator, and this is not a conquering army, but more of a, a—" And it was a popular concept. People enjoyed it. *Taming of the Shrew*, if we want to sell tickets, we sell a lot of tickets. Our top seller right now is *Taming of the Shrew*. Over *South Pacific*. Yeah. I could go down another rabbit hole. (EH laughs) *South Pacific* is a fabulous show. Do you know *South Pacific*?

EH: I've never seen it. I know a lot of the music, and I know the basics, but it's not one that I've ever actually seen.

MB: They were ahead of their time, Rodgers and Hammerstein, when they wrote it. It won the Pulitzer Prize, it deals with racism. This girl from the south falls in love with this guy, and then finds out that he has these children, who are ethnic, and that bothers her, and she cannot deal with that, and I think everyone forgets about that. They know "There is Nothing Like a Dame," and "Wash That Man Right Out of Here [sic]", and all those types of things, and I think there are those type of issues too, but theatre is great, because it's live, and it's living, and it deals with issues that make us think and consider things on the other side, and I think that's why we have challenges with this. So we did—we talked about denying the food. We talked about the training, if you will. We talked about the tailor scene. Everyone just has a ball laughing at that wedding scene, but that wedding scene, where he comes dressed up—can you imagine? On your wedding day? That happening? You know, him showing up, and we just love it. And all the lines that they say, they're meant to be joke lines. The lines at the end of that scene, what is it, Petruchio is Kated? And madly mated," and, "Such a mad match, never that we've seen." Plus his behavior in the church, all of those type of things. We could make a case for that. But for some reason, we always laugh. And the more hilarious—in this particular production, he came out, he had a bra as a hat. Which, I don't think most people knew what it was, until he came out, and then we saw what it was, which nobody—no high school kid analyzes this way, but in the same way that I analyze the liberators, I go, "How interesting that he's wearing a bra on his head. Interesting." Not just because it's funny, I just think there's an interesting line there about that type of stuff. And then his whole speech about, "She is my ox, my ass, my goods," you know. (EH visibly reacts) Yeah (laughs, EH laughs) Yeah. And they laugh—with student crowds, they laugh, they laugh, they laugh, they laugh, and then we started in on that thing, and whoooooooooo, I mean, the audience went (makes sound to indicate audience falling silent) And then, all of a sudden, he turns it, and—"Grumio, my horse," (makes sound of sword being drawn from sheath), takes out his sword, and then turns it into a humorous thing, throws him on the shoulder, and takes him off, and takes her offstage. Takes us out of that moment. Contrast that moment with the moment at the end of the show, where she does that monologue. So, there's plenty for the girl from Duchesne to sit and seethe with. (laughs) So, I don't know if I answered your question. We talked about the issues. I told them, when you have somebody who says that, engage them.

EH: That's great.

MB: Engage them. Ask, "Why? Did you find that our production was the same? Do you think they're in love with one another?" That's why that question that I brought up, "Was Kate, quote, tamed?" That's—no, she fell in love. No, she does this. No—I don't think anybody wants to say that that's what's happening. Was Petruchio tamed? Was that—and then we open it up, and have great discussions with it after that. So. I don't know if I've talked about anything. *(EH laughs)* Good luck with that, have a great time.

EH: That's great, because I asked Malloree about how she specifically responded to that question, but it's good to know.

MB: How did she? I mean, I know you asked the question, but how did she answer that for you?

EH: I think, she said that first Tom Littman responded to it a little bit, and then she herself jumped in and pointed out some of Kate's shortcomings, and the fact that in the beginning, she was very unhappy, and acted out very negatively, and she hit people, and she tied up her sister for no good reason, and she did all these terrible things, so she had her faults as well.

MB: Yep. And I heard her use that many times. And it was really nice to see the two of them process that, and not all plays end with a talkback, where you can actually talk about those issues, and bring them up. It was a really lovely production, because you were able to—you also saw a really tortured—I brought up the wedding, I love the moment—"a madcap ruffian," you know—now you're doing this to me, Father, why do you do this? You really feel sorry for her. Shakespeare's, I think, given us a really good journey that, if handled correctly, if that girl who's playing Kate, you see her—tortured, motherless, father doesn't know what to do, sister's driving things, working all the way through it, and then you see him deeply in love. I will tell you where the major problem, for this show—I think the wooing scene, if handled correctly, solves all the problems in the second half of the show. Because, frequently, they go, "Oh, here's a time when we can have a knock-down, drag-out, physical humor, beat-up—" But it's called a wooing scene. This is where Petruchio meets his match. Where he goes, "I love her. I love her even more than what I did before. Never make denial. I must and will have Katherine for my wife." I mean, he loves her, and if we can show that in that scene—and I've seen many, many high school versions of the show, and it's a chance for two people to wail on each other, and that doesn't do you any favors for the second half of the show. Now, I'm not saying don't do that, because Kate comes out—but if he can get his licking, and at the same time, go, "Wow, I really, really love this girl." I think that's where the audience falls in love. It's—"Where two fires meet, do consume the thing that feeds their fury."

EH: Going along with the love story idea, I asked Shelly this question as well, but I'd love to hear from you—what guided the process of adapting the script itself, and cutting it down for this production?

MB: I think we'll say the same thing. I had a script already cut, which I had cut and put together. I want the whole show there, so that when a student audience is seeing the show—with anything we do, so that makes it a better teaching tool for a teacher. I only have 75 minutes to do that, so I want every major monologue, I want every famous line, I want everything in there. And then I want to make sure that all of the characters have everything they need as well, because it's a 7-person cast, we took Biondello out, we had Vincentio make an appearance the father—all of that stuff, we had to take out. We took Gremio out. We kept Grumio in, we took Gremio out, so there's only one suitor that's in there. And then we moved it about so that there would be—you know, "I'm playing this character, now I've gotta play this character," so it makes sense in and out. And so, we're with Kate and Petruchio, now we're back with Bianca and Lucentio, now we're with Kate and Petruchio, now we're back with Lucentio. So that we have that same type of arc going. And then I give the script to them, and—oh, and then the other thing I want to make sure of, is when I cut out, I want iambs in place, I want scans, otherwise it's not a tool for an actor. And this is a tough show, because it's not all completely in verse. It doesn't all completely do that. Verse and prose. And so, when I cut that, I try to keep line endings intact, and the verse is really important to me. And I know it's important to the majority of the actors. And then I give that to the director, and say, "Here is a script, you can use this if you'd like, here's how we've done past productions, but feel free to take or add or do whatever, but it's gotta come in at 75 minutes." And then they read through, and then they will add lines, and what's nice is every director I've had has always wanted to add a bit of their own back in, or make adaptations. And then the actors show up. And they're there at their first table session. And they're saying, "Yeah, but this—oh, this line, I really need this. I really, really need this line." And then another'll say, "I really, really need this." Generally most companies that we have are really grateful that we—the time we take—it can't just be about the plot and action for me. I have three principles that guide me on these productions. I'm looking for text-based performance. In other words, it's gotta be the text. I'm looking for resonant, relevant, accessible storytelling. In other words, I want students to be able to see this is their story. And I'm looking for innovative theatrical techniques. So, innovative theatricality is, go back to the old. I want them to see things onstage they've never seen before, and primarily that means stripped away. So we use periaktois frequently, blocks—in *Macbeth*, ribbons, shadows, all that type of stuff. So that teachers can look at this and can go, "Oh, wow, I can do a whole play just like this. I don't need all this production value, I can do it in a stripped-away production, and let, the characters—" And we've got some really, really cool concepts from those three guiding principles. But the script itself comes through that combined process. And then Shelly takes it, and then runs with it after that.

EH: Great.

MB: So does that confirm what she said, as well?

EH: Yes, and what she talked about was something that you'd mentioned a little earlier, as well, the idea of Petruchio also being a shrew. So making sure that, as she was cutting, it was never too one-sided.

MB: Correct. Which, I will tell you, I think it's easier for us to make this palatable, because we don't have to do—oh my gosh, once he gets back home, we've got that long Grumio speech. And then after the long Grumio speech, which is important, because they say, "He's coming home! He's coming home!" And then we've got that really wonderful Three Stooges moments, and you find out what his house is like. Then you've got the stuff with the tailor, and then you have all those other things. But, because we've got 75 minutes, man. *(EH laughs)* Cut, cut, cut, cut—oh, look at that! Look at that. And we can kind of take them back. And then you look for things. But it is tough. I think there are moments in the script where she goes, "Ding!" And she sees what's happening. And I think there are moments in the script where he goes, "Ding!" And you have to find those. I think the road is really, really important. Look, we're going to talk about the whole show eventually *(laughs)*. Because I just told you that the wooing scene is— *(EH laughs)*. I mean, if you start at the top of the show, she's a wildcat, you know—you can't marry one until we have the other, and "Ohhhh, the devil's dam,"—they're calling her the devil's dam! I mean, geez—so we can say that's a bad thing, or we can believe Shakespeare, and these characters' perceptions, and say, "You know—" because Shakespeare mostly says everything that he means. And so, they think she's the devil's dam, so what is she doing? So we've got all of that type of stuff, and, "Oh, what am I to do?" And then she ties up her sister, and all that type of stuff. And then by the time we get to the road, which is really, really important, and—she had this wonderful device. She had this beautiful music that she had. So, training, finally we're happy, "Eat apace," you know, eat, isn't this fabulous, and now we're going to get you dressed. Haha! And gets a hat, he does not destroy the hat. I'm sure she told you about that. Did she talk to you about the hat moment?

EH: She did not. The first I saw of the hat was, "She wanted to show her mother the hat," from the comments. *(laughs)*

MB: Yeah. And it's been a couple years, so she might have forgot about that, but you—comes in, there's a lovely hat, she takes this, and she puts that hat on her head. And frequently *(ripping noise)*, it's just ripped up. So, puts the hat on, he rips up the dress. But that hat, that he demeans, says is awful and all that type of stuff, before they go, he comes up, and he gives her this hat, and she—"Oh, thank you for that." This is before—so they've got this lovely—that he does in the final scene. But as they're walking out, there's this beautiful music montage, and they start on their way, and then he goes, "Nope. I'm not going to go," and he goes back, and she *(frustrated noise)*. And then he comes up and he *(mimes checking wind)*, "Oh, the

weather's not right," and goes back. And then he comes back, and he goes, "Should we go? Oh, I've got—no, I don't think I'll go." And so she's eager to go, she's eager to go, she's eager to go, she's eager to go, she's eager to go. Finally, we do the scene. Which, I think establishes that we've been doing this thing for some time. And also makes that, kind of, a training thing. And says, "Once more, again, to your father's," you know, and (*gasps*) "Oh, how goodly sign," you know, "shines the sun." And, "It's the moon, 'tis not," you know—"Oh, I say it is this," and, da da da, goes on for that. And then in comes a great character actor, who plays Vincentio—I mean, that monologue, "So will it be for Katherine," Grumio applauds, everybody applauds, and it tied into this beautiful music montage that she had before that, and just makes it really, really fun. And then they have fun with Vincentio, and then after they have fun with Vincentio, that they go on. And this scene is so hard. And they rehearsed it over and over and over again. Because—it was interesting, as producer, because I sat there, and I believe in letting them—I defend their product. "What are you trying to do?" I defend it, I defend it, I defend it. I'm just outside eyes, but when he says, "Let's go back home, then," you know, "Come on and kiss me, Kate." That is so hard. That moment is so hard. Because if it looks like, "We are not going to go to your father's until you kiss me"? Date rape culture, you know, welcome. I mean, it's just hard. And I remember Tom—so they did it, and it was good. It was good. But I went up, and I said, "Man, she needs to look like she wants this, and he needs to look like—that it needs to be her choice." It has to be her choice, because if it is not her choice, then it's all force. And they worked it, they worked it, they worked it, they worked it, and he says, "All right. Back to your father's," and, how Tom did it—I don't know how she got him to this point, I do remember her talking to her, and saying, "This has got to be your choice." And he used to go, in early rehearsal, (*gruffly*) "All right, back to your father's," the braggart, and instead he turned it into, (*quietly*) "Back—back to your father's." And turned, and he was saddened, he was hurt by it. Which is also manipulative, I mean, it's also dangerous. So as he turns and starts to walk back, she goes, "No. I will give you a kiss." And the way Malloreë said it, it was very, (*forcefully*) "No. I'm in charge. I'm going to do this." And then he comes back to her, and it was just a tender, tender, gentle thing. And then he pulls out and says, "Is not this well?" And then he goes out, and then the next scene, there's a music transition, and she comes in and he takes this hat out, and she looks at it, and she goes, "Oh, thank you. Thank you for this hat." And then puts it on, couldn't get it on. Puts it on, it fell. Finally, she just held it in her hands. And then, in the rehearsal process—I remember all this, this is so cool! In the rehearsal process, she kept it, and I said, "That's really fabulous, let's just keep it there," and they were going to cut it. They said, "Cut the hat," and I said, "No! No, no, no, that hat's fabulous. That's the same hat that they had before." And the whole process of putting it together made us discover that. Then we got this great comment from a kid, you know, because he liked her hat. But it allowed us another opportunity to do give and take. Final monologue, she's instructing, she's instructing, she comes down, she does direct address to the audience, when she talks directly to the audience, it's an instruction on how we should behave as individuals, and then she goes up, literally gets on her knees. When I watched it, I went, (*panicked*) "Ohh, Shelly! Oh

my—gahh! I hired you so I wouldn't have this! What on earth are you doing with this?" Gets down, she puts her hand bet—and he jumps up, and he stands her up and says, "No. No. You will not do this." And then they're equal partners. I mean, it was just so fabulous. And, for me, showed that—you know, I need to be trained, no, I need to be trained. No, I need to be trained—and through this, how are we learning to get along, together. And this is really, really fabulous. I think we've—that question was cutting. You got us with that one.

EH: (*laughs*) Yeah.

MB: But I'm glad you reminded me about that kiss moment. Because—and we went up and talked about it, I just said, "It needs to be a choice. We just need to keep working on it, we need to keep working on it." And then it scared me, because when they finally got it right, frequently—we do 75 shows. And 75 shows, that show's going to arc, and turn, and get up, and, and—oh my gosh, please don't lose that moment, please don't lose it, please—and they got better. I mean, Mallore's "No. I will give you a kiss." And it was (*explosion noise*), "I'm in charge, bing!" But you have to be careful there, too, you know—"Light bulb! It's all about you!" No, no, no, no, no. It was just a really, really interesting thing. And then when you launch into that final scene—I've already talked about what happens in the final scene, but when you launch into that final scene, now we're bartering on them again, that's terrible. Now, we're going to bet on—"I'd venture as much on a hawk and a hound, but not so much upon my wife." I mean, that's—(*frustrated noise*), you know, what on earth are we—? And then Tom was manly, but vulnerable. I mean he, "Gaahh, you know, is it going to happen, is it not going to happen?" Which led to the audience's—we've never seen this before. Quit playing the end! Don't play the end! We don't know what's going to happen here. Is she going to come out? She does come out. Why does she come out? I mean, it's all that stuff.

EH: Yeah, that's great. And I didn't know about the hat. That's really cool to know, that he kind of preserved that. I actually have another question, and it's a little bit off—but you mentioned *Merchant of Venice* earlier, and that's actually another show that I'm writing about. I'm writing specifically about a production that Brigham Young did, that toured, and I'd love to know—you mentioned feeling like there were reasons that *Merchant of Venice* maybe worked for the audience that you had, and I was just curious if you could talk a little bit about that.

MB: Fred, our founder, tells this story. You can't find it anywhere, but Fred tells the story. You can find references to him telling the story, that *Merchant of Venice* was one of the first plays that was performed here within the Cedar City area, when the early settlers first came. We don't know that, okay? But there has been an affinity, and it has been talked about frequently, he did do a *Fiddler on the Roof*, one of the first ones off Broadway, that was done here in Cedar City, and it was very, very popular. He did it here at the University. It's hard to imagine, because *Fiddler on the Roof* is done in the culture so much, but imagine the very first time that was done off

of Broadway, and his was one of the first shows that was ever done. And so he did it here, and it resonated very, very strongly with the local population. The reason why *Merchant of Venice*, I think, would resonate that strongly is—I'm going to get a little religious here, too. I'm really not—I'll talk about it in an academic vein, I'm not doing a preachy thing here, but I think, from an academic perspective, there's interesting study here. Mormons consider themselves part of the tribe of Israel. Sometimes people, non-Mormons, in the early days, were called gentiles, in the same way that—so, Mormons would be the equivalent of Jews, gentiles. So that's essentially the religious thing on it, and we could get into it, where that comes from. But I don't think we have to. Then, they started in New York, then they go to Vermont, then they go to Ohio, then they're driven to Missouri, then they go back to Illinois, and then they're driven out to Salt Lake. There is a persecution, martyr—you know, Joseph Smith is killed, martyred. I mean, there is this chosen people, on their way to Zion—it's called Zion—on their way to Zion, and pushed and driven out, so the whole identification with Jewish culture, and specifically Jewish persecution, and that type of stuff. And there's a whole bunch of other stuff that ties into that. So there would be some type of connection, but it's interesting that connection would be more with Shylock, than would necessarily be with the other characters. So I think there would be a sensitivity to any performance of—well, you know, *Book of Mormon* the musical, we've all—there is an understanding of that. There was a really fabulous production that was done at Ashland, where they came out and they threw the menorah onstage, and—you can find writings about this too, and the Jewish community was quite upset by the way that they felt religious iconography was used during that. And we have Jewish members of our board who do not like the show *Merchant of Venice*, at all. And wish we weren't doing it. I've been at board meetings when it was done, and they were talking about the season, they said, "You know, it's a terrible show, and shouldn't do it, and—" The last time we did it, Tony Amendola, a great actor, who is presently playing Lear for us this summer, did a fabulous—great sensitivity, that he brought to it. And this—he happens to be a friend of mine, but this board member was grateful for the sensitivity that was brought on that. Which leads us to the courtroom scene. Because when you're in that courtroom scene, which I think at times is more dist—it's one thing to come in and say—to persecute the Jews and beat them up and all that type of stuff. But that's providing a theatrical motivation for what happens later within the story. And he has choices—does he value his faith more than his daughter? Does he value his faith more than his riches? You know, how really serious is this? And you can go into the history, and I think what's interesting about Shakespeare compared to *The Jew of Malta*, and I'm sure you've done the research on *Jew of Malta*.

EH: Yeah.

MB: And the historical research there. What was happening in England at the time, the legend is that there were scripts that were asked, and they started to—because of the—Dr. Lopez? Is it Dr. Lopez?

EH: Oh, Queen Elizabeth's doctor?

MB: Yes.

EH: Yeah—I'm not sure—I know the story of him, I'm not sure if that's the name, that sounds right, but I'm not sure.

MB: Yeah. And he's Jewish, and—so, you know. So, at this time, for there to be these two pieces that come out—*Jew of Malta*, which, he's out and out villain, but for Shakespeare to write a character who would have been played in clown format, with a red nose, and—he would have been played as a clown. But it's interesting that Shakespeare gives him a voice. "Do we not bleed? Do we not revenge?" So he takes this character and full fleshes him. Gives him a voice. Makes it easier for us in our modern day to be able to make him more full-fleshed, and, and to go on that journey. My challenge with the scene is not the stuff that happens in the end, and not the stuff that happens in the beginning, but when you are in that courtroom, there's some really interesting things that happen. And the audience, when Portia starts getting the upper hand, and starts turning it on, and then—give me the name of the comic character—"A Daniel! A Daniel!"

EH: Oh, Gratiano!

MB: Yeah. So, Gratiano, I mean, he's comic. He is there for sole comic reasons, and so when he starts doing this, "Yahh! This, this, this, this, this!" And the audience, every time we've done it, does what it is supposed to do. What is scripted to do. They start laughing, they hoot. They go, "Woohoo! Yeah! Oh, get him! Ohh, ahh!" All that type of stuff. And Nancy Melich, who is our literary seminar director, who I talked about, Nancy Melich came up to me, and she said, "What can we do about that? That is terrible, what's happening in that audience. I sat in there, and ugh, it's just terrible. It's terrible, the way, I mean—there were audience members last night who were cheering when Gratiano was saying those things. Isn't that terrible?" And the educator in me, and the dramaturg in me, said, "Is it terrible?" And you are having a physical reaction, Nancy, to this. It makes you sick, what is happening onstage. And what this other character is doing, for comic effect, and those jokes are landing, and the audience, because they are so invested with what's happening with Portia, and that pound of flesh, and are rooting for him, are cheering, and are going, "Yay!" It's no different in *Taming of the Shrew*, where they say, "Yeah! You're really taming her!" You know, that's happening there. But I think what's happening is that's we have, literally, conflict in the audience by audience saying, "But they shouldn't be feeling that way." Ohhh—are you the arbitrator of what they should be feeling, and what they should not be feeling? So let's just cut Gratiano's lines. Because they're reacting to Gratiano's lines. They're reacting to this table turn, this guy who's had the upper cards, they're reacting to that. And I think, what you've got is a fine piece of theatre that Shakespeare's composed, that's still working—because it rankles me

too, when I see that. I go, "Oh, ugh, look at what's happening there." It's similar to *Titus Andronicus*, where he goes, "We are going to do the following," and you know who they're eating. You know exactly who they're eating. And he goes, "I've done this," and, and I've seen audiences go, (*cheering*) "Aaaahhhh!" I go, "Yahh, who are you? Who are you? What have we tapped into, why you're cheering while other girls are, and guys are just sickened by what's happening in front of them." I'll bring this up, you're not talking about that show, but when we did *Titus Andronicus* this last time, he comes out to the audience, and he says, "I'm now going to grind them up, and I'm going to put them in 'em, and I'm going to feed them. And that will be our revenge." And then he comes up and he does that. So, he said, "I don't want the audience to know." So he took that monologue out, and he kills them, and then he invites them in, and he starts feeding them. So those of us who know, like the girl in *Duchesne*, those of us who know are sitting there going, "Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh!" And this is just going on, and they're eating, and having this wonderful time. And then he inverts it, and he says, "This is what you've done." So—and (*disgusted*) "Guuuuhhh!" The audience just went "Raaahhhh!" I mean, just, "Oh, I can't believe it!" Because they didn't know. He didn't want to give away what he was doing. He's traded one reaction for the other reaction, that he had there. Now, how does that apply to *Merchant*? He manipulated that script, and I knew—I went, "Oh, my gosh." And I asked him, "Why did you do this?" He said, "I don't—" well, I knew why he did it, I said, "It was a surprise!" He says, "Yep. Don't want to give it away. I wanted to do that." That courtroom scene is a perfect scene. And she was reacting—and she's also a friend of mine, her modern sensitivity to her friends and people, to—"That's terrible, the audience is reacting that way." Yeah, but they're engaging in a real moment, a piece of real theatre that's happening onstage. And don't worry, at the end of this show, you know, that'll happen. If we were to change that, that's no different than people objecting to other types of censorship—"You shouldn't have that. You shouldn't have that in there. That's bad to throw those menorahs onstage. That's bad to do that." Yeah, but later, at the end, we're going to find out how bad that is. You know, Gratiano will get his comeuppance. As will the other. So, when you said *Merchant of Venice*, I was just reminded of that. For me, I will carry that moment, that piece of live theatre, and Nancy's reaction to this—"What should I do? You know, we have got to change that." I go, "No, I think Shakespeare's rubbing our nose in something that is, you know, not—should—" Even that line—and I don't think it means—I think that line means more to me, "A Daniel, a Daniel, a second Daniel." Daniel was seen as this great judge and arbitrator. The fact that Gratiano is throwing that line in his face is even a double thing that most people don't know. David Ivers, who is our artistic director, and also is Jewish, saw the production and they took his yarmulke—they took Shylock's yarmulke and threw it on the floor, and he was sitting watching the show, and he goes "Gaahhhh!" And then went up to the actor and director, and dramaturg, who was not Jewish, and said, "Oh, hey, let me just tell you what you just did." So, I think we are benefited in modern times with the resources of research and sensitivity and community, and because we have all of these things, we should use all of those things to help us tell a story, but not forget that there's a master dramatist at work, who can help us amplify even more things.

I'll use *Cabaret* as an example. If we were to perform a *Cabaret*, the way it was in the '70s, it would not resonate with modern audiences like the present way we do *Cabaret*. I don't know if you've seen *Cabaret*, but there are certain things that we do in *Cabaret* now that make us see and resonate with that. So it's about understanding the audience, and trusting the playwright, and treating every play like it's a new play. Does that make sense? I think sometimes Shakespeare is—we pull him out of the box, and we museum him. Instead of every time we do a play, it should be a new play. This is a new play. It's a new audience, it's new actors, it's a new script, falling on new ears, and if we treated Shakespeare with the same respect that we treat modern playwrights, that—I mean, can you imagine walking up to Albee, or Neil LaBute, and saying, "Neil, this is offensive. You know, you really shouldn't be doing this." But I don't think we reverence—I sat in a STAA conference, and they talked about the Americanization of *Henry V*—STAA being the Shakespeare Theatre Association of America—and *Henry V* has been painted as this heroic tale—"We English, we America. We few, we happy few," and it—propaganda piece, and, "This is terrible! It's terrible, terrible! It's a terrible play, and we shouldn't be doing it, we shouldn't be doing it." He was a modern playwright. I can find out his name if you want it, and he's saying this to the audience, and half the audience agreed, and the other half—"Ugh, come on." And I was loving (*laughs, EH laughs*), the discourse that was happening between that. But I went, "Dude, dude, you're a new playwright! Where is your respect for the playwright of the past? He was saying something. And it's rankling you, and it's rankling you, and so you think you want to shut him down? Well, I want to shut you down. How does that make you feel?" No, no, he is a new playwright. Shakespeare is a new playwright, and if we treated him as a new playwright, for new audiences, all these problems would go away. You know, what is this playwright trying to say? All right, when they don't understand this word, because they don't understand that I—pick any Shakespeare word, they can't understand this. What do we have to do to make sure that they understand this word? You know—oh, we've gotta cut this. No, you'd never do that to LaBute. Now, maybe LaBute won't get the following he's supposed to. Maybe an audience will get upset, but that's—you treat it as a new play, treat it as an innovative piece of theatre, and treat it as something that just might upset—I'm referring to Duchesne again. We've gotta make sure that she can get something out of it, and somebody else can get something out of it, too. I don't know. Now, I'm on a soapbox. (*laughs, EH laughs*)

EH: Well, it's so interesting that you bring up *Henry V*, because Ohio State actually just did a touring production of *Henry V*, for local schools, and it was so interesting, because it was—I mean, they had the big speeches, but there was also—they staged it as if it were in a VA, or a VFA hall.⁹⁰

MB: Oh, wow!

⁹⁰ The production, done at Ohio State in 2015, was set in a VFW hall.

EH: So it said a lot, also, about the cost of war in addition to the glory of it.

MB: Yeah. I think it's heralded as a patriotic play, a coming of age—and I think all of that is true. It's in there, I—he called it irresponsible, *laughs*), and I went, "Yep. Yep. And Joan of Arc—La Pucelle is a—yeah, he's playing for the whole audience!" You ever watch a *Simpsons* episode? Same thing, you're writing *Simpsons* episodes for, you know—so, realize where it's coming from. It was really interesting what happened in me, and it helped me frame how I feel about Shakespeare as a modern playwright. Because I've also sat in on funding meetings, or been privy to grant meetings, where new playwrights will say, "Well, we're giving too much money to old Shakespeare. When are we going to give it to new plays?" And of course, I'm a Shakespeare guy, so—but too many times it's new—and funding makes sense, either these guys get money, or these guys get money. But I think we're in the same camp. Shakespeare is a new guy. Tennessee Williams was once new. Eugene O'Neill was once new. Those were once all new playwrights. I'm a Neil LaBute fan, too. Gets me angry, but (*laughs*) that means theatre is doing its job. (*EH laughs*) And I've seen, I've seen *Henry Vs* that are flag-waving, and I've also—I saw a beautiful production of *Henry V* at Stratford, that used video, and the Boy was walking around with a video camera that was live and was up above the stage, and then he turned it to do monologues, and he'd capture those monologues. And it was a really cool, modern concept. Again, cost of war, it's really kind of cool. And it makes those heroic speeches—takes the sails out of some of that, and gives them context. Anyway. It was cool.

EH: I have one more question, if you have time.

MB: Yep, that's fine.

EH: So, when you do the full-length productions of plays like *Shrew* or *Merchant of Venice*, that are a little more challenging, in terms of the literary seminars after the show, do the issues come up, are there questions about those? How do those get discussed?

MB: Yes, they do come up. And I love them. I love that Nancy and Ace Pilkington handle those. A little bit about that process—we start the summer season with previews, and we invite the directors to come out and speak at those times, and we record those, and then we—and so they basically share their concept. And this allows the literary seminar directors to then—they're able to say 3 weeks later, "Well, Henry Warnitz said the following," or "J.R. Sullivan said the following." So it allows them to talk about that. We're able to talk about what the director was going for was this. Again, I think it's really great to ask back, "Well, what did you think about that? Did you like that, or did you enjoy that?" Here's a—I'm not trashing your dissertation (*EH laughs*), but it's interesting that we call *Shrew*, which is a major seller, and *Merchant of Venice*, which is a major seller difficult plays, but, oh my gosh, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*? Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh!

EH: I know! If anyone was doing those for young audiences, I would look at that one (*laughs*), but I haven't found anyone who's decided to tour that to kids yet.

MB: Yeah. Well, we're doing that this fall. We're not touring it, and—I mean, those are—they're kids! Those are kids! You know, they like this, and the next day, they like this. I dream of a time when we can tour with *Two Gents* you know? Oh my gosh, he almost rapes her?

EH: I know, yeah.

MB: You know? And what's—(*mocking, joking*) it's almost rape, it's not full rape, so it's okay.

EH: Ugh, yeah.

MB: And then he forgives him, doesn't give her a voice at the end. Man, *Measure for Measure*, oh my gosh, oh my gosh! I don't know when I'll be able to tour *Measure for Measure*.

EH: I know.

MB: It's—oh, they're all laughing back here (*EH laughs*) This is my—yeah, school kids would love it, I don't know if I could get it by the teachers. Teachers and community—our very conservative community. Anyway, so, *Measure for Measure*, oh, we had a field day with that one. That was great. And we do a lot of the histories, so I'm grateful that—I inherited these programs, but in the late '60s, having—when Michael Finlayson said, "Fred, you've got the pre-talk, to prepare audiences. You need to have the post-talk, where you can talk about what they saw, what they experienced." So it's really cool, the discussions we get out there. And it actually empowers the audience—it sometimes empowers the audience too much. We get patrons—or, we get actors from Ashland, or from other companies, where—and you've been around patrons before, you know, where they'll say, "I didn't like the way she played Lady Macbeth," or, "Why was she wearing that dress? Was she wearing a [*unclear*]?" All those comments, which are—these are living people, you know? Why are you talking so candidly about them? But that candid talk also allows us, if we facilitate it correctly, to have some good discussions about it. So I think my answer is, yeah, we deal with all those issues, and the issues from the other problem plays. (*laughs*) Which leads us—will there be more problem plays in the future, as we become more sensitive about this? It's interesting, we call—let's talk about bed tricks. You know? Right?

EH: Yeah.

MB: So what we're going to do, is I'll climb in, and I'll have sex with him instead, and

then, at the end, we'll tell him I was the one who had sex with him, and then he has to marry me! Yeah, you do that. (*EH laughs*) And then—Isabelle, the nun, we'll save you from your Catholicism. And I will marry you, because you're so fabulous, and I won't give you a voice in the end of the show for you to speak or respond, either. So, there's so many great things to talk about. Just, why he does that, and what I think is most intriguing, is how we as modern audiences, and we as modern artists choose to justify, or the choices we make to make this piece of theatre work. Some directors say, "This is it. Own it. This is it." Others will—and so, I mean, it makes for some really, really great discussions in table session rooms, and within the process. Why doesn't she talk? That type of stuff. That was one thing that just really upset our audiences, our recent *Measure for Measure*. Why is he marrying her? And there's multiple answers. Well, it was a different time. He's saving her, because now she's not a Catholic, or she's—all those type of things. Or maybe she does still have a voice, or maybe he's shutting it down, or the cycle perpetuates, another bad choice from the Duke. You know, a duke who's going to get in disguise, the town's just a mess—the town's a mess already, he's going to let him do it, and you solve my problems, because I don't have the ability to enforce my sexual chastity laws. These are all just examples of the stuff we talk about. So, yes, we talk about those things, and we've talked about—during that *Merchant of Venice*, they talked about what happened, they talked about Jessica's behavior at the end of that show, because her behavior is very interesting. Very much, you know? Oh, I'm going to love you. And from an older sensitivity, they were done. They were married. I mean, there's a love sonnet, they're not thinking about—we, if anything, have tried to—Shylock goes off, and then he ends in a happy way. He ends in a musical theatre way, with that whole ring thing. And then all of a sudden, we come back, and we have Shylock going down a river, or we have him walk alone onstage, and we have, just to remind us—I think those are modern devices that we've done to try to help us PC it. Make it more politically correct. I embrace those conversations, and I hope that we have them and we have them in the grove, when we do that. I don't know, was that specific enough for you?

EH: Yes. I figured—it sounded like they came up. Did the woman who led—Nancy, I think you said her name was—did she bring up the Gratiano's cheering in the courtroom?

MB: She did. Well, early in the season it started happening, and I said, "That's going to happen all season long." She said, "I don't know what to do with that." That moment didn't come out in the groves. Other things came out in the groves. And it bothered her that nobody was talking about that. Which I found interesting. In other words, the audiences kind of let that go. Which means, I think, the piece of theatre did what it was supposed to, later, by the end of the show, that those moments were resolved. She did have one or two people—and I'm sure there'll be moments this year, with *Lear*, and with *Shrew*. When is this due? When are you doing this?

EH: I am writing this summer and this fall, so I'm hoping to have everything finished

by next spring, but I'm writing all summer and fall.

MB: Okay, because we're doing *Shrew* right now. But it's not touring. And I know your focus is touring, but a very interesting thing is happening, that I don't think a lot of the public is going to see. Fred Adams is directing *Shrew*, so, so he opened with *Shrew*, and now—as the Adams Theatre is closing, and we're building the new theatre, he is directing it. So I want you to imagine a man of his age, at that age of the theatre, is directing younger actors, and his directing techniques are different. Because they come from another age, another time. And Scott Phillips is assisting him, who is our Executive Director, but I've heard rumblings in the cast about the differences. I think it's going to be a very popular *Shrew*. It stars Bryan Vaughn and Melinda Pfundstein, two Festival favorites, that we have here frequently. But the tension between the new world, and the old world is—I think will yield very interesting things. So if I hear of anything, I can call you and say, "Wow, they're having an interesting discussion about this."

EH: Yeah, please do let me know, because I'll be writing.

MB: He's quite an outspoken Artistic Director, like most. And loves this show, loves Kate, and taking care of her. He's very much about, you know, "You go here, you go here," as opposed to organic treatments, "Let's see what we can discover," directing style-wise. So it'll be interesting to see what happens with that production. We'll hear. We'll see what they say in the seminars. And I don't think the seminars are completely conducive of the whole audience, you know, if we have a 700 or 800 house, and we have 120 in a seminar, they are our tried and true, our people who see all 6 plays. They're quite articulate, the crowd is. So, cool.

EH: Great. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me.

MB: Yeah, it's, it's a pleasure. I look forward to seeing it and reading it. You've spoken to some great people. Thanks so much, Elizabeth. See you.

EH: See you.

MB: Bye.

Misha Fristensky 2015
Interview with the author via phone
28 Jan.

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): I'd love to get your thoughts on how you feel audiences on the tour responded to the show, to *Taming of the Shrew* generally. The general response.

Misha Fristensky (MF): I would say in almost every place we went, the response was great. It was really nice going into places that didn't get to experience Shakespeare at all, and it was wonderful to see them light up and enjoy the whole experience, because I think we tried really hard with our particular show, to make it accessible to a wide range of audiences whether it be young, old, and so I think we accomplished that.

EH: That's great. One of my questions and it's a really broad question, but how did young audiences, or did they, respond to some of the more complicated gender stuff, because *Taming of the Shrew's* known as this play that has all these—it's a really fun play, but also has these complicated gender dynamics going on, so I'm just wondering if there was any response to that from young audiences, or if it was just part and parcel of the show.

MF: I'd say not as much as I think we might have expected, because I think the kids were just trying to deal with the language and deal with everything that they were seeing, but there were particular places, where there would be some kids who would go, "Well, why did Kate decide to do this, and why is she treated like that, and why is she so mean," (*EH laughs*) and it was fun to be able to discuss those particular questions with some of the kids who were paying attention to that, because in some of the places that we went the kids studied the play the whole week before, they discussed it with their teacher, and they had some questions ready to go for us, which was great.

EH: Oh, that's great. Can you tell me a little bit about what you remember from those discussions. So when kids asked things like, "Why does Kate do the things that she does or why is she treated that way," what were some of the conversations that you recall happening around those topics?

MF: Sure. The one that I particular remember best—it was actually one of our first shows. It was at a youth correctional facility, and we performed for about six guys and their teachers, so it was in this gym and it was our first show on the road, and so they had done their research, and we were expecting these guys to sit there with their arms crossed and just like, not be about it, and at first that's what they did, but as the show went on, they started to get involved and they were laughing, and they were very involved with the show. And at the end of the show, if I remember correctly, I think they had a couple questions as to—what was it exactly, I think, at

the end of the show, when Kate gives her, "Fie, fie" speech—"unknit thy, that threatening, unkind brow,"—the way we tried to play it was we believed that Kate and Petruchio decided, this is how their marriage worked for them, and we wanted to show kids that everyone goes to a marriage in a different way, everyone has their own path, and this is how they decided to do it. And when—the line that Kate says, "Then place your hands below your husband's foot," we had this thing where our Kate went down as to bow before Petruchio to show that she is more or less giving in to him and what he wants her to do, and we had our Petruchio pick up her hand and raise her up to his level, so he was saying, in an essence, "No, we're gonna do this together." Even though we were still using the same text that Shakespeare wrote, we were showing that this is how these two tried to do their marriage together, and kids were like, "Oh, we noticed that, and that was really great, and we thought it was really cool how even though Petruchio could be this, like, really mean guy, how he started to work things out with Kate. We thought that was really great," (*EH laughs*) and it was just great to notice that they found little moments like that and could pick that out. I think that was really often correct.

EH: That's really cool they picked up on that. I guess that leads a little bit into my next question, so those—that was one of the memorable moments surrounding gender. Were there other moments that were particularly memorable or kind of stuck out to you from those post-show question and answer sessions that you did?

MF: Yes, actually (*laughs, EH laughs*). There was this—I don't remember exactly the location, but there was this lady who was totally on the side of women being submissive, and, you know—"This play hit it on the nail, women have to, like, it should be the male who takes control and women should bow to the male, and whatever they decide goes," and we—there were kids, this was for a community show, so there were kids in the audience, there were older folks, and as a cast, I remember, we were just looking around at each other, (*EH laughs*) and going, "Wow," like I mean, this—of course this stuff still exists, but this woman was just totally like, "I don't totally agree with the way you guys decided to show it, I think that women need to act this way, they have to bow down before the male," and we were just looking at each other, saying, "Wow, there are young children here, listening to this, but I guess to each his own." So, that's something that really stuck out. (*laughs*)

EH: Do you remember how you guys as a company, or how anyone specific ended up responding to that, or did it just go on to another question or comment?

MF: I don't actually quite remember, I think we just tried to handle it with grace, as best that we could, and we nodded our heads, and said, "Okay, well, that's your opinion, that's very nice," and then I think we kind of deflected a little bit, and go on to another question. (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) Yeah. How did you guys as a company, in rehearsal and performance—

and you talked about it a little bit—but how did you handle some of those more complex and potentially problematic themes about gender and power dynamics that come up in the play?

MF: I think once—like I mentioned earlier, I think we tried to focus on telling a story that was particular to our Kate and Petruchio. Instead of just hitting a general wash of things, we wanted to make sure—and afterwards in the Q and A, we—because we had a lot of questions of, "Well, this is a very complex show about gender issues. How do you feel your show handled it?" And we'd say, "Well, once again, this is particular to our Kate and Petruchio, and no marriage is perfect, and obviously, theirs is not, but we wanted to show that through the ups and downs, through the bad—everyone can make mistakes, everyone has their own path as to how they come towards something, and this is how Kate and Petruchio handled it. At the end of the day, it worked out for them." And that's usually how we went about that.

EH: Yeah. Was that something that you as a company—or that Shelly Gaza brought up specifically in rehearsal, or is it something that you all arrived at together? Is there a specific way that came about or did it just kind of come up organically that that was the story that you were telling?

MF: It was definitely something that we discussed as a company before, in rehearsals and doing our table work and whatnot, but it also came out organically as well, doing these performances. I think we had seventy-some odd shows, we had a lot of time to continue to discuss the subject matter amongst each other, and, you know, questions that were asked to us from different places, we were able to absorb those and stew with them for a little bit. It's something that came up throughout the process.

EH: Wow. Yeah, I can imagine, especially, doing 70—that's a lot of performances to do. *(EH and MF laugh)*

MF: Yeah.

EH: So, changing gears, away from gender, but to talk about the performance for young audiences in general, did you find in doing this performance for young audiences, did anything change about your style of performance, as opposed to doing a show for a more general audience?

MF: I think things were changed up when we had a community performance, when we had a children's show, and also depended on the children's ages. So if we knew we would be going into—we had a couple middle school shows that we did, that were middle school and high school kids, so having done the show quite a few times and just learning, we knew that with kids like that, the text would be a little harder for them to understand, so we knew that we had to really be on our game when it came to the rest of the elements of the show, which is our stylized commedia part of

the show, and we had a lot of bits in the show. We knew that we could amp those up a little bit to really keep their focus and keep them engaged in the show. And then when we had some community shows and we knew there'd be some older folks, or people who were familiar with the show we'd dial into the text, making sure that we hit those moments really well. Not to say that we gave it any less or any more in any particular fashion, but we just knew that there were certain parts of the show that we knew we could dial in and crank up just a little more to cater to a specific audience.

EH: Yeah, I know that when I talked to Shelly Gaza, she talked a lot about the importance of really physically engaging the text, so engaging young audiences in that way of using a lot of physicality, and really embodying stuff, so it sounds like that was a big part of the production, and of the overall style.

MF: Absolutely.

EH: So I have two other specific performance-related questions. I noticed in the—I read the script that was used for the performance, and I noticed that in addition to playing Tranio, you also played the Widow. Is that right?

MF: That is correct.

EH: (*laughs*). Can you tell me a little bit about playing that role, since it's cross-gender, and how the audience responded to that and that being played?

MF: Sure. (*laughs*) I mean, just about without fail, any time I came out, in any performance, there would be some kind of reaction. (*EH laughs*) Hoot and hollers, some gasps, some laughing. I think, actually, I had a little ways to walk on the stage, so I don't think people noticed it was me yet, that it was a guy, and once they did, that's when a little bit of uproar started to take place (*EH laughs*), and for me as an actor, that's great, because it meant to me that they were paying attention and that I had their attention, to get them engaged and tell the story that we wanted to.

EH: Yeah. That's very fun. (*laughs*) And then another element that I know was added into the performance was the hip-hop dance that Shelly had mentioned, and we'd spoken a little bit about. So could you tell me a little bit about the process of developing that and incorporating, that into the pre show and transitions?

MF: Sure. When we all got together as a company and Shelly told us her vision and what she saw for the show, she knew that she wanted the opening bit to really draw in the audience and just pop. And so she sat us down, and she goes, "I have a couple ideas, and I wanted to start with some music. And I want to play this music for you guys, and just tell me what you think." And she played this hip-hop inspired song, and I immediately was drawn to it, because I love dance, I love music, and hip-hop

especially. And, so I was all about it, and the rest of us were on board as well, and we're like, "Actually, this works perfect," and she goes, "Okay, well I'm just going to play it and I kind of want to see what you guys do." And so we just stood up and she played the track a couple times, and we just started moving, and our basis for that opening pre show was, we were a troupe, a company of actors, what we really were, getting ready to do a show. So we were putting our props in place, moving scenery around, engaging one another, with, "Hey, how you doing," and dancing as well. I was the first one out onstage and I came out as the music came, and I just knew I had to do something to really grab the attention of everyone, so I jumped up, and I went into this half split, (*EH laughs*), and I said hello to everyone without saying hello, but just using my actions and a little bit of dance. That's how I know how to communicate with people very well is through my body and through dance and it was great that Shelly recognized that and allowed us all to take part of it and it just came organically as well, which was really nice for us to be a part of as a unit.

EH: Yeah, that's a really cool introduction. And I think I've seen a production photo online of you jumping in the air, which looked very impressive. (*laughs*)

MF: (*laughs*) Yeah.

EH: She had also mentioned that dance came back throughout the show in the transition, I think she said, to Petruchio's house. I was just wondering if you could talk a little more about that and how that kept working throughout the show.

MF: Sure. In the transition to Petruchio's house—I wasn't involved in this number, but it was when we were setting up for Petruchio's house, and Shelly had another great piece of music. It was a little more, I would say, salsa theme to put it the best way I can think of it, and we had the servants of the house once again moving the set and putting it together, but they were dancing around while they were doing it, and at every performance, it grew. Each actor started finding their character, and specific little things that their character would do, like, we'd hear like, "Cha cha!" (*EH laughs*) and different sounds and exclamations, and different moves—we had hits and other things going on that the audience really enjoyed. I think we always got a nice little laugh during that time. And once again, it was a device used to help cover up a scene change, but it also kept the audience engaged and kept the mood—I think it just helped keep the mood in a good place. With the subject material, we always wanted to keep the audience engaged and not have them be lost with some of the heavier things that were coming along, so I think moments like that were really useful.

EH: Yeah, it seems like it would be a great way to keep audience's attention. I'm wondering, because it sounds like the music was pretty modern, so do you think the contemporary style helped the audience to connect with the show, especially since it opened with that hip-hop music feel? Did you get that sense at all?

MF: Absolutely. I think, especially with the different variety of music genres, it kind of invited everyone into the show. Because we had a little bit of hip-hop for the high school kids who could relate to that, and then we had an upbeat number that everyone could kind of get into, and then we had another folk-inspired singer/songwriter song that was a little more fun and still everyone could get into as well, so I definitely think that the modern contemporary song choices helped in keeping the attention.

EH: Yeah. That's great. So shifting gears again a little bit, when we talked before, you'd mentioned the workshops that were a part of the tour, and I hadn't really known about those before, so I'd just love to know a little more about the content of the workshops and what exactly you did with students during those.

MF: Sure. So we taught three different styles of workshops. We had improvisation, Shakespeare text, and stage combat. And for almost all of the school shows, we would either teach the classes before the show or after the show, and we would split up. One of the company members would help the technical director and the stage manager set up the stage, if it was before the show, while we'd pair off and we'd teach the classes together. And depending on the size—sometimes we had—I remember our first one, we had four people in a stage combat class I taught (*EH laughs*), and then at another time we had about forty. So the sizes could definitely range, and as the tour went along, we kind of developed our own style, of what we had to teach and we got comfortable with that, and I know that in stage combat, we had a couple basic moves that we wanted to teach the kids, and I think what we stressed mostly was just safety. Because we had some tricks and some little bit of gymnastic stuff and stage combat in our show, with some of the bits that we did, so we wanted to take that and show the kids that through learning the proper technique and through rehearsals, and becoming comfortable with one another, it was possible to make it look really cool. And Shakespeare text was just a basic introduction to Shakespeare text, and we tried to break it down by using—I'm sure you're familiar with the Shakespeare insults and putting intention behind the insults, and that was really fun for people of all ages to really get on board with that. And improv, we'd just do some games to get them used to improv and comfortable with being up onstage, and just going with the flow. And we also wanted to stress, still being a Shakespeare show, that sometimes things can go wrong (*EH laughs*) and you still have to be in the world and in the moment, and we wanted to give them the tools to do that.

EH: That's very cool. So did the content relate directly to *Taming of the Shrew*, or—it sounds like it was just general theatre stage combat, and Shakespeare text, and general improv stuff. Is that right?

MF: Yes. That's correct.

EH: Okay. So, my other question—so you mentioned 70 performances, and I know

I've done a touring show with just 20, and it changed a lot from when we started to when we closed, just in terms of our own understanding of the show and the way certain things went, so I'm just curious as to how the show changed and developed over the span of the tour.

MF: It was incredible. It would be really interesting to see a video of when we first started to when we finished (*laughs, EH laughs*), because I felt like our rehearsals—we put it up pretty quickly, so even with—it's a Shakespeare show, so I think we all wanted to spend a lot more time really digging into it and getting into the meaty parts and fine-tuning some moments, but we didn't have that time, because we had to get on the road. But that is what was so great about being on the road and having so many performances is that we were able to—during the course of that time, we never stopped working. We were always looking at our scripts, we were always talking with each other about, "Oh, how did this moment work, how did the audience feel about that? Ah, you know that didn't really work, what if we changed it up with this?" And we'd always be bouncing ideas off each other, and we always were—what was so great about our ensemble, I just loved working with this company, was we always wanted to put on the best show that we could, and we were 100% about telling the story, and our message, and through all those performances, moments got fine-tuned, choices became clearer. There would be days where it—I think it was a 75 minute show—there would be days when our stage manager would come up, and be like, "Guys, you ran two minutes over, what's going on?" Like, "Misha, at this particular part, you really took your time there, didn't you, really feeling that moment?" (*EH laughs*) and I'd be, "Well, yeah." So it would change, depending on the location. And other times, we'd just be like, "Well, we just flew through that, we were really feeling it, the crowd was feeling it." So, it was great, because it was really fun. I think it wasn't until the last two weeks before we got done where we were really like, "Okay, we've been doing this for a while, we're ready to kind of put this baby under wraps," (*EH laughs*) but we were on board for so long and just had such a great time crafting it, fine-tuning it, making it the best that we really could.

EH: Wow. Again, I know, just speaking from experience, doing a touring show, I know there were moments in the show—we did *As You Like It*—where we didn't realize how strong the audience reaction was going to be. So, like, we did not realize how vocal audiences would be in response to a certain fight. Were there any moments that, once you got on tour, you were surprised by the way audiences reacted, or characters that you were surprised by the reaction to?

MF: We definitely did have some of those moments. The moment that I was talking about, where we had our Kate go down and bow her head in her hand, and then when Petruchio knelt down with her and brought her back up to his eye level. I know in some of the community performances, and the people who were familiar with the show—we'd have some gasps, or slight little claps—they were just so engaged in the story and were so happy that—I think they'd probably never seen a

version like that, and I think that was the moment that we really enjoyed. That was great. When Petruchio comes out right before the wedding, we had a costume piece, where it was a hat, but it was made out of a bra. *(EH laughs)* So *(laughs)* we had Petruchio in this ridiculous-looking outfit. This was him going, "Okay, Kate, you're going to marry me, well, you're going to get this." *(EH laughs)* And I remember, there would be audience who would just be losing it, just laughing and howling because he looked ridiculous with this bra on his head, and it was so great. Sometimes we would lose it as well, because it was really funny. We also put a lot of work in our characters, and we had quite a few characters who had their own specific idiosyncrasies and we got a lot of great reactions from the crowd, of loving certain characters and faces they made, or a bit that went over really well. I'd say we sometimes we knew which moments to expect, like as you do a show you know that you're going to get a laugh here, you gotta pause there, and then other times, we'd just be like, "Oh, that came out of nowhere," *(EH laughs)* or, "Where was the laugh on that one?"

EH: Yeah. *(laughs)* I know when I spoke to Shelly, she was talking about her touring experience, um, when she performed in the tour, and she had mentioned noticing that, particularly in some of the performances in Utah, people had been exposed to a lot of Shakespeare, and then some other places that was not the case quite as much. Did you notice that there were any particular places where students seemed to have been prepared really well, or were steeped in Shakespeare. Were there any differences between audience response in that way?

MF: Mm hmm. Shelly is definitely hitting it on the nail. Most places in Utah were familiar with Shakespeare, and I think that has a lot to do with the strong presence of the Shakespeare festival there, and because most people who came and saw the shows were like, "Oh, yeah, we, we go to the Festival every year, that's our summer vacation, and we love seeing the tours, and we love seeing the shows, and we've seen *Taming of the Shrew* four times, *(EH laughs)* and we loved how you guys did it," or, you know "This didn't quite work for us." So, I would definitely say even during the Q&As, when we were in Utah, we expected and were ready for some deeper conversations. And when we went to—I remember this place, I think it was Chandler, Arizona—I think that was a reservation that we went on—and over 90% of the crowd had never seen a Shakespeare show before. And that's what I think, at least personally for me, and I can speak for some of my castmates as well, was just some of the most rewarding for us, to see people come to us after the show and just be so thankful and grateful for showing them something they'd never seen before, and they couldn't believe that we'd give our time to them to show them something like this, and I think that's why I love doing what I do. That's why I think theatre's so magical.

EH: Yeah that sounds like a great experience and great thing to be able to do. I've just got one more question. It's pretty broad, but were there any specific challenges that you encountered doing the show, either because of the challenges in the themes

of the play, or just challenges of doing a 70-performance run of a touring show?

MF: Yes. I would say health—just moving around in different climates and being cooped up in vans and hotel rooms became an issue a little bit, just trying to stay healthy. We didn't have any understudies, so if you got sick, we still had to do it, and there was a couple performances where our Kate, she had terrible coughing fits in the middle of a show. But we went along with it. We played it into the—not, played it into the show, but if she coughed, we gave her a moment, and we acknowledged it in character, and a lot of the audiences seemed to enjoy that, and that was nice for us as well. So health usually, and I think a great thing about this tour as well is you know what you're going into from past tour experiences and shows that have gone to the particular places that you're visiting, but everything can change. A venue can change, a location can change, so you have to adapt and you have to be on your toes and change for anything that may be thrown your way. So we sometimes didn't know what we were getting into until we pulled up and then we had a stage manager and tech TD go in and look at the space and go, "Well, this is not going to fit, we don't have enough space for our tables in the back for our props, so we'll have to work something out." (*EH laughs*) And actually those were some of the biggest challenges that we definitely faced.

EH: Yeah, and—so 70 shows, how many months was the run?

MF: I think we, we left Cedar City on January 22, and then our last show was April 20.

EH: Okay. Got it, so about 3 months. All right. That is a long run.

MF: Yeah. (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) Those are all the questions that I have. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me. Have a good night.

MF: All right. Thanks, you too.

EH: Thanks. Bye.

MF: Bye bye.

Shelly Gaza 2014
Interview with the author via Skype
8 Dec.

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): Just to start off, I'd love to know a little bit about how you were brought on as the director and adaptor for this production at Utah Shakespeare, how you started that work.

Shelly Gaza (SG): My relationship with Utah Shakespeare Festival started in 2004, when I was a member of their acting company, so I was an actor with them for several years, and actually, I played Kate in *Taming of the Shrew*, in 2005, I think, for their touring production of *Taming of the Shrew* at that time. So I played their Kate, so that's when I first worked with them on their children's—I worked on their MainStage, [2005] was the only time I'd ever worked with them on their young audiences tour. So, they do four shows that they rotate every year. They do *Shrew*, and *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, and—okay, what's the fourth—oh, *Midsummer Night's Dream*. And I'm pretty sure that that corresponds with the Utah state curriculum, because I think those are the four plays that they teach in the English classes, so they rotate them through so that they can sort of add it—it helps the theater maintain bookings, because they know that it's applicable to the English curriculum.

EH: Right

SG: So I guess it was a year and a half ago now when I first started talking to Michael Bahr about it, he just called me to see if I'd be interested in directing it. They use a different director every year, partially because they do go back to the same schools year after year, so they like to make sure that the shows are different, and that they're showing a new and interesting production every year so the kids don't get bored. And the teachers don't get bored. And, so, anyway, he approached me and I was available, and that's how I agreed to do the directing of the production last year.

EH: Okay, great, and I didn't know they rotated through the four productions. That's so interesting, that's really great to know. I'm guessing it's not the same adaptation, because it looked like you adapted the script.

SG: Yeah, it's really up to the director. I think it kind of depends on what the director wants to do. I used my own adaptation, but it was, I mean, part of it was informed by the production that I did in 2005, just because I had that in my head, and I knew my idea of what had worked in that production, so, we actually started with that cutting, and then I took out some more, put in some stuff, that kind of thing. It's nice that Michael Bahr starts to—because it's really hard to cut it down to 75 minutes.

EH: Yeah (*laughs*)

SG: And that's (*laughs*)—and they're like, it has to be that. And that has to do with the—basically, I think it's two class periods. They try to do it so that you can do it in a two class period block, so that it can happen either before lunch or after lunch, and you can get the most kids in the auditorium at the same time.

EH: Right

SG: So, anyways, it's really hard to do that 75 minute cutting (*EH laughs*), so I started there, but there were things that I did want to do differently, and there were things that I felt like didn't work as well with the one that we did, had done, in '05, so, that's how I arrived at what my cutting was.

EH: Okay. Could you maybe speak a little bit about some of the things that worked well and didn't work well in your experience as an actor in the production? And how specifically that guided your process?

SG: Sure, I think what I was aware of when I was an actor in the production, was how much you needed to tell the story physically as well as verbally, because the age ranges are huge, sometimes, in these. Sometimes we do community productions where you'd have six and seven year olds, all the way through grandparents and so, for those, of course, the younger kids—basically, pre-high school, elementary all the way through middle school—they need to see the story happen, they need to make visual connections with what the story is. Once you get into high school, depending on your high school student, you certainly then—you have to tell the story physically, and then the text backs up the story, so that, it's like the text is icing for everybody over 12 years old. (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) Right.

SG: So in a way, it's sort of this balance. Certainly, the text is important and we choose what to keep very carefully, but I don't ever want the young kids not to be engaged with the story, because I'm relying just on telling it verbally. So—that's kind of the dance that—and I felt that as an actor too, that when I was really physically engaged with the action, I had the audience with me. And so it's really important when you pick actors to do these kind of shows, you have to pick actors who are comfortable physicalizing the action—it's not fake or anything, but it is a broader kind of acting. And there are some actors, I think, that really get that, and do that naturally. And those are the actors that I think do this work best. It doesn't work so well when you have an actor that's very cerebral, and very intellectually based, and then you tell them to layer on the bigness, because then it seems a little fake and kids, oh, they get that right away, I mean, they're the most honest critics, of course. (*EH and SG laugh*) So that's what I noticed, when I was acting it. So then when I was casting my production, as the director, I knew that I wanted to do a very physical production, so we did lots of physical gags, we did a lot of dance, a lot of acrobatic stuff, and so I needed actors that could do that. But I think that I—I'm kind

of guessing, although it wasn't totally conscious, I think that my concept for the production had a lot to do with what it was like being an actor, (*laughs*) 7, 8 years ago or whenever that was. So—I got off track a little bit. Does that answer—is that what you were—

EH: Yeah, that absolutely answers my question. That's so interesting, because we do a touring production at OSU that I acted in last year. It was of *As You Like It* last year, but it's so true that when you're physicalizing and really embodying whatever the story is, it's so much easier, especially for—we did some performances for 5 and 6 year olds, and they get so much more into the fighting and the physical moments than just talking at them.

SG: Yeah, they do. They do, and I think that it's important. Here's why I'm interested in doing Shakespeare for young audiences like that. Because, it's really okay that they don't understand the words yet. It's really okay that that rich text and poetry doesn't really mean anything to them yet, and I think that we have to—I want to catch them young, I want to catch them when they're young so that they have this fun memory of seeing *Midsummer*, or, or *As You Like It* or whatever, and that they had a positive experience, so that as they age and they get to high school, when they cognitively can grasp the richness of the text and all of that, they assume they like it. Instead of starting from a place of assuming I'm not going to like it, and I think unfortunately, a lot of high school kids—they're presented with Shakespeare and for whatever reason they already think it's going to be hard and it's going to be boring and I'm not going to like it. And if we can get kids a positive theatre-going experience, oh, and it happened to be Shakespeare, then that's a total win, and I'm really okay with them not understanding (*laughs*) a lot of the words that even come out of the mouth. That's kind of okay, with me.

EH: Yeah. I agree. (*EH and SG laugh*) You talked a little bit about your concept and adaptation process, using physicality and placing a lot of emphasis on that. I noticed in your script notes, you talked about the fact that there's the really difficult idea of taming a woman that comes into play in this, and there's the final speech which is really problematic, but it's about more than that, that's not necessarily the overall meaning or the heart of the play, and I was wondering if you could speak a little bit more about that idea.

SG: Sure. In our production—and Michael Bahr, who's the Education Director—and I think you've had a little contact with him—he and I talked a lot about it, and we're totally agreed that this play works best today when the idea is that there's two shrews, that Petruchio is a shrew, and Kate is a shrew, and that it's about those two people learning how to love each other, those two people learning how to be partners, how to be spouses, how to compromise. So, when that was at the back of my mind the whole time, that informed some of the things that I cut. If it just felt too one-sided, as far as Kate's a baddie and Petruchio's a goodie, or something like that, then I just let it go, I just cut it from the script. So that helped arrive at this cutting

and then as we were in rehearsal, we just talked about it constantly in rehearsal, that everything had to feel give and take, that if we were going to show the ugly side of Kate, we were going to show the ugly side of Petruchio, and then when we get to that end scene, we staged it so that—we wanted it to be apparent that they loved each other. That they were not perfect people by the end of the play (*laughs, EH laughs*) They were imperfect people who had learned to be together, or learned to love each other, or something along those lines. So when it came to that final speech of Kate, it wasn't fully cut by the time we started rehearsal. Mallore Hill, who played Kate for me, she—in fact, I cut a big section of it two weeks into rehearsal. In my head, I felt like it could be delivered in a way that was going to work, and she really didn't, and I trusted her. I also trusted her because she's 22, and she's a lot closer to the age of these students we were going to be playing for than I am, and so I trusted her on that, and so we ended up cutting another 6 or 8 lines. I'm pretty sure the version you have the final cut, so it's minus that section. So it was also kind of a work in progress but that final speech, I thought—oh, well I'll tell you this too. We did a preview performance in Cedar City, before we took it on the road, and I had a conversation with a mom after the show, and she had brought her daughter who was junior high age. And she was bummed out hard by the end speech. She kept thinking "I thought it was going to be a joke, I thought we were going to—" But we were playing it straight, because I really wanted there to be a final message to the play. And so whatever I had hoped to do, it didn't do that for her, as an audience member. Now, she said her daughter didn't get it, her daughter was probably 11 or 12, and her daughter thought it was fun. But I had to trust that feedback, or I decided to trust that feedback, because I thought it was really important to make sure that I was connecting—I didn't want it to be okay just because the kids, oh, they're not going to understand those words. That wasn't enough, and I wanted the parents and the teachers to be on board with it, too. So that led to some final trimming of that last speech too. But really the guiding principle for me was—the reason to do this play—and I think we have to ask ourselves that question every time we do Shakespeare nowadays. Why today? Why another *As You Like It* today? Why another *Taming of the Shrew* today? And, so my idea, or our idea with Michael Bahr, was this idea of two people learning to compromise and be partners and to love each other. So, that being the driving message through it, the choices always had to support that, and that's how we arrived at every decision along the way. Another thing I should mention too, that was a part of this, is that we cast Baptista as a woman, so she was a mother. We didn't play it as her playing a man. We played it as Baptista was a mother, and I think that there were a couple reasons to do that. One is, I think it's really important to show young women that there's a place for them in classical theater, and in Shakespeare. I think the tide's turning in that, I think a lot of professional productions are starting to be more open-minded about gender neutral casting. But I also wanted to—I had this really great actress, Tetrianna Silas, who played it, and she's African-American, and I also wanted to have a diverse cast, that was really important too. So we had two African-American actors in the cast, and so I really wanted to use her, and I really wanted to use a woman, and I think that that's important too, if the power structures in *Taming of*

the Shrew are not all male. So if it's not all men deciding Kate's fate, that helps too. It's a little bit more subliminal. So I thought it was important that the message wasn't that men were controlling Kate's fate, that we could explore the idea of power structure, of children struggling with parents. And I think that's a really current theme that students would understand. It was about parent-child dynamic, not female child-male parent dynamic, necessarily. I thought it helped keep it a little bit more universal in theme, that it was about parent-child, not just another theme of male-female.

EH: Right. I was going to ask, because I noticed the gender swap in the script, and I actually had another gender-related question. I noticed that the Zany #1 played Tranio, Grumio, and the Widow, and I was just curious as to how that cross-gendering worked, (*SG laughs, EH laughs*) and how that went.

SG: Well, I wish I could say it had more deep meaning than it did. (*laughs*) Part of it was, that actor was the only one who I didn't need to play something else in that final scene, because I needed Kate and I needed Bianca, because they have lines, they're part of that scene. And I needed Baptista, because Baptista is part of that scene, and the only not crucial characters were the Grumio-Tranio characters, so, it kind of was a necessity. And then Misha, who was the guy who played the Zany #1, he's a funny guy, and he had fun with it. So it ended up being a funny little bit. And the kids thought it was funny when they realized it was that guy playing the thing. We didn't really do much more than that with it. We didn't really make any statements with it except we put him in a dress, we put him in a funny, elaborate headpiece, and called it good. (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) I was just curious, because I noticed that, and I was just wondering if it was a male actor or female actor playing it. That sounds fun.

SG: Yes, it was. And it would have been cool to put another female in the cast. What I tried to talk Michael Bahr into doing was giving me 8 characters, 8 actors. Because then I would have cast one more female. I would have had a female play Tranio. That's what I really wanted to do. Because then we could do some fun cross-gender whatever, and I never fully fleshed that out, because Michael said I'm sorry, we only have enough money for seven actors, (*SG and EH laugh*) but I think, as a director, I always feel like—yes, well, the next time I do this show, I'm going to, x, y, z. But, anyhow, so that's the long answer to the story of the Widow. (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) So you talked a little bit about the one mom that you spoke to, and I'm just curious, in terms of audience reaction, actually both to this production and the one that you acted in, in 2005, how you felt audiences, young or adult, received either adaptation of *Taming of the Shrew*.

SG: Well, I know more about the feedback to the one that I was in, than the one that I directed. Only because, the one that I directed, I saw it through opening, and then I

never got to see the show again, because they were on the road, and I was back in Colorado. But the one that I was in, it was always received extremely well. It was a very fulfilling experience, that whole tour, of being an actor in that show. I think it had a lot to do with the production, I think at that time we also had a fun, physical production that students connected with. I also think, it's very interesting—so, this tour goes through Utah, Arizona, Nevada—we did it in Idaho, I can't remember if my tour went through Idaho or not—an interesting thing about Utah, though, is that it is a part of their educational curriculum, but it's a part of their culture in a way. Culturally, Utah's a very unique place. It's a very culturally specific part of the country, they are very unified—I don't know the percentage, but a huge percentage of the population is Mormon—and I'm not Mormon, so I'm not—I just have learned about it, spending a lot of time working in Utah, but from what I understand, the kids and the families read Shakespeare, they know a lot about the plays. So that helps. A lot of them knew the story before they saw the play. So that's always nice and helpful. I don't know that that was necessarily the case in Arizona and Nevada and some of the other places, although I don't remember necessarily it being a difference. Maybe there was, but I don't remember if there was between the—I just remember that in general, we had really positive responses. And we always did a talkback after the show, so students were always invited to stay, and they would ask questions about the play. Or, a lot of times they'd want to know about what it's like to be an actor. And those were great. We always ran out of time, we always had to say, "Oh, gosh, sorry, we only have time for one more question," because they all wanted to talk. And then, from what I understand—because I keep in touch with all those actors from the tour—I know that they had a good experience like I did when I was an actor in it, so I think it was probably similar, although, Michael Bahr could probably tell you more. Because I didn't get to see as many. *(laughs)*

EH: *(laughs)* Right—right, right. So I know we talked a little bit about the concept just in general, in terms of physicality; I know I read a little bit about some of it, that it was classical costuming with a modern twist, and I saw some of the images, and I'm just wondering if you could talk about where that came in to your concept, that unique look of the show.

SG: Well, that had a lot to do with the costume designer. Christina Leinicke is her name, and when we first started design talks—which happened before casting, they're the first thing that happens—and I had originally thought more of a neutral palette. I had had the idea to start in a sort of neutral thing and add costume pieces during the show. But then she started pulling these really cool research pieces, and we started talking about it, and her aesthetic was so cool—I mean, because it was kind of Elizabethan, we had sort of a corseted silhouette on the females, but then with this sort of Victorian era thing, because we had like floofy petticoats under the skirts with these Victorian shaped boots on the women. But then she had this great idea, she wanted to do different colored Converse high tops for the Zany's, and then she showed me this great picture of Johnny Depp, and we ended up going with this Johnny Depp picture for Petruchio, Johnny Depp ala, I don't know, it was like Pirates

of the Caribbean meets this—(EH laughs)—we just had so much fun talking about all this stuff—and then she started doing the sketches, and sketching up the costume plot, and I just loved where she went with it. So, really, I had this mini idea, and she just went crazy with it in this really great way. And along the way, I wanted to be sure that we had a bright, vibrant color palette. I thought that was important. I knew that we wanted to do a lot of acrobatic movement and dance movement, we wanted to do a lot of lazzi stage fighting goofiness, so I knew that the actors needed to be able to move. They needed to be able to move well, so all of that was part of the conversation, and then she's the one that came up with the actual final aesthetic of what it looked like. I just feel really lucky that she was the costume designer on it, so that's kind of how it—yeah, so we made up our own time. To me, it was important to have a reference to historical silhouettes. One reason is, the year before, they did *Romeo and Juliet*—and remembering that a lot of these students see each, they'll see them their freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior year, they'll see all of the productions—they had just done a very contemporary *Romeo and Juliet*. Completely contemporary dress, they had very hip modern clothing, no costume references to historical. So I wanted to be sure to do something different than that. It's also kind of my personal aesthetic, I really like period costuming, I just really like that stuff, so it is part of my personal aesthetic interest. So all of that stuff is how we arrived at this final look, which we called gypsy circus. Or, *commedia gypsy circus*, so, *commedia dell'arte* from the Renaissance, married with this idea of circus from the turn of the century. So Victorian-era circus, and then gypsy—the idea of a traveling band of actors. The backdrop was this gypsy curtain-looking thing. So that was our made up time period-concept-thing. (laughs)

EH: (laughs) It seems like *commedia* was a big influence, in terms of the Zanys and the fighting style. Was that a big—

SG: Yeah, it was. And, you know, a lot of that is just honoring the fact that that would have been where Shakespeare was coming from too. I mean, the *Grumio* and *Gremio* clowns, and *Tranio*—surely, that's where he was coming from when he wrote those characters, so it fits well. It's written to be done that way, and then, that's when I came up with the idea of the Zanys being these shapeshifting—that they were going to play all the multiple characters. Then the lovers, the idea of *Kate* and *Petruchio*, and *Bianca* and *Lucentio*, not playing multiple characters throughout, so that we could keep track of the two love stories, and the differences between the two. The only time I didn't do that was *Bianca* and *Lucentio* played servants in *Petruchio's* house, because we had some fun lazzi stuff that we wanted to do and if we had lots of little bobbing around servants it, it was funnier that way. So, except for that scene, it was only the Zanys that changed characters. And that's from the *commedia* tradition.

EH: You mentioned the contrasts between the two love stories that you have going on. Can you talk a little more about that, and how you handled that in rehearsal, and going through production and everything?

SG: Yeah, sure. Because we kept those four characters the same characters the whole time, it was really interesting how we could sort of track the different love stories. There were some talkback questions that we threw out to the students, that kind of—because in 75 minutes, we didn't fully flesh this out. But the seed of the idea was planted, and a lot of times we had some interesting discussion after the show about it with the kids. In the beginning, you think that Bianca and Lucentio are the perfect couple, and that they're the couple you want to be like, you know, "Oh, I want to be like them, oh, they're romantic, oh, he loves her so much, and oh, she's so pretty, and oh, she's so sweet, and oh, he's so romantic," and all of that. And then we're presented with Kate and Petruchio, who do nothing but argue and fight, and resist each other. And then by the end, we also see what we think is the happy ending with Bianca and Lucentio— that we're at their wedding feast, they're happily married, and, "Oh, that's what I want to be like," all of that kind of thing. But there is a power struggle, you can see that their power struggle is just beginning, and so one of the talkback questions we asked was, "So what happens next?" "Who is going to be the happier couple? Who are better friends, better partners, better—" And, of course, it's a very leading question, but they start thinking, "Oh, well, Kate and Petruchio are the happy ones, and Bianca and Lucentio we're not so sure about." For me, the follow-up question could be—if I were the English teacher taking my kids back to the classroom, the idea that we work through conflict, we do all of that, before we get married (*SG and EH laugh*) as opposed to committing to the marriage and then figuring— (*EH laughs*) and I certainly wouldn't want to suggest that it's the happily ever after once you're—but the idea that the journey and the conflict—that it isn't necessarily just about always being happy, always being the good couple. So we sort of watch those two couples come together at the end, from different ways, and then the discussion hopefully for the students is, "Okay, so, what's better? What happens next? What do you think?"

EH: Did you get the opportunity to see any students respond to that, or was that mostly when the company was on the road?

SG: That was when the company was on the road. What I did get to see, a lot of times, which was really great, was I would get daily performance reports. And my stage manager, she was really great, she always put in, "Best question" and "Best response" from the discussion—so she would distill it for me. So I always got to read the most—it's really amazing, some really insightful questions, and really insightful comments, they just wanted to say what they thought about the play, which was totally fine, we welcomed that, too, if they didn't have questions, if they just wanted to tell us, "Well, I thought this", or whatever. So I did get to read little blurbs about it. It was always affirming, it reminded us that they're getting it. The ones that get it really get it, and the ones that don't, it's totally okay that they don't, we just want them to have a good time, and have a positive experience from it. I wonder, too, if you want to talk with—I can get you in touch with some of the actors that were in the show. They could tell you specifics about that, so, I'm happy to, if you want.

They're great, and they love talking about it.

EH: Yeah, I would love to.

SG: I don't know if that fits in your research, or your timeline, or anything. I know you're probably really busy. (*laughs*)

EH: No, I would love to get to speak with some of them, because I'm trying to get as much as I can about these productions that I'm looking at, so that would be wonderful.

SG: Okay, great. Well, I'll e-mail you. Certainly Mallore Hill, she and I are still in very recent contact, because she's starting to look into going to grad school, so I've been talking to her just this last week about letters of rec and all that stuff, so I know I can get you in touch with Mallore, and maybe some of the others too. But I'll e-mail you their contact info.

EH: That would be wonderful. Thank you so much.

SG: Yeah, you bet.

EH: So, I think I've covered most of my questions. The one big one that I have left, and you talked about this a little bit, but, if you could work on this production again, another touring production of *Shrew*, is there anything you would change or do differently, or—what do you think you might do differently?

SG: Ah, gosh, that's a great question, and a hard one. I don't know. I mean, I hate to say that no, I wouldn't change a thing (*EH laughs*), I think that, if anything, when I do—and I hope to be able to do a Shakespeare for young audiences again—that I'll feel—I wasn't sure how casting Baptista as a woman would work, I wasn't sure how adding this hip-hop dance number thing that we did in the beginning would work, and I think I will feel more bold about making those choices. So, if anything, I would do more of what we did, just knowing that it works, that mixing things like that hip-hop music thing, and doing the cross-gender casting—I would just do more of that. I think I would feel more at liberty to make those kinds of choices. And also, because part of the directing process, when you're brought in as a director, is selling your idea, and selling your concept to the production team that's always there, and so I think I would feel a little bit more confident about saying, "Look, this works. This is how we engage these young audiences. This is how we draw them in, and no, we don't offend people because we're messing with Shakespeare, and no, we don't lose the message because we're too busy doing this hip-hop number." I think I'd just feel more confident about doing all of what we did, and maybe even having more fun with it, because I really feel like it worked so well with that *Shrew*. So, I think that's how I'd answer that question. If I think of anything, like, "Oh no, Elizabeth, we should have done this," I'll let you know. (*laughs*) But I can't think of anything

exactly along that line, except to say that I hope next time, I—I mean, I hope I get to do something like this again, and that—I'm just reiterating what I already said.

EH: No, I totally understand, and can you tell me more about the hip-hop dance number at the beginning, because that sounds so interesting.

SG: Oh, did I not mention the hip-hop dance number? Okay, so— (*SG and EH laugh*) I love the idea of a prologue for Shakespeare, and this is certainly not a new—I mean, it's not something I came up with, I've been in shows, I've been in productions of Shakespeare before, where there is a prologue, and a prologue is a way to set the world that the audience is coming into, set the aesthetic, set the tone, because Shakespeare, the way it's written, of course, it just comes right in. I mean, you've got act one, scene one, and the actors just start talking, and we just start right in with the story. And our aesthetic is not really that, modern audiences. When you go to a film, when you go to a movie, you've got the whole opening sequence, the credits, the score—I mean, we don't even think about it, but we're used to that, and we know by the way that the music is, by what the credits look like, we know what we're in for. And I think that puts an audience at ease, especially those that aren't used to Shakespeare. Because they don't really know what they're in for. So the idea of a prologue just helps bring them to the world that we're about to spend 75 minutes in. So we did this idea of this gypsy circus, people coming to town, and setting up this show, and Misha Fristensky, who I cast as the Tranio/Grumio guy, he happens to be an accomplished hip-hop dancer. I know this about him because I've worked with him before, and so I played this music for him that I liked. Scott Palfreyman, our sound designer, found this really cool music that was—it was a hip-hop beat, but it had this carnival sampled loop that went through it, and I played it for him [Misha], and I said, "What do you think we can do with this?" And I just kind of let him play with it for a while, and so the whole first—well, it was a little less than two minutes, this prologue. He came out, and he danced—basically, we set the scene. So they brought on these trunks, and they put on costume pieces, but it was all choreographed movement. So it was choreographed that they were setting up the carnival, they put up these lights, they put on these fun costume pieces, and it was this sort of hip-hop infused movement. And that's what we did before we actually started the dialogue.

EH: Cool (*laughs*)

SG: And then we had another, before what would have structurally been act two. We didn't take an act break or anything, but I see the play as before Kate and Petruchio's wedding and after Kate and Petruchio's wedding. So after Kate and Petruchio's wedding, before we went to Petruchio's house, we did another number, that was like a dance number, and it was the servants setting up Petruchio's house. And then, at the very end, we took our curtain call music to that same hip-hop kind of music. So—it was cool, it was really cool. And it was really about—I mean, obviously, I'm a 41 year old teacher, I know nothing about hip-hop. I mean, I kind of

know, I have a sense of what probably is cool, but I really trusted my young cast to make those decisions, because I didn't want to be old fuddy-duddy teacher (*EH laughs*) who was out of touch with. So I kind of said, "Here's what I'm envisioning, what do you think?" I had this music I liked, and they ran with it, and did this very cool hip-hop dance number to start the show. (*laughs*)

EH: That's a cool thread throughout, it sounds like, as well as setting it up.

SG: It was very cool. It gave it—structurally, it worked. My director brain was satisfied, because it gave a nice through line to it. The students really liked it, the actors really liked it, they had fun with it. (*laughs*)

EH: That's really cool. (*laughs*) I didn't realize that was a part of it. (*SG laughs*) Well, wonderful. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me.

SG: Of course, no problem.

EH: I really appreciate it.

SG: It's been very fun. (*laughs*)

EH: Wonderful! Bye.

SG: Bye

Marilyn Halperin 2015a

Personal interview with the author at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre

23 Feb.

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): My first question for you—I know when we spoke on the phone back in the fall, you mentioned that part of the education program, a central aspect, is the partnerships and relationships with schools and teachers that you form. So when you're choosing a play, or thinking about how students might respond to a play like *Taming of the Shrew*, how do you take those relationships into account when you're thinking about those plays?

Marilyn Halperin (MH): The first response I have is in the selection of the title, and, in all honesty, a play like *Shrew*, although we've done it a couple of times, is not one that we easily go back to, and say, "Oh yeah, we're going to do that," without questioning our choice of that. There is always the pragmatic decision that it is a known title. But then there is the pedagogical and ethical concern of what's in that play. As a department, we are very involved in choosing the title, and we do that with the artistic team's help, and with our producer's help, but that said, once a director is brought on board, it is my job to help that director see our needs in an education program, and sometimes that's a better relationship than others. Sometimes the artist is very open to that, and sometimes the artist is more concerned with his or her art and interpretation, and so—I'm being really honest in this. Sometimes, that collaboration between education and an artist is more successful than other times. How we choose to interpret a given play is still the artist's decision. And it would not be incumbent upon me to say, "Okay, well, Kate's final speech—"

(Recording paused)

MH: Working with the artistic team who are the ones that make the decision about the artist—the director, in some respects the decision, the casting of the director, needs to be made with a lot of care, and we have made mistakes—and I'm talking about our student production—and then we don't make that mistake again (*laughs*), but the hope is that once the artist is selected, that, for the most part they are given leeway. Now, that's not to say that I don't get in the muck, and I don't get involved in certain decisions, but it typically is staging decisions versus big interpretive decisions.

EH: I also had a question about one specific interpretation, because I watched a big chunk of the 2007 *Taming of the Shrew*, the Short Shakespeare, and I was really interested in that concept, and I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about how that was received, because there was the commedia frame, but also the Western costumes, and the way Petruchio was played was interesting, there seemed to be some theatricality and sincerity and an interesting mix of things going on.

MH: Yeah. So, that's a good example of a time that we were working with a known quantity. David has directed our full length, and I'm pretty sure that wouldn't have been the first abridgment he directed, but it's possible it was. I can't remember whether he had directed abridgments before. And in an early conversation, he mentioned commedia, but it didn't sort of register. I wish it had, because I think the commedia was a little bit distancing for a young student audience who had never seen theatre before, let alone the conventions of commedia. David is a very theatrical director. He is crowd-pleasing, so there were things in that production that were a bit challenging for me, but kids loved. For example, every time the bleachers would erupt in the cheer of "Padua, Padua," and I would be—I actually tried to get that cut, but the kids loved it, and so it was maybe a little bit low humor, but it was well-received. I think that in general that production was really well-received by students, but the commedia aspect of it, unless their teachers chose to go in the direction of giving some background on that historical chapter, that probably went over their heads.

EH: I also thought the final speech was really interesting, because it seemed like Kate gave it to two of the men, and I don't know if you were privy to any of what went into that choice or if you know about where that came from.

MH: I'm trying to remember that. I do not remember. Molly Glynn, who played Kate, who was killed by a falling tree limb while bicycling last year, she was a very strong, very compassionate woman, but there's a real internal strength in her, and I think she brought that to that characterization, and to her interpretation, but again, within the confines of the script. I don't remember—who did she address it to?

EH: One of them was Hortensio, and maybe—

MH: Lucentio?

EH: Hortensio—

MH: Yeah, Hortensio, and who was the other?

EH: Maybe Grumio? I don't remember exactly.

MH: Okay. Probably the other two husbands. So, Hortensio and Lucentio, I would think. Actually I do remember that. And I think that, as I recall, the idea behind that was that there was already an understanding between her and Petruchio, that in some respects, that's a speech that didn't need to be shared with him, because they had reached this sort of intimate understanding between them, and so it became, in a sense, her speaking for both of them to the other two couples. There was a real affection, and I think some chemistry between the actors playing Petruchio and Katharina that time, and I think it—well actually, both times, there was, and I think that that played out in—a director can come up with any interpretation and

certainly that's important, but it's finally the chemistry between the actors too that is what we see.

EH: Yeah. I watched the Q and A for that one as well, and it seemed like a lot of the questions were ones that I know I've seen come up when I've done shows with kids—memorizing, and kissing, and things like that, but I was wondering if, just running the Q and A's for that production, for that run, were there any particularly memorable questions, either from that one or from the other production of *Shrew*.

MH: Well, I think the question that is always the most memorable for *Shrew* is asking Kate what's going on in her mind during that last speech, and that comes up every time we do *Shrew*, and the actor who plays Katharina really has to feel ready to field that. But I would say that, in general, hopefully what you were hearing by way of responses, even to the most familiar of questions, were—the responses may have been a little fuller than you're used to hearing them, because we work with the actors, in three meetings, helping them to become educator-artists in those post-shows, so, yes, the most common kind of questions, like, "How long did it take you to memorize your line," "Is that real blood," whatever those are—"Do you ever get nervous," we try to get them to respond to the question and help them learn how to respond to the question, but then make it a bigger idea within it. But also to just be responding one human being to another, as opposed to—I mean, respect has to be in every answer. So now, the cast for *Macbeth* is out on tour now, and I'm not seeing those discussions, but the person who's leading the discussions is checking in with me all the time, so we give notes on those discussions throughout the entire run. The stage manager does, or I do, or in this case now, the person who's leading the discussions also may. Because we see those as a really important part of the process, of education, and of bridging the performance back to the classroom. So, when the question is raised of any Kate about what is going on in her mind in that last scene, the hope is that she's talking about her own personal experience and then putting it into a historical context as well.

EH: I did notice that the answers were very full, especially the process one. I know the—it was the man who played Grumio had answered, he talked about the six months of design and all of the things that went into that, which was a really full answer. I also had a question about the pre-show, because I noticed for both the Shakespeare in the Park and the Short Shakespeare that I saw here, there was a really interesting pre-show speech about, not just the typical turn off your cell phone and things like that, but also about hearing Shakespeare, and I was wondering if you could talk about how that maybe developed, or what effect that seems to have for students.

MH: Yeah. Well, the parks one is very pulled back from the one that we do here. The one that we do here with students has evolved over the years, but the idea is, it still needs to be rules of the road, as it is in every theatre, but much more important than that to me, especially in our Courtyard Theatre, because there is no buffer zone in

that space down there—you know, a proscenium stage gives a lot more buffer to audience behavior than the Courtyard, the thrust stage does. So, what we need most of all is to help kids understand that they are part of the process, and that the show is dependent upon their being part of our team, in essence, and the actor onstage in that pre-show is the last piece of that, and it starts with us greeting the bus, and then it continues with us bringing in individual group by individual group, and as an education team talking with them about the Courtyard Theatre and about the acoustics, and then there's one more piece where the education staff goes into the theatre just before we give up the house, and talk to people on the aisles, who are the most present in that extended stage that we have down there. And the actor comes on, and I think that if we've done our job well as an education department, then by the time the show starts, all of those—I think the majority of kids probably come in expecting either not to get it or to be bored. I would say that that would be—in many of our audiences, that would be the majority of the students, and so what I'm trying really hard to do is help them feel welcomed and help them feel like they belong here, so that those quintessential adolescent defenses that happen when someone doesn't feel welcomed, and doesn't feel like they have any place here—they don't have to put those up, and so as we talk about the language with them, I always liken it to when you go to the doctor as a kid, and the nurse says, "This shot is just going to hurt for a split second," and so you've got that message in your mind of, "Okay, when I feel that, it isn't going to hurt forever." Well, that's not the best of analogies, but in some respects, it is saying, "Yeah, you and everyone else are lost in the first few minutes, and this is all you need to do—watch our hands, watch our faces." So the idea is to give them the tools, but also give them the information that this is probably going to happen, and just don't check out. We work with that actor really extensively, and it's not easy—that is a hard role for an actor, because what we're trying for is basically an older brother to younger siblings, so there's a warmth, there's a connectivity, but there is also kind of a presence, and that's a hard balance. But we need their participation desperately in that Courtyard Theatre, and we have amazing audiences here, and I think there's various reasons for that. One of them is this very playful entry into the theatre itself.

EH: I just wanted to go back to the commedia aspect for one minute, because I remembered a question that I had wanted to ask, because I've heard of a couple other performances of *Shrew* using some commedia elements, and one of the things that was interesting is that there's not just the conventions of the masks, but also the sound effects for the hits and things like that, and I was wondering if you thought that might—or had noticed that that had any effect on the way that audiences viewed the combat, or the fighting.

MH: Yeah. So, David felt that this and *Comedy of Errors* were as close to farce as Shakespeare ever got, and that violence in farce isn't taken in the same way that violence even in comedy is. That there's kind of a distancing element, that we don't really take it very seriously, and I think that the foley sounds that Ethan incorporated into his soundscape—and he was live onstage—that whole idea was

just to make it a little bit more unreal, it was never supposed to be a realistic approach to this play, and thereby kind of soften the blows, both with the sound, with this element of farce, with this element of—this isn't really unfolding in front of you, it's a group of actors that's putting this on, so there was that kind of level of distancing as well, and the soundscape helped with that, I think, and—I mean, any time we have live sound on the stage for our student audiences, they love it. They love it.

EH: Did you hear anything from the teachers in terms of how they responded to the production or how they felt their students responded afterwards?

MH: Yeah. I think that we were really, really pleased with—we get hundreds upon hundreds of letters and evaluations through the course of the abridgment, and that was a very popular production. It was popular with the students, it was popular with the teachers, but it was very non-controversial.

EH: Right, right. Yes, and especially viewing it, obviously, in contrast with the full-length one.

MH: Yeah.

EH: But I know, just—because *Taming of the Shrew* came from the RSC to Ohio, and it was an abridged production, and I know some of the teachers were hesitant, not because they made it controversial, but just because of the themes, so I was just curious about their responses. So when you're thinking about the full length shows, so the *Shrew* with the frame written by Neil LaBute, what kind of prep did you do with teachers, to help them prep their students for that?

MH: So the first thing that—we are reserving tickets for our student matinees long before we know anything about a production. So we start selling those tickets to teachers the spring before, so we don't have any information yet about a production. Then as it begins to become a reality, if there are aspects of it, as there were in this particular production, that we think might pose a challenge to teachers, we share that, and give them the opportunity to opt out at that stage. So some teachers did. For some schools the issue of homosexuality on the stage was not where they wanted to go, some teachers are teaching in communities where they may have just one or two families in their student base of classes, but they just can't approach certain topics. And then I think there are some teachers who just don't like the idea of messing around with Shakespeare. So we lost some schools, and we talked with the director about making a couple of changes, though I honestly at this point can't remember what they were. The main thing we did was, with the pre-show that year—it was one of the best pre-shows we ever did, and Eric had to come onstage and really kind of help students understand what they were about to see in the frame, and that he was going to become this other person, who was then going to become another person, and that was really helpful and effective. And the responses

to that production, both in terms of our student audiences, our teachers, and our public were vastly diverse. And really, I think that the frame that LaBute ended up with was so mild next to what he had originally thought he wanted to do, and he and Josie planned. I mean, just in general, that it was not quite as incendiary as I think everyone made it out to be, but I can understand from a teacher's perspective, we always—there are certain theatres that make an absolute policy out of bringing the same exact piece of art to their student audiences as to their adults, and in general, we do that as well. But there are exceptions, and I cannot remember what I asked of Josie. It was challenging, those conversations, but there've been maybe a handful of times over my 22-plus years where we've asked directors to—maybe someone needs to, if there is nakedness, that we cover it up with some—we have to think through a different design choice for the student matinees. We've had rape on our stage, and I think we've pulled it back a little bit, you know, so the story is being told, because for example in *Troilus*, there is basically a rape, but we'll pull back the staging somewhat, so as—because I think our general rule of thumb is I don't want to lose any audience member by a staging choice. Not for long, I mean, we can lose them for a few minutes, but then you need to have them come back, and if all that audience is doing then is sort of reacting, because they've gotten so riled up in a given moment, then I would rather change that moment a little bit.

EH: Did you hear from any teachers in terms of how—because the frame, at least in the film that I saw, did seem to very explicitly just dive into the issue of gender in *Taming of the Shrew* and really kind of expose that and bring that to light, and talk about the play in terms of that. Do you know of any teachers that discussed that, or did you hear from teachers that discussed that idea with their classes and how that went?

MH: Definitely. Definitely. I think that one of the things that we heard was, from some of our teachers, that it was hugely fruitful in the way of classroom discussions, and then comparing it to their own point of views about the play, and their own interpretation. I think, as I said before, any time we do a production that reaches even dozens of teachers, let alone hundreds and hundreds of teachers, there is a wide range of how the teachers utilize that production back in their classroom, but yes, we absolutely got feedback that it opened up the play and class discussions for a number of teachers.

EH: That's great. Now for something like that, was there a Q and A afterwards?

MH: Mm hmm.

EH: Were there any particularly memorable things that came out of that, or things that you recall coming up a lot?

MH: I think, again, there was—so the people who helped me with that discussion were Katharina, the Director, Lucentio, one other person, I can't remember right

now. And, I think there were definitely questions about the frame every time, trying to understand it, trying to figure out the why behind it, and then again, the Katharina ending, and just the choice that we made to end the play the way we did.

EH: I also watched some of the, the CPS Shakespeare ones, the *Othello* and *Taming of the Shrew*, and they were really cool to watch (*laughs*) but for—I guess I'll start with *Othello*. I know they talked a little bit about the choice of play, and the teachers' reactions, and one of the students talked about how a lot of the themes were very resonant for them today, because those themes continue, but I was curious about how the issue of race in the initial script was discussed, or if that was brought up, because I know based on the casting, that was not necessarily an issue in the production itself.

MH: Well, we struggled with opening up that discussion. We thought it was going to be very present all the time through the rehearsal period, and many of these kids, though they go to minority schools, go to schools that are not diverse, so there's African Americans in one school, there's Latinos in another school—and that's not entirely true, but that is kind of the way of CPS, and it was hard for them to talk about the prejudice and hatred in this play in racial terms. We didn't want to harp on it, but we also felt like they needed to connect with it in some way in order to do that play. So that surprised us, actually, we thought it was going to be more on their minds, or more—I don't know if it wasn't on their minds, but it wasn't on the tip of their tongues, and so that was a challenge. The way that director works is that she will ask the cast how they want to stage various—not all the scenes, because we'd never get done, but some key scenes. And so, as in *Shrew*, what happened was—and we had actually much more fueled discussions for *Shrew* than we did for *Othello* (*EH laughs*), and there was a lot of discussion about how they wanted to stage the end of the play, and so we tried various ways, and they kind of get to decide based on the arc of those two characters what they want to see at the end, so the production is a result of that.

EH: Yeah, that—the question about that was really interesting, because there were two girls with two very different views (*laughs*), which was really great to hear.

MH: Yes, there were.

EH: I did have one question, just going back to *Othello*, because I noticed for at least two of the Iago soliloquies, there were two actors speaking Spanish, along with Iago, and I was wondering where that choice came from, and how that choice was made.

MH: So the director makes that decision artistically, based on moments in the play that she feels lend themselves to that kind of bilingual approach. I think it's one of the great strengths that Kirsten has, and we've done that for years now. So it's just bits of the play, and they are some of the moments in all of the CPS Shakespeare productions that kind of stand out in memory. But it's her decision. Then the kids—

so, unfortunately what's out there in terms of Spanish translations is kind of high Spanish, it's academic Spanish, and so we take that and then usually the kids and a teacher who is bilingual tend to retranslate it, so that it's more like street Spanish.

EH: But there is a focus—part of the focus seems to be on some bilingual moments in each of the plays.

MH: Because a number of our families in that program only speak Spanish. So they're coming to see the play and we feel like it's really important that they hear their language even in—a little bit.

EH: How are the students chosen to participate?

MH: The teachers are chosen, and then they choose their students. What we do is we ask teachers who have gone through our thirty-hour professional development program here. And we did that at first, pragmatically, because we wanted to reach into a certain kind of school—we didn't want to put up a general audition, because we knew that we would get the crown jewels, and the drama—the people who are already succeeding would be responding to a general call, and we wanted instead to reach into some of the really underserved neighborhood schools in the city. We already had relationships with those schools through their teachers, because our teacher training program focuses on them, and so they in turn—as I recruit the teachers, I'm saying, "The goal is that you are recruiting students who are falling between the cracks, either academically or socially." And sometimes that happens, and sometimes it doesn't, so we do get a drama queen or king, which is probably fine, it probably helps the production a bit, but there've been more students than not who fit that bill, and whose lives have really been changed by this experience.

EH: And that was sort of my last question. It seems like the process itself, as well as the performance, really affects kids, just from seeing the way they were talking about that final scene in *Shrew*, and talking about the program overall, and I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit about the effects of doing the CPS program, whether it's *Othello* or *Shrew* or another play on the students.

MH: Well, it gets us to the place that every English teacher wants to be in his or her classroom, which is deep reading, close analysis, engagement with a character, taking a stance, getting inside a different character's perspective, and the stakes being high, and really that you care about a character, and—whether you hate him or love him, that you care about them. Our discussions are probably one of our—I guess actors always say that that's their favorite part of the whole process in rehearsal and in production, and I guess that's true for us too, that those discussions are like the Platonic ideal of what you want a classroom discussion to be, they're just full, you know, kids vying and having really strong opinions, and many of these kids are struggling readers. There was one, one of the students you would have seen in *Shrew*, not *Othello*—I don't think Darren was in *Othello*. The years start to blur, but

for three years we had a student in the program who was—we had to feed the lines in, because he could not read. I mean, he was a sophomore, junior, senior, but he couldn't read well enough to do—and nor did he write very well. So how he learned his lines was someone in the read-through sitting next to him and feeding in the lines, and then he would speak them, and then we also recorded him doing that feeding in and then him speaking them, and that's how he learned his lines. So that's an extreme. We also have ELL kids, and they struggle with the language—most of them struggle to some extent with the language, but there's this product, there's this goal at the end, and they struggle, and they find success in that struggle as opposed to being shut down by that struggle. And that's a huge, huge life lesson. One of the young women who was in our first three years, Lucy—and our goal is not that they become actors, in fact, I generally feel a failure every time we've taken a kid who never thought about acting and then decides they must go to Hollywood, or they—you know, is like a, "Oh God, we destroyed another life," but Lucy was—many of our kids are painfully shy when they come in, that that's the crack they're falling in socially. Lucy was one of those, and after she graduated from Chicago Military, she went into the Air Force, and she came back to visit one day after she'd been in the Air Force for about a year. She didn't live in Chicago anymore and her family didn't either, but she came back to Chicago, and she came in and did a surprise visit, and I ran into this, you know, young woman in camouflage in our lobby, who had come to see me, and we had this lovely visit, and then an hour or two later, we've said our goodbyes, she's leaving out through those front doors, and she turns back around, and looks at me, and says, "This is the place that made me brave." And I think that that's what we want this program to do. I don't particularly want a bunch of kids going in and becoming military fodder, but for Lucy that was her choice, and she felt that she had been given the courage that she needed through the program to tackle something she thought was beyond her reach, and that we see happen time and time again, which I love.

EH: Do you see kids relating the themes—it sounded like it, for *Shrew* and a little bit for *Othello*, but relating the themes of the play to what's going on for them?

MH: Absolutely, without question. Absolutely, even in *Othello*, I mean, there were kids who really—there was a kid who was in trouble with the law, really a kid we kind of fell in love with, but he was in trouble with the law. And he really identified with Iago, and his conversations about that character were so compelling, and then another young woman would relate—several of the young women related to Emilia, of course, especially. And I think when those really personal connections are made, and they always are, that's when real learning is taking place. That's when literature is becoming a life lesson and not just an assignment.

EH: So is the process a mix of discussion and on your feet rehearsal for those?

MH: Well, we actually start with a week of theatre workshopping, because a lot of our kids don't even know what upstage, downstage, stage left, stage right is, or

anything, and we do clowning, and we do text work. We don't actually get into assigning the roles until fall, and then at that point, we start with table work just as one would with a professional cast, and that's when the discussions begin, but then they continue all the way through the process even though they're up on their feet a lot.

EH: That's great. I think those are all the questions that I have. Thank you so much for taking the time. It's so, so helpful.

MH: Yeah. Absolutely. Good. Yay! I'm glad you're doing it.

EH: Yeah! Yeah, it's fun. It's a fun topic to have.

Mallore Hill 2015a
Interview with the author via FaceTime
6 Feb.

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): So my first question—coming into the rehearsal process for the show, preparing to play Kate, what were your feelings about the play, and about the gender dynamics and the Kate-Petruchio relationship?

Mallore Hill (MH): Yeah. I can't say, really, I did the play, but we did the play when I was a freshman in high school, and that was my first experience with *Taming of the Shrew*, and I remember seeing it and the final speech came up, and I was like, "What? She just—what? Are you kidding?" And I got so mad, and so I had wanted to do the role for a very long time because I felt like there had to have been more to it than that, and I was like, "It can't be that—she can't just, like, cave, like, she can't just cave." And so when I found out that I had been cast in the role, I knew that I wanted to bring a little more groundedness to her, and a little bit more of a sense of her doing things on her own terms, not doing them because somebody was making her do it. And I sort of had Kate version A, B, and C in my head coming into rehearsal, and was waiting to see how Shelly wanted to take the show and what she was interested in doing with it, and also what kind of Petruchio I had. I didn't know who I was playing opposite of, and so I didn't know what the dynamic was going to be there. So I was sort of prepared to play a couple of different Kates. Luckily it was my favorite version that I got to do, (*laughs, EH laughs*) but I definitely came in with the idea that—and I'm very sure that Shelly was on the same page—knowing that we didn't want her to be weak, and we didn't her to sort of just be whipped into submission, that that wasn't the story we wanted to tell. We wanted to tell a love story. So, that was where we came into it at.

EH: Can you tell me a little bit more about how you worked during rehearsal to find that grounded version of Kate that you were talking about, and to find that love story with Petruchio?

MH: Yeah. Oh, it was a process, it was a process. There were days. (*laughs*). One thing that I think worked was sort of happenstance—what worked very well was that the Petruchio that I had was not playing Petruchio as this completely domineering jerk. He was playing him with a lot of his own insecurities, and a softness that I think complemented what I was doing very well, and we just matched each other in a way that—we fell into a nice rhythm of them being very equal and being very similar, and just being so hard headed and so like one another that they almost don't agree, but it not necessarily being that one person was right and one person was wrong. There was definitely a strong sense of play, I think, in the relationship, that we explored, of how do these two people fall in love, and what is it about the other character that they like, but maybe they're just hiding it. And so we started—Shelly brought it in from the very beginning and it was a great moment—the first time that they see each other, Kate came stumbling out onstage mad,

because Dad tells her to go talk to this guy and she's upset about it, and we had this moment—and he's prepping, trying to make himself look really good, and we just would turn and see each other, and it was sort of the love at first sight moment. And so you get this sense, instantly, that they both have a connection and there's something there, but then they immediately are like, wall, wall, wall, wall, no, I don't want to play—what? Who are you? (*EH laughs*) So I think it gave the audience, too, a taste that they were real people, and that there was something there beyond just being told that they were going to be together. It gave the audience an opportunity to fall in love with them and who they are. Very briefly, but I think it helped set up the tone. And that was something that we found set the relationship very strongly for the rest of the show.

EH: Cool. Can you talk a little bit about the final speech? Because I know you mentioned it, seeing it, and Shelly mentioned it when I talked to her, so I'd love to hear about your process working with that.

MH: That final speech! (*EH laughs*) I remember—ugh, I remember getting cast, and I immediately went, "That speech is gonna kill me" (*EH laughs*), that speech will be the death of me, because that's the speech, and that's the thing that everybody waits for that knows the show, and is like, "How's it going to be done?" And it was frustrating and very hard for a very long time, and it was not working, and I was getting—I knew that it wasn't working, and I was getting very frustrated, because I needed so badly for everyone to understand that it was Kate's choice, and that she was doing it because she wanted to do it, not because she was being forced to do it. I wanted so badly for that to be the element, and trying to accomplish that was getting very difficult, and we had a preview, and I remember eavesdropping on a woman talking to Shelly about it, and saying, "I just still don't understand why she just turns around in the end, and is so passive. I don't understand it," and I was like, "No! God! No, that's not what I want!" And so, we had a rehearsal with just Petruchio, myself, and Shelly, and I remember throwing everything off the stage, and being like, "I just need—I need it to work, and I don't know why it's not working, and everything's frustrating!" And what ultimately ended up happening, in the middle of a rehearsal one day, I just remember being like, "Shelly, I need to talk to the audience. Can I take part of this to them?" And she said, "Well, what do you mean?" And I was like, "I don't know, but I just need to get them on my side, I need them to understand what I'm doing." And so we ended up taking a portion of the speech directly out to the audience, and I had a moment where I went from talking to Petruchio to talking to everybody, and sort of just being like, "Everyone, calm down. I know what I'm doing. This is fine. Everyone relax." And it gave the audience a moment to breathe, and usually there were chuckles, and people were like, "Oh, okay," and added some humor to it—I needed so badly a moment to really connect with them, and to just say, "I'm doing this on my own terms." Because I'm such a—I'm kind of a feminist too, and the idea of Kate being so strong and so willful, almost to a fault, at the beginning—to go into being completely passive didn't make sense to me, and so we ended up finding, with that final speech, it became an apology for

her behavior. A lot of it became her owning up to her own faults, and saying, "I'm sorry. I did—I threw a chair, and I tied my sister up for no reason, okay, that was probably not the best decision," and it's a growing up moment, I think, for her, in a lot of ways, and sort of saying, "I recognize my faults, and I want to be better, and I think I can be better, if I just allow myself to love this man." And our Petruchio was very good in that final speech about not allowing it to be something that he was necessarily proud of. He was never watching me, being like, "Yeah, woman, say those things." He always had this air of, "Well, that's not what I want you to do, and I hope you know that, I hope you know that I don't expect you to do that." And so, the hand beneath the foot moment that happens, when I would reach down to put my hand beneath his foot, he would stop me and grab my hand. And it became a moment of, "You don't have to do that, it's okay." And he would sort of stand me back up. And so all in all, I think we just encapsulated the final speech with a sense of her doing it because she wanted to, not because she had to.

EH: I had talked to Misha Fristensky last week, and he had mentioned that moment of Petruchio reaching down, and how nice that was and what a strong audience reaction it often got, especially from people who knew the final speech and were waiting for it. So it sounds like a cool final moment.

MH: Yeah, it was—we were pretty happy with it.

EH: Good. (*MH laughs*) He had mentioned audiences responding to that moment specifically, but I'm wondering, from your point of view, how students responded to the play, especially the Kate-Petruchio stuff, and that relationship.

MH: Yeah. (*laughs*) Well, there were a lot of questions about kissing, cause they were all kids, (*EH laughs*), they were like, "Oh my god, they really kissed!", but we had a very strong—it was almost overwhelmingly positive, the response, which was very heartwarming in a lot of ways, because we were concerned about it, and we didn't know for a very long time how it was going to sit with students, especially, and oddly enough, the students were so much more accepting of everything than the parents. A lot of times the parents were a little more strong-willed about things, and had some negative opinions, but the students generally were like, "Well, they loved each other, they fell in love," or, we had one—I'll never forget it, this little eight year old boy—because "Why did Kate change?" was always a question that we brought up, "Why do you think she changed?" And that usually gave me a gauge on how my performance had been that day too (*EH laughs, MH laughs*), because sometimes it didn't work right, but this one little kid—I say he was eight, I don't actually know, but he was very, very young, he was definitely in elementary school—sort of raised his hand, and like, bloomed out of the audience, and said, "I think that Kate just realized that when you're in a relationship, it can't be all about you, it's a partnership, and you have to make it about each other," and we all were like, "Where are your parents? Who raised you?" (*EH laughs*) Like, who's responsible for this beautiful child?" This little boy got it (*MH snaps fingers*), he was like, "Well, it's

about a relationship, is a give and take," and he just had this eloquent response, and we were all just—you know, our faces on the floor, because we couldn't believe that he understood it so well. And, generally speaking, a lot of the response—I mean, we always had a couple of boys that were trying to be smart, and make everyone laugh, so they'd be like, "Oh, cause she was hungry, so she gave in cause she wanted food," and we were like, "I mean, yeah, that's, that's a motivating factor." But generally speaking, people got it, and got what we were trying to do with it, and saw that we were trying to tell a story of two people, and how these people fall in love, and we weren't trying to—I think sometimes the final speech in the show itself can get a little preachy, and it can get a little, like, "This is how you should be in your relationship," and we very much were striving to tell these two individuals' story, and how they work well with one another, and Petruchio and Kate's relationship is not for everybody, but it works for them. And we tended to get that as a response from a lot of kids, and the responses would also vary, oddly enough, depending on where we were, and the socioeconomic status of the various schools. We did performances at two youth correctional facilities, with predominantly high school boys, and these are boys who are like, leaning back, like, "I dare you to entertain me," and by the end we would have them leaning on the edge of their seats, they were so invested and so excited about it, and it was so touching. But those guys, because their life just led them to have a little bit of a different experience, they saw different things in the show that other kids didn't see. So when we asked, why did Kate change, we got comments from those boys that were more like, "Well, she realized that, just because she was upset and didn't like something, she couldn't just act out about it, like, that wasn't the right way to handle it. She realized that she had to open up to somebody else. She realized that she could actually be loved by somebody," and, comments like that had us, had me, crying, because I was like, "Oh my God, you get it!" But also, they had more deep emotional responses than some of the other schools, I just think because of where they were at in life and what they'd been through. I mean a lot of them were good kids, they just messed up at some—did something at some point, messed up, but they all had very profound opinions and thoughts on the show that were really, really fascinating, especially with it being, sort of, a comedy. But then, we had a lot of kids that—we had one girl in particular, I remember, who was not happy with what we had done, I guess, and she (*laughs*)—how did she word it, it was something to the effect of, "Do you even realize that she's basically getting, like, trained to behave?" She was absolutely not having it, and everybody was, like, "Whoa!" and (*laughs*) Tom, who played Petruchio, gave a nice response, and I finally kind of stopped Tom, and I said, "You know, in defense of Kate, (*EH laughs*), can I just speak for Kate for a second, Kate is not a nice person. Let's just talk about what she does in the beginning. Let's talk about how she treats people in the beginning. She's not doing things that are nice either. Nobody is perfect, and she certainly is not, and so her behavior is not golden either." And so, I had to defend her in a sense of, she wasn't just getting trained to do what she was told to do, and I think that girl just thought that she was being smart, and she was cooler than everybody else. It was such a high school thing, I was like, "Oh, I know you. I know that girl. (*EH laughs*) I know that girl." But she was just like,

"Do you even realize?" We had a lot of different responses, but it was all, generally speaking, very positive, and we had a lot of good feedback, and people seemed to get it, and that was exciting for us. There was maybe one or two shows, every now and then, that it was sort of, glazed over, and they were not really there, and we were like, "Okay, thank you very much (*EH laughs*), have a good night!" (*laughs*) But we saw a lot of different types of communities, and so the responses sort of varied, depending on where we were, and who the people were, and at community shows versus student shows. It was definitely very interesting.

EH: You mentioned that some of the adults or parents sometimes had more negative reactions. Was that to just the original play and the ideas?

MH: Yeah. Generally speaking, it was just the overall theme that people would see, about women being subservient. Even though we combated it very well, it's still there, and the play is the play, and we can't change that. So every now and then, we would just get an adult, usually an adult woman, who would just have a problem with it, and just say, "I don't care for the story, I don't like the story," and we were always like, "Okay. We're sorry?" (*laughs*) We can't change what Shakespeare wrote. I mean, we cut some things out of the final speech, because they weren't working, and they were just a little too dated, but, just every now and then, it was just adults that didn't care for the general idea, but that was a very small minority. We did have one woman say that she agreed with the idea that women should be subservient, and we were all like, "Ooohh! Okay. Great." (*EH laughs*)

EH: Misha mentioned that when I asked him any questions that he remembered that stood out (*MH laughs*)—that was one that he mentioned (*laughs*)

MH: Yeah. We all just sort of smiled and nodded, and no one really knew what to say, and we were just like, "Okay, you know, there's still people who really—and there's nothing wrong with that—there are people who still very much believe in being in that sort of position in their relationship, and if that works for them, that works for them." And that was something I think we tried to spin off of, was every relationship is different, and every relationship is unique, and Kate and Petruchio's relationship works for them, and so we're not trying to say that everyone should do this (*laughs, EH laughs*). But that was one that we were all just like, "What? Oh—okay." I thought she was going to go the other direction, I thought she was going to get angry or something, and then she ended up being like, "I just really—I really agree with that," and we were like, "Ooo-kay." (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) You mentioned Kate and Petruchio's relationship, and what works for them, and I know, when I talked to Shelly, she talked a lot about that idea, and she had mentioned—and I may be remembering this wrong, but I think she'd mentioned one of the questions for the students being something about comparing Bianca and Lucentio's relationship with Kate and Petruchio's? Is that something that was brought up at all?

MH: Yes and no. We didn't necessarily compare and contrast them directly, saying, "This relationship versus this relationship." What usually came out of the conversations was, we would bring up the idea of who else is a shrew, and this idea that Kate is not the only shrew, that everybody has elements of shrewishness in them, and Bianca usually came up as another character that had a shrew side, if you will. So that would sort of be brought up, in that respect, and people would talk about how Bianca did things differently, but it was a little less about relationship to relationship, I think, and more about character to character. I personally don't recall a whole lot of conversation about, like, "Bianca and Lucentio versus Kate and Petruchio." It was very much, "Bianca and Kate are different in this way, and what worked for Bianca—" It was more of in that sort of direction.

EH: Okay, got it. So you mentioned some of the memorable moments that came up, with the eight-year-old boy, and very insightful comments about relationships. Were there any other particularly memorable moments or topics that came up a lot during those post-show discussions?

MH: The correctional facility boys, I think, was just such a touching thing because you could tell that they need expression, and they need to talk about some of these themes—not necessarily the theme of men and women, but the theme of behavior, and how do you deal with emotions that you feel, because Kate obviously expresses them in a very negative way in the beginning. She's not good at expressing herself. She's very bad at it. And she covers up a lot of insecurity—this is my Kate, obviously, that I'm speaking of, but, for me, she was covering up a lot of insecurity through bad behavior, and I think a lot of feelings of inadequacy, and not feeling as pretty as her sister, and never being as good as her sister, and everyone likes her sister, and Mom likes her sister, and she can't do anything right, and everyone thinks she's this terrible human being. And a lot of times we would have kids who would recognize that element, like the one kid that said she finally found someone who got her and loved her, which was his reasoning for why she changed. I was just like, "Uh! Right to the heart." He said something to the effect of, "She didn't feel loved before she met him, and she could never be what her mom wanted her to be." And you could just tell that there was a personal connection there with him, and those sort of moments where they saw something in their own lives in the show, were always really, really wonderful to hear. And those kinds of responses were really great. Also responses from very small communities, that were just so unbelievably grateful to have art in their town. We had one community where all the theatre programs had been cut, and they were just so grateful and blessed that we came to give them theatre, and the little kids would run up on the stage and say they wanted to be actors, and ask, how can we do this? And the parents were looking at us going, "How do they do it? What do we do? We don't know, they want to do it, and we don't know what to do, and we don't have anywhere to—we don't have programs." So we're trying to give them as much information as we can about summer camps, um—"Get your friends together and do it in your backyard! Put on a play in your backyard," anything.

Trying to help bring art into communities that don't have access to it, and don't see it very often, was something that was very rewarding. We had a lot of kids who had never seen a play, and it was a new experience for them, you know, behavior, theatre etiquette, and there were a lot of elements that were really wonderful to see people learning and exploring. And also, the reason we all do theatre sometimes, I think, is because we know how much it meant to us when we were younger, and so the idea of doing that for other kids was really exciting. And I did have one woman, she wasn't a student, obviously, she was an adult, but she came up to me at the end of a show—and I'll probably cry when I start talking about it—but she said that she had lost her husband a year ago, and had not laughed since, and she came up to me and gave me this huge hug, and she's like, "Thank you for making me laugh again." And I was just weeping, and I was like, "Oh my God!" and she was telling me her story, and was like, "I haven't had an opportunity to laugh, and you gave me an opportunity to escape," and I was like, "That's why! That's why we do it!" (*laughs*) Even with a show like *Taming of the Shrew*, it still meant a lot to some individuals, and that was really—the kids that were like, "This was so cool, and this is so neat, and you guys do this for a living?" And they'd ask us what our day jobs were, and we were like, "This. This is what we do," and they were all like, "What? You can do that?! That's a job?" And I know our castmate, Kaitlin had seen the tour come through when she was in school, and it was the first thing that made her really want to be an actor, and then she got to do the tour, and so she was in hog heaven the whole time. But the idea that we could maybe inspire kids to do something bigger with their lives, beyond their small towns, was really exciting.

EH: That's great, that's wonderful. (*MH laughs, EH laughs*) So I know you mentioned that for the final speech, you gave some of it out to the audience, and when I talked to Misha, he talked about making a silent moment of connection with the audience when he came out at the very top, starting the prologue, and one of the things that I'm looking at is audience engagement and connection, so I'm wondering, were there any other moments of direct address, or audience interaction, participation, things like that throughout the show?

MH: Yeah. I had very little, and that was sort of on purpose. I think I grew to really want that final moment to be very—not drastic, but very purposeful, and very much her finally acknowledging that everybody was there. There was one other moment that would happen. It was right before the wedding, and I would come barreling around the corner in all of the wedding garb, and it looked absolutely ridiculous, and I was obviously unhappy about it, and inevitably, everyone would laugh at how ridiculous it was. And I started developing this moment of realizing that they were all laughing at me, and then looking at them, and shrinking, and being like, "I know I—" just like, it hurts, you know, everyone laughing at you and having that moment of acknowledging that everyone could see it, and see how ridiculous I was, and then wilting a little bit, and letting them see her vulnerable side for a moment. It wasn't a direct address, it was more an interaction. But then Mom comes out, and is like, "Prepare for the wedding," and I immediately was like, "I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine,

everything's fine, I'm fine." But that was a moment that I grew to really love, because it was just me onstage at that point, just coming out and having a moment with them [the audience], of them seeing that I was a human being, and that she [Kate] can be hurt, too. But the only other time—there was one—I wish we had done it sooner, cause it happened the last week of the show. With a lot of the kids, the kissing, any time there was any lead up to the kissing (*EH laughs*), they would like, "Oohhhh, noooo, here it goes again, blah, why?!" And they would all be very vocal about it, which was hilarious (*EH laughs*)—loved it. And the final scene, usually there was one more kiss with Petruchio and Kate, and there was one night where we went in for it, and all the little kids started—"Ugggghhh, noooo, blergh," and we both stopped, and just turned out to the audience (*EH laughs*), with this look of, like, "Calm down," and then went back and did the kiss, and it was a great moment of allowing—we allowed them to influence us, less planning it and saying, "Okay, at this moment, I turn out to the audience," and more feeding off of what they were giving us, and allowing it to come from a very natural place and not stifling it if weird things happened, or if somebody had some sort of vocal reaction to something, not ignoring it, we usually allowed it to become a part of it. We had a very interactive show, I think, in that respect. But for me, it was those three. I know other characters had more than that.

EH: So I know you had a long run, Misha told me it was 70 shows, and you mentioned those two specific moments that developed. How did the show change and develop for you, during the run? Because I know in a run like that, it always does.

MH: Yeah, and I had never done a run that long. The longest run I had done up until that point was probably a ten or fifteen show total, over the course of two or three weeks. So that was definitely a new experience for me. We had to find things to sort of, zhuzh it up a little bit every now and then, and keep ourselves alive in it. We added things here and there, but it was never anything that changed the show, or changed the core of the show. It would be things like maybe a different facial reaction, someone would react a little differently to something one night, or the scene where Petruchio is starving Kate, and taunting her with food in front of her, it grew to this thing where I would just flop down on top of the trunk that was a table, and groan about how upset I—and that wasn't something we had blocked in the beginning, but it just came out of a moment of me literally scrambling across the table one night and I realized I got really far, and I just sort of flopped down on it, and it read really well and it worked, and so we kept it. And there were some other relationship moments that grew and developed in really positive ways. I think everything that was added or changed enhanced the show, it never took away from the show. I think we had a group that was very good about keeping the integrity of the show and not wanting to try to steal focus or do things just because it was funny. It was just, you know, something happened, and we reacted differently, or, a little closer to the end of the run, we did start horsing around a little bit. There were a couple of nights where Ray, who was one of our cast members, who is just one of the

funniest people I've ever known, and will just make a face, and I'll lose it—he came out, playing old Vincentio, in the little street scene, and had his eyes crossed, was playing him cross-eyed, (*EH laughs*), and I couldn't handle it. It took everything in me, I was like, "I hate you so much right now." But it was little things like that, he wasn't necessarily trying to change something, he was like, "Ah, Vincentio's cross-eyed today," and came out doing it, and we were like, "Wh—what?" (*laughs*) But I think everything grew, and relationships grew, and became clearer, and we tightened things up, and enhanced other moments. It was odd, because things were changing, but I'm always hesitant to say that, because it makes it seem like we were altering things, but it was more that things were growing, and becoming more grounded and more connected, and we were able to really come to a nice sense of play with one another as a cast. We all felt very safe with one another, very comfortable, we were never concerned about what somebody was going to do, and so we were able to play a little bit here and there and try new things here and there and adjust things and if it worked, it worked, if it didn't, it didn't, we didn't do it the next night (*laughs*). So, it was wonderful, and we had a very good group that never tried to throw off the show, and everybody was very good about recognizing when it was a moment where the focus needed to be in a specific place, and when they could be stealing. There were times where—like the moment where Kate shows up, when the boys are placing the bets on whose wives will come when they're called, and Kate would come out, which was always such a great audience moment, because usually, if they had never seen the show, they were always astounded that she came around the corner, or had people go, "What?!" (*EH laughs*), it was great. But the other boys, the two suitors, would always do this slow turn of shock, and jaw-drop, and it grew and got bigger and bigger and longer and longer and it became more expressive, and that became a really fun moment with the boys, and then one night, one of them sneezed in the middle of that. And he just sneezed, and then looked down and smiled at me (*EH laughs*), and it was just a hot mess, but it was moments like that that were sort of wonderful. But we didn't change anything that altered what we were trying to do (*recording cut out*) important.

EH: Right, which makes sense, I just know I've done a much shorter run of a tour—it was only twenty performances—but it was over three months, and by the end—I know our director came to the last performance and talked about how much it had developed, and everyone had settled into the show, and some things that needed to grow had grown.

MH: Yeah. And we so wished that Shelly could have seen us in the final run, the final home stretch there, because it became such a joyful, wonderful show to do every day, and it grew into, I think, what she wanted it to be, and we were all so proud of it, it was a show that we were so proud to present. And you don't always have that, sometimes you have shows where you're like, "Ugh, okay (*EH laughs*), here we go again!" But this one, we were always very excited to get out of bed in the morning to do it, and always happy to show it, and wanted people to see it, and so we wished that she could have seen the final bit. We ended up going back to our school, a

couple of us did, after the tour, and did a Q and A session at our school, and they ended up talking me and Petruchio into doing the wooing scene (*EH laughs*), and so we did the wooing scene, and Shelly got to see it, and she was like, "It's so much better than when I left you guys! This is so good!" And she was so funny, but I would have loved to have heard her take on how it developed, but she didn't, unfortunately, get to see it towards the end.

EH: So we talked a little bit about how it changed and developed, but for your performance style overall, did you find that your performance style for this show in particular was different from a show where you're performing more for adult or general audiences? Did you find any shift there?

MH: I think that there was an up-play on size, on making things a little bigger, and a little more colorful. We focused less on movie realism, and more about larger than life characters, and how big can we make them, but also have them grounded in truth and not have them so big that they're not real people. And there was a style in the sense that it was this commedia dell'arte traveling troupe of actors, with the trunks, and we were throwing hats around, and changing characters. So there was definitely a sense of play, and a heightened sense of reality there, that I hadn't really gotten to do in a show before, that was really fun. I got to play less than everybody else, because I was only one character, and Kate is not exactly the playful type (*EH laughs*), in the sense that everybody else was. The boys got to do a lot, and got to run around and do some fun crazy stuff, and toss each other around, and throw hats and get stuck in trunks, and they had a very physical—like, Misha, Misha—that boy would sweat buckets every show. He was running the whole time. So I think there was a sense of not holding back that was really nice and refreshing, of allowing yourself to let things be big and sort of silly. But I didn't necessarily adjust, at least not consciously—there wasn't an adjustment of, "Well, we're doing this for kids, so we needed to change x, y, and z." I know that we did hit certain jokes differently if we knew that the audience was older. When the kids were really young, when they were elementary, we all knew we had to pick up the pace, they weren't going to pick up the really intellectual jokes, so it was like, don't worry about them, just keep it fast, tight, physical, make it lively, because that's what catches their eye and that's what's interesting to them at that age. And if it was an older high school audience, and we knew we could play up some of the dirtier jokes, and some of the more cerebral jokes—and we could gauge within the first few scenes what was working and what wasn't with any particular audience. And then we would all consciously adjust, you know, "Okay, we don't need to hit those moments and these comedic lines because they aren't going to get it, let's hit the physical comedy, let's push that a little more today." So we would live adjust based on who we were performing for, but I wouldn't say that necessarily there was a conscious, like, "Well, we're doing this for kids, so this is how we're going to do it."

EH: Part of what I was curious about was what you mentioned in terms of the slightly larger than life aspect, because I know I've heard a lot from folks in various

productions, and from Shelly and Misha, that a lot of it was about the physicalizing the text, and really doing a lot of that. I will ask one more question about the difference between community and kid audiences, just because I know, again, having done a, a few shows for kids, there have, for me, always been some moments where kids react to something that you wouldn't expect, or where you get a very different reaction from an adult audience, so were there any moments like that in the show?

MH: Yeah. Tom probably ran into that more than I did. Tom would have the speech, the Petruchio speech, where he's revealing his plan about what he's doing, and, and he would interact with various audience members, and sometimes find a guy in the audience to be, like, "Do you know how to do it better? Can you tell me how to do it better?" And sometimes people would get it, and they were totally in it, and sometimes they wouldn't, and he would come backstage and be like, "Well, that didn't work," or there'd be, like, one little kid that would say, like—there were a couple times where we had little kids that would just full on have an opinion and say it out loud, and it was hilarious. We would have little kids that would just go, "You're not nice." (*EH laughs*) Or, "Why is he being mean?" They're asking their parents, "Why are they doing that? Why are they being mean?" or "That's not nice." There were a couple of times, we performed at a reservation, the—oh, gosh, I'm going to butcher the pronunciation of it. It was a Native American reservation that we performed at, and that community was very interesting because they clearly—it's another culture and they didn't have an exposure to live theatre, and they didn't quite know what that meant, how to be an audience member, and so eventually all the little kids had moved from their seats and were sitting down right by the footlights, like this (*mimes chin on hand, intently focused*), right in front of us, and they just all slowly had moved down, and, some people were coming and going. They were never disrespectful at all, they came in and sat down, and were interested, and then they had something else they needed to do so they would go, and we had this odd revolving door happening through that whole show, but it was never distracting. It was the most bizarre thing ever. And they were very vocal and caught certain jokes that other people hadn't caught, and we were like, "Wait a minute, what?" And they were totally with us, which was great and very refreshing, and a lot of them, as soon as the show was over, they had questions like, "How do you memorize all those lines?" or they were very curious to know how we were comfortable being silly in front of people like that, and sort of, like, "How, how are you comfortable with that? How—you put on these—" Especially because Misha would put on the dress at the end and be the Widow, and a lot of the guys were like, "How can you put on a dress, man, and run around? You're okay with that?" And they were very interested in the logistics of it, of what it is to put on a play, and that was very interesting. I had a couple "You go girl"s (*EH laughs*), every now and then that would come out of the audience, that I was like, "Yeah! Thank you, I will" (*laughs, EH laughs*) Or we'd have some "Mmmm,"—people would, "Mmm, what! Oh! No, uh-uh!" We would have some of that, (*recording cut out*) great, and that's it. We were very encouraging of reactions from them, and wanted that, we wanted it to be

interactive. I can't think of particular moments where I was like, "Well, that was really weird," except the one time the teacher yelled at the kids and told them not to react at all, and we were all like, "Well, there goes our show." That was really bad, and we were like, "Well, let's see if we can win them back." The kissing reactions were always hilarious, because we had, like—we had a little boy one time, who went, "Aw, no, not again!" (*EH laughs*), right before we went in for a kiss. Or, just "Eeeewwww!", and stuff like that was always really funny. We had some teenage boys that would yell, "Get some!" and stuff like that, and we usually were very—we would interact with it, we would let it be a live thing and we wouldn't necessarily make it a negative, it was just like, "Yeah, this is the reaction, whatever, he's trying to be Joe Cool, he's in high school right now, he's just trying to be Joe Cool." But, I'm trying to think if there was anything in particular that was a really odd reaction to something. I think just every now and then, when we had a dead audience, it was always very odd. We had a couple of times where there was just, like, nothing. And we were like, "Are they awake? (*laughs*) Are they here?" And you get those every now and then, that's the nature of the beast, but there were a couple of times where we were like, "We've got nothing." (*laughs, EH laughs*) And so we would kinda speed up, and just be like, "All right they're not feeling it. That's fine."

EH: Yeah. In terms of engaging the audience, I know there was some modern music added at the beginning, and then throughout. In your view, or your opinion, how did that affect—did it help engage kids, right away? How did they react to that?

MH: I think our prologue beginning was very, very good about setting the show up, and setting the energy level, and also for us, as actors, at 6 am or something, after we've had a load-in and we now have to do Shakespeare, the prologue was great, because it just gave everybody that nice kick-start of, "We're doing a show, it's awesome, it's going to be really fun!" And it got all the kids drawn in, and we were doing tricks, and the boys are doing backflips, and it made a lot of the kids go, "Oh, this is going to be different." Especially those kids who came in going, "We have to watch Shakespeare today?" Which, I know how terrible that can be, when you're going to school, and all of a sudden, you're just told you're going to an assembly to watch a show, you know, I can see how they would be very, like, (*sighs dramatically*), "I don't know about this," so, with that prologue, what was always nice was we usually got them with that, it usually made them interested, and they usually went, "Oh, this is going to be fun, this is different, they've got some cool music, and their costumes are funny, and I don't know why they're wearing that stuff, but—" We drew them in very quickly, which was very nice, because Shakespeare is a lot, for even adults, to listen to sometimes. Attention span can be very short, and so—especially with the technology age that we're in—so I think it was very important that we grabbed them from the beginning, and then it was just our job to hold on to them for the ride of the show, and I think the music helped. I think the dancing and the fun and the liveliness and the sense of play, and the sense of not being a stuffy Shakespeare show, like they probably thought we would be, was very refreshing to a lot of them. And I know that a lot of the teachers too had a

reaction of saying that it was much more accessible than a lot of the tour shows they had seen, that we did a really good job of making it interesting and fun and lively for the students, and not just cramming Shakespeare down their throat. (*laughs*)

EH: That's good. (*laughs, MH laughs*) Yeah. I have two more questions for you, and one is going back to gender. I know that the role of Baptista was switched to a mother. For you, playing Kate, how—did that affect the way you saw Kate and that parent-child relationship, or how did it affect that?

MH: Yeah. I loved it, but I also, from a personal standpoint, I have a single mom, and I grew up with an older sister who was, sort of, like, the perfect kid, so I was like, "Oh no! (*laughs, EH laughs*) I know this all too well!" So, I loved it being a woman, because I think it took away some of the harshness of the gender roles a little bit, as opposed to it being all of these men that are trying to domineer the women, and as opposed to it being this father who's just trying to marry off his daughters, it added a new dynamic when it was a mother who was just trying to get her daughter to have a good life. All she wanted was the best for her kids, I think, is very much what our Baptista was working with, and working from, was, "I'm trying to help you. I'm trying to give you a good life. Quit being so stubborn." (*laughs, EH laughs*) And that, I think, added a really nice element of it not being about gender so much, and it not being about men and women, and it being about people, and relationships, and, and a lot of people ended up siding with Kate and being like, "Her mom sort of picked on her," or "Her mom was playing favorites," and things like that. And we always brought it in at the end of the show, there was always a moment where I arrived with Petruchio, and immediately hugged Mom, and then turned to sister, and there was a moment of, "I'm sorry I was a twit," and she was like, "I'm sorry too," and we would hug as well, and so it brought it back to being a happy sort of—everybody still loved each other and still cared about one another, and I think the dynamic became much less about the historical context which was fathers needed to marry their daughters off so they could be financially secure, and they—there's this historical context there that we can't deny, but with it being a mom, I think it became more about her trying to do something good for her daughter and trying to just make a good life for her, and less about a gender role.

EH: Yeah, that makes sense as that kind of swap. And then my last question, not related to the performance itself, but I know there were three different workshops that you guys did, and I'm just wondering what you taught, how that worked for you, and how that went, and what the content was.

MH: Yeah. We had a stage combat workshop, we had an improv workshop, and then a Shakespeare text workshop, and we had had meetings before we went on tour about how to structure those, and what could we teach, and what works and what doesn't, and we all joked that we had just—you would do certain warmup games, and from those warmup games, you could gauge how either receptive they were going to be, or if they were not having it at all. And from there we could adjust

accordingly to what we would teach, and how we would teach it. There was a settling that happened, I would say, two or three weeks into the run, of people just really connecting and enjoying teaching a particular workshop, and so we had our go-to people that would always teach this one or always teach that one, and then there were people like me who floated between all three depending on who was sitting out, because one person would sit out every day and help with the set, and the rest would go to teach, and so I got to see all of them a lot more than some other people, but it was definitely very, very interesting. Sometimes the little kids were the best ones because they were just so willing to try anything, and they were just excited. The high school kids have a lot of reservations, because they're at that point where they're very insecure about everything, and they want to be cool, and they don't want to look silly, and so we had to establish very early on that everybody was going to look silly, but we were going to have some fun. Generally speaking, everyone was very receptive to the combat workshop, they always found that cool and different and interesting. Something that was exciting for me as an educator was telling kids that you can make a career out of combat, out of stage combat, you know, there's fight choreographers, and there's people who do this for a living, and stunt men, and I had at least four or five boys over the course of the run come up to me and ask me for information on how they could pursue that, because they didn't know that that was a thing, and they were like, "I can do this for a living?" I'm like, "Yeah, you totally can. People do it all the time." And so that was always really fun, taking it out of a context of just doing a workshop with you, and being like, "Hey, just so you know, if you like this stuff, you can keep doing it. It's not just something that you have to do because we are doing a workshop, it's something you can take classes in, and it's something you can learn about." And then also like watching kids explore Shakespeare and get excited about it, and realize that it's more than just stuffy old words in an old book. And Tom, our Petruchio, was very good about breaking text down, and talking about imagery and use of—like, we would use insults and do Shakespeare insult battles and stuff like that, and that was always exciting to the kids. The improv workshops, I think worked best when kids were uninhibited and not judgmental, and we did our best to set up that environment, and establish that it was not a judgmental world, and people should feel free to just try things, but there was definitely an overwhelming realization that we had that theatre kids, students who were in theatre classes, were exponentially more engaged, and more present than students that weren't. And that's beyond even just the workshops, that's being able to look you in the eye and talk to you, and have a conversation with you, and engage with you as a person. The theatre kids would look you in the eye and would actually interact, and a lot of the kids who weren't necessarily theatre students were just very closed off, which was something we started to notice and got very interesting for me as a person who's very much a, "Arts in schools!" kind of person. We live in an age like this (*mimes looking at cell phone*), and everyone is on these (*picks up phone*) all of the time and so it was wonderful to watch people put them away and watch the kids engage with each other, and have to be present in a room, and interact, and it was very uncomfortable for some of them, it was out of their comfort zone, and we were not giving them any

leeway on it, we were like, "No, we're going, everyone's doing it, I'll make you do it with me if you don't do it." But it was a joy. I love teaching, so I loved doing workshops. We did have some times where we had some kids that were very unruly, and could not be wrangled in, and were just hard to deal with, and those workshops just became about, "Okay, we're not going to get a lot done with them, so, obviously let's just give them some basic stuff and, and move on to the next school." Which is sad, but a lot of that came because you had educators that weren't setting up expectations of those kids. There were some theatre teachers that had kids with—they were just so well-behaved, and were absolutely beautiful, and then you had some educators who just—the kids were running around and were just an absolute nightmare, and you're like, "Oh my God! (*EH laughs*) We have to teach them." They would just hand them over to us and then disappear, and we were like, "Ooookay!" (*laughs, EH laughs*) But I think the workshops also were very helpful, bringing actors and bringing professional artists to the students, and allowing them to connect with us and ask us questions and talk to us more individually, in less of a "up on a stage" sort of manner, and break down some stuff and do some combat and do some text, and have them get excited about it. It was a lot of fun, and very rewarding in a lot of ways, too.

EH: That's cool. I know, Misha had mentioned sometimes you did the workshops before and sometimes after the performances, is that right?

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah.

EH: Did you notice a difference in engagement of kids, if you did it before versus after? Or was it basically the same?

MH: Yes and no. It really depended on who the kids were that were doing the workshops, which is odd, but—because sometimes it was kids who knew they were doing the workshops, and they had signed up for them, and so they were excited about them, and sometimes it was the teacher standing there telling them, "Oh, by the way, you have to go do this." And so they were like, "What? I don't—what?" I think that made more of a difference than when the workshops were happening. I know that a lot of times, they got really excited about the workshops after we had done the show, because they were seeing us in our street clothes and we were being ourselves as opposed to a character, and so that was exciting for them, and then there were other times where we did the workshops beforehand, and interacted with them, and they saw us in our own personal life, and then they saw the show, and they would come up afterwards and be like, "Oh my gosh, you were so, like, this, and you did that, and I can't believe you did that, like, when we were working with you earlier, like, you're so fun!" And they would have, I think, bigger reactions to what we were doing onstage if they had seen us before and seen us not being those characters. I think it gave them a, a better sense of acting, like, "Okay, she's not actually like this in real life, but she played this character that was," and gave them a fun separation, but also it was interesting for them to watch, and they would say,

like, "How did you do that? How do you pretend to be in love with somebody?" You know, and stuff like that, and so that was always fun, but it was—the differences in the workshops really just came from what kind of kids we were getting that day, and where they were coming from, and how much they knew or didn't know, and, and how mature they were or weren't, which, we had some very immature groups, but were very easy to teach, um, and then we had some immature groups that were very hard to teach. It wasn't so much about maturity, I guess, but it just varied from group to group, really coming down to, I think a lot of times, the educators, because the educators set expectations of those students. And if we come in and we have higher expectations, a lot of times they would fight us on it, and if we came in and we had slightly lower expectations, if their teachers were very domineering, and we were a little more fun, then they got excited, and they got a little more lively, so it was very much different from group to group, just depending on who they were, where they were from, where they'd come from before the show, if they had had a whole day of class or if it was early in the morning. It was always sort of a toss-up, and we just had to—it was very much a fly by the seat of your pants kind of style of teaching, because you just had to gauge within, like, ten minutes, where they were at, and what was going to be the best course of action.

EH: Yeah. Cool. Well, those are all of my questions. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. Have a great rest of your day!

MH: You too. Take care.

EH: You too. Bye.

MH: Bye!

Megan Sanborn Jones 2015a
Interview with the author via phone
13 July

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): Just to start out, and this was on the list I sent you, I think, but *Henry V* definitely has challenging content, and challenging themes. I know, when we did it at OSU this past year, there were a lot of questions about the depiction of war in the play, and it's not done a lot for young audiences. So in approaching the show, before rehearsals and during rehearsals, how did you address these more difficult aspects of that show?

Megan Sanborn Jones (MSJ): The thing that I try to do with any kind of show I direct, but I think it's particularly easy to do with theatre for young audiences, is try to tell a story for the audience I assume is going to be there. When I direct professionally, I think I have the least control over that, because anybody who wants to can buy a ticket, although you know the city you're directing in, or anything like that. The reason I say it's easiest for young audiences is because I know exactly who's going to see this (*EH laughs*), and it's going to be children. In schools. In Utah. Between the ages of—so, I was able to very narrowly wind down who was going to see the show, and then for me the question becomes, "How do I tell the story for those people?" And I don't see *Henry V* as having challenging issues. I don't look at the play and go, "Oh my gosh, how am I going to do this?" Because it didn't seem particularly challenging to me, in part because I don't know that issues of violence and despair are actually that unique. Meaning, we live in a world where kids see violence or despair fairly often, even in the animated movies they go and see. So I really wasn't that concerned about it. But what I was concerned about was trying to take this very dated thing—lineage, who gets the throne, etc., and what that meant. One of the things that we really decided to focus on is the character of Henry himself, or, in our production herself, and how this journey that Henry is going through—to go to war—is embedded in the larger process of trying to figure out who—and I'm going to use "she," because that's how my brain works, since I directed it—who she is as a king. And what it means to come into your own, or what it means to listen to some advisors and not listen to other advice, and what are the consequences of those kinds of decisions. So we really heavily, upfront, made a big deal about why Henry made the decision to go to war, who she listened to, why that mattered, and then the scenes of battle and the things that happened subsequent to that became consequences of the initial decision. And I think that that was something that was directly applicable to these young audiences. Now, I can look up some of this information for you—I don't remember exactly how we limited it, but I'm pretty sure we said third to sixth grade. I don't think we had kindergarteners come and see it. So part of it is that we selected up, in terms of our audience. But I just think these kids, every day, are making decisions, listening to people, and then there will be consequences to that decision, some of which may be violent. And either metaphorically violent, emotionally violent, or actually physically violent. And so that was how we tried to frame what I guess could be perceived as difficult material.

EH: Yeah. So was there a specific age that you placed Henry as? Or just the general idea of being someone who was on the cusp of growing up and becoming king?

MSJ: More that [second one]. I don't think we went, "You're fifteen," (*EH laughs*) or anything like that. But we did have a sense—we tried to play it youthfully. And I really worked with my actress, so that in the beginning scenes, she was unsure, and young, and making wild decisions. We did pull in some stuff from *Henry IV*. I think it's really hard, particularly for people who have maybe never seen any Shakespeare at all, no less the—not seen this sequence, to know who Harry is, and to understand—why do some people call him Harry? Why does it matter when Bardolph is killed? Because you don't know that they were best friends, and Harry used to be a roustabout, all of that. So we did, with a nod to Kenneth Branagh's lovely film adaptation, pull in some scenes from *Henry IV*, right at the beginning, and tried to be as overt and didactic with the kids as possible. We actually added—and this kind of slips in with your question about audience participation—but added an introductory beginning, saying, "Hi, I'm so-and-so, and here's who I'm going to play. Yep, I'm a girl, but I'm a king! Get over it," right? (*EH laughs*) And then, we said, "And I get to hang out with these guys. They were my best friends, but you can tell they're kind of naughty." So we tried to set up as much as possible, so that by the time we move right into *Henry V*, and the questions of that script, "What should I do, should I go to war?", it brought with it the sense of youth, like, "I'm not quite sure what I'm doing," and then how the consequences of that war age and bring Harry into herself. As kind of a grownup.

EH: Okay. That makes sense. That's really interesting, because I know—I think I mentioned Ohio State just did *Henry V* as our school tour, and they did a similar thing, where they added some narration before, just to be like, "Look, Henry was this guy who hung out in the taverns a lot with Falstaff," so that's interesting that that pre-story got added in there too.

MSJ: Because it seems like it's fairly important to do.

EH: Yeah, really to understand Henry and the relationships and why some of what happens is important, it seems like it's vital to know that.

MSJ: Yeah.

EH: Yeah. So you mentioned audience interaction and participation with that beginning thing, and I read a little bit about some of the audience participation on some of the online reviews as well, and I'm wondering if you could just tell me a little bit more about how you incorporated that into the show.

MSJ: I don't remember.

EH: (*laughs*) Okay.

MSJ: (*laughs*) I have racked my brain, and I even e-mailed some of my actors to try and remind me what we did, and I don't know. What did you glean from the reviews (*laughs, EH laughs*), that could maybe help jog my memory?

EH: The one that I saw said that—and they saw a public performance at Brigham Young, not a school one, but they said students were incorporated in the scene where Henry walks amongst the troops in disguise.

MSJ: Oh, yeah! Yeah, we pulled people in. For me, I really love Teresa Dayley Love's style. She does this magnificent work with actually casting characters from the audience to come in and play different roles, and it doesn't end up being gimmicky, it ends up being integral to the part, wonderful stuff. I am not so good at that. And so my initial thought, when I first set this up, I was all like, "I'm going to try really hard to do that. To help bring more kids in and on the stage, and maybe even play a part or two." And that fell away in our rehearsal process. I was trying to juggle basically choreographing the entire 45-minute show, and doing lots of other things, so that the couple of things that we did do, I know for sure, is at the beginning, we let the audience know that they were the English army. We wanted to make it really clear, for better or for worse, England are the good guys, red is the good color, when you see red, you cheer, that's us, we're the army, and blue is the bad guys, they're the French, we don't like them, boo, boo. And we actually coached the kids to be like, "Cheer for England, boo for France." So we set that up, and then that allowed us, in these moments, when Henry was talking to England, to talk to everybody, talk to the kids, move out, walk into the audience, and be like, "Brothers, do you see what I'm saying?" So that gave us a bigger scope of the audience. We set it up in stadium seating, meaning we just had two long rows of audience, and then a strip in the middle where the actors performed, and so the result, no matter what side you were sitting on, it looked like everybody on the other side was part of the stage. So, it was like a proscenium for each half of the audience, but when they saw the show, then they would see a whole bunch of kids sitting back behind them, so when we had the actors walk into the audience, for half of the audience, it would look like those were the English army as well, to try to make the army look bigger. And we encouraged the kids to cheer and to do stuff. For example, with the, "For God, Henry, and St. George," that cheer, we coached them at the beginning—"Well, if you're going to do a cheer with us, you'll have to learn the English cheer." And St. George, Utah is a place, and so we had to say, "When we say St. George, we don't mean the place down in southern Utah where all your grandmas and grandpas go to golf. What we mean is this guy who fought a dragon, that's who St. George is." So we coached them, and they practiced yelling the cheer with us, so then when it showed up in the show, all the kids yelled, and some of them would even stand up and yell. So the primary audience engagement, was trying to code for the children early on that they were the English army, and then doing the staging so it went out into the audience, so it made it look, because of the way we set up the space, like the English army included

the kids, and then to have them kind of whoop, yell, and cheer, and then be quiet, like, "Oh no, the French are coming, everybody be quiet, shhh, be quiet." And directly talking to the children using that. So, then, an extension of that would be, when we are in the scene where Henry is walking around, and we need an English army onstage, we pulled some kids in, up out of the audience, to sit around campfires and be quiet during that moment. I don't believe we ever brought kids up onstage other than that time, but for me it was part of the whole audience engagement, which was, "You are the English army."

EH: Yeah, that's really cool. It seems like that would also help them understand the English/French divide and also engage with Henry and what she was doing.

MSJ: Yeah, that was part of the hope. Yeah.

EH: Did you hear from the actors or company manager or stage manager, if they felt like that affected the kids' engagement when they went out on tour?

MSJ: Yeah. My sense is that the more we can get the students involved right at the beginning—in appropriate ways, we had one school where—it didn't backfire, it's just that the children's behavior at the school was clearly less supervised than it was at other schools, and once we gave them license in the first two minutes of the play to be engaged, we couldn't calm them down. They wouldn't shut up, they were yelling, they were screaming, and there was no teacher involvement. It was like the teachers were zombies, they just sat there. And it was early on—it was either the first or second time with kids, and—I mean, it was terrifying. Because the actors couldn't talk over the ruckus, and so finally—I was at that performance, I pulled somebody—I can't remember, probably the guy we had playing Fluellen slash everybody else, because he was the biggest, strongest, loudest-voiced guy, and I was like, "Stop the show. Calm them down." Because teachers weren't doing it. And so one of the things that I think was exciting and terrifying about trying to engage the kids early on, was that if they really, really engaged (*laughs, EH laughs*), it was a bit tricky. And so we did, we finally stopped—he kind of was like, "Everybody, all the English army people, I need you to be quiet now, everyone be quiet!" And tried to get them to calm down. But for the most part, I think that that was really fun. And I had the cast circulate. They helped seat the kids, and in seating them, would say, "Hey, welcome to the show. You guys need to know, I'm in the English army, and you need to, like, totally listen to me, because we're the good guys. You see that guy over there, in blue? Bad guy!" So they set it up right from the beginning, and then the result, the kids were expecting that, so I think it makes it a more engaging production for actors to be able to really talk to the kids, and so they seemed to like that.

EH: Yeah. That's cool. That's really cool, especially to do it right from when they enter the space, to have them interact that way. So, you mentioned that you cast

Henry as a woman, and I also read that there were additional roles that were male in the script, but played by women?

MSJ: Yes.

EH: Yes, and I was just wondering if you could tell me, especially about the decision to cast Henry as a woman, but also the others, just how you came to the decision, and how you think it affected the show, or didn't affect the show, as a whole?

MSJ: For me, it's a standard in theatre that you get, normally, 3-4 times as many women auditioning for the female roles available. And never quite enough men to even fill the roles. When I have a choice, I make efforts to select plays that have more roles for women, but when I'm asked to direct Shakespeare, I don't have a choice. I was asked to direct *Henry V*, which is, frankly, all men. One of the early cuts we made was, "We're just not going to do the last scene. This is a play about Henry. I don't need to get him married. Done." So we literally cut the whole last act, it wasn't even in the play. We ended with the death of the Boy, and him winning, and saying, "This is a big day, and we won." And that was the end of the play for us. So I was like, basically now I'm directing a show with all men, and that's just dumb. I teach at a university. And we're touring to schools where half of the kids there are girls. And it just seemed ill-advised to me, and so it was an obvious choice for me—let's not worry about whether it's about a boy or about a girl, let's just cast the very best actor to be Henry, and then from there, see what needs to happen to make that work. And when I had open auditions, the best actors were clearly the women. I had outstanding women audition for the part, so after the very first audition, even before callbacks, I—talking with the team, I explained, "I've been leaning towards making Henry a woman anyway, but I was willing to do it either way." And everyone agreed, "Well, yeah, you've got these four women, who all are phenomenal, and one guy," who was really great. I'm like, "All right, then, Henry's a woman. Done." And so it was sort of driven by practical reasons, and also driven by political efficacy. Recognizing that women make up over half of the people auditioning, and over half the people who are seeing it. To bring in a show all about men and expect them to step in and be like, "Oh, I get it,"—I mean, it happens all the time, but I think it's important for both men and women—boys and girls, I guess, in this case, to be able to look at men and women heroes, and relate across. We expect girls to do that all the time. "Harry Potter's just like you!" You know, "Henry V is just like you!" And I thought, "Why don't we just make Henry V just like you?" So, she was a girl. And we decided not to make her a girl, meaning the only thing we changed was he to she. Everything else ran exactly the same. We even called her "king." And, interestingly enough, the only people who had problems with that were the adults. The teachers were like, "Well, I think that might confuse my kids." But the kids were like, Henry's a king, and she's a girl. And they're said, "Okay." They got it, they were like, "Whatever," it was nothing for the children. The adults on the other hand, reacted, "Well, I think that might be confusing." Turns out, it was only confusing for the grown ups. The kids all just kind of took it. We played it exactly as it was, and she

was a woman, whose name was Harry, and she was the king. And taking that as a cue, that's how we ended up casting the rest of the show. Because again, they're all male characters, except for the Mistress. The Mistress was the one character who's not a male character. And so basically, we had a cast of 7. Four women and three men, and we went through the script very carefully to try to say, who's in scenes together? And how can we double this? How can we have people—everybody played 3 parts, one person played 4. With the exception of Henry. She played only Henry, but everybody else played at least 3 parts, and some people played 4. And it was—again, it was the necessities of the script: "Well, if this person is this person in this scene, they can't be that person, because in a later scene, they'd be talking to themselves. All right, well then we'll have them play this person, then." And then, once we figured out what the divisions were—and I did try to make some divisions make sense, in terms of strength, and then my better character actors I gave more parts to, that kind of thing. And then we just assigned them out as boys or girls. We literally just kind of went, "Well, who would be best for this list of parts from the ensemble I cast." That's how that ended up working. And then, the—like, I had a woman who played Nym, Cambridge, and Orleans. She played it as herself, we didn't try to mask the fact that she was a girl, but all of our costuming and all of the design was fairly gender neutral—I mean, the women were wearing really tough outfits, and skintight jeans, and big heavy combat boots with mohawks in their hair, so it wasn't like you went, "Oh, that's so obviously a girl." You went, "This is a group of tough people." And so that was what we went with in terms of gender. And then I just really didn't treat it much more than that.

EH: That cool, because it's, because Shakespeare is so male-heavy, so it's nice to hear about an ensemble that was more women than men. Doing a Shakespeare show. I think you mentioned, one of the male actors played Fluellen, yes?

MSJ: Yes.

EH: Yes.

MSJ: And Falstaff, and Exeter.

EH: (*laughs*) Okay. The same actor played those three, or those were the three main male—

MSJ: No, the actor who played Fluellen also played Falstaff and also played Exeter.

EH: Okay, got it. And you mentioned that he used a hip-hop influence in his lines, as Fluellen?

MSJ: Yes.

EH: Can you just tell me more about that, and how the contemporary flair or style

affected the show and affected kids' reception, that you know of, of the show, or kids' reaction to it?

MSJ: I'm not good with knowing how the audience reacted to it. I think I only saw the show a handful of times and rarely with audience, although I will say that Fluellen was by far the cast favorite, in terms of cheering for him—the man who played those three roles was clearly a standout in the production. Where that came from is, I play with a number of different ways of how to adapt Shakespeare when I direct these Young Company Shakespeare plays. Sometimes I've done it where the whole adaptation comes out of us working together as a cast. Sometimes I've done it where I just adapt the script myself over the summer, and I show up and I say, "Here's the script! Believe it or not!" And sometimes there's a lot of collaboration and sometimes there's very little. With this production, I decided to make it the centerpiece of a class I actually teach, which is a class called Contemporary Performance Practices, where—it's a survey course for juniors, where every week, we take a different contemporary practice, like hip-hop theatre, or devised theatre ala Mary Zimmerman, or heavily movement-based theatre, and look at—tracking it from Grotowski up to and including some other innovators who do, heavily movement-based things. And we have a unit on technology onstage, and 3D illuminated productions. So we just try to do a different unit all the time, and so this became the centerpiece of that. And I did it two semesters in a row, and the first semester we just used *Henry V* as an inspiration piece. And so for each of the units, when we were experimenting around with styles of theater, they had to somehow relate to *Henry V*, and then the final projects of the class were six different contemporary-practice-inspired versions of *Henry V*, and they each took an act and performed the whole thing. And it was remarkable. And so I had videotaped that, and I already had a whole bunch of ideas in place about how to adapt it down. Once we got the cast, they were required to take the class the next semester, with the understanding that the stuff we were doing in class would actually lead to what the show would end up being. And so a big part of the class was casting the play in their individual roles. I did not actually cast the play, the class cast the play. We did a whole bunch of Viewpoint exercises, and we did Tectonic moment work, and other exercises, then I put the list of roles needed up on the board, and we voted as a class, including the cast itself. And, it was very, very obvious, who should be cast in which role. Students noticed, "Makenzie keeps making these really strong decisions, where she moves herself out of the square, and she's really bold and she's always isolated. She's obviously Henry." The whole class, and the cast themselves agreed, except for one girl in the cast, who really wanted to play Henry. But she just wasn't making—I mean, she would have been a great Henry too—but she wasn't making that strong of decisions. We ended up casting her as the boy. And so the hip-hop came out of that. The man who ended up playing Fluellen is a remarkable hip-hop artist, a spoken word artist. He is just phenomenal, and on his own in these class projects he had already been taking the Shakespeare and writing it in hip-hop style. Hip-hop Shakespeare has been done successfully in other venues, too. We'd studied the Q Brothers *Othello: The Remix* and other hip-hop version of Shakespeare. Our hip-hop

Fluellen was just so effective, and so successful, and we were trying to—you know, I wasn't going to try to make him do a Welsh accent, so I'm thought, how do we show that here's a guy who's legit lower-class, and doesn't quite fit in, but is a man's man? And the hip-hop fit for that perfectly. And so, for all of Fluellen's roles, I gave the actor free rein to rewrite them however he wanted. And it was beautiful, he kept the gist of the phraseology, he kept a lot of Shakespeare's words, but he turned it into spoken word poetry. And so that's how we had Fluellen be different.

EH: That's really cool.

MSJ: Yeah. Yeah, he was awesome, and everybody loved him.

EH: Yeah, I know, he was mentioned specifically in one of the things I was reading about the show as that sort of contemporary flair, and just that that set him apart as a different character, or a different class. Can you tell me just a little bit more about how that class influenced your adaptation? Some other ways that that ended up coming into the way that you adapted and staged the show?

MSJ: I would say there were three things that came out of the class. The first was the casting. I explained, "This might be awkward. What do you guys feel about it, as a cast. If you don't want to do this this way, we could do it a different way." And they were all pretty game. They said, "No, we can do this." So the fact that we literally, with 26 people, did a series of exercises, some of which I ran, and some of which the class ran, because at that point they were pretty proficient. They'd say, "Let's try a Grotowski exercise, in terms of the really specific movement work to try to get to via negativa, and see who looks like they are more French and looks more English." And I'd be say, "Okay, great, try it." And so they'd get the cast up onstage and set up these exercises, and then we'd all talk together, and people would report, "Well, here's what I observed." And we had a recorder keeping notes of the observations, and it just became increasingly and increasingly obvious which parts seemed best. Because we put up on a board, you know, somebody's going to play Nym, Cambridge, and Orleans, somebody else is going to play Canterbury, the Boy, and the King, we had it all up there. And then we're decided, "Yeah, this person just keeps making the kind of choices that says to me that," and they're decided, "Yeah, you two move in the same way, so you should be from the same country, largely." You know, and we did that, and the actors were all very game. I think that must be awkward, to be with bunch of peers in a class together, but then they were all kind of excited about it. They were like, "Really? I didn't realize that about my body," and then somebody else would say, "Well, I'll show you what I saw you doing," and so the casting was the first thing that directly came out of the class. I think with two exceptions, where two people got swapped in ways that I wouldn't have put them, it was what I would have done, had I just cast it myself. But two of them weren't, and it ended up being great that way, so there was that, the casting. The second thing that came out of it was really specific scenes that were staged in the class ended up in the final script, blocked the way they had been performed in class. These scenes might

not even have been staged necessarily by the actors who ended up playing the roles, but by other class members, that at the end of it, we agreed, "That's it. That thing right there is how it should be." And then we would actually write that in—I wrote that into the script, to say, "Here's how this thing is going to be, it's how it will be staged." And a lot of that came out of the process that we tried to overarch with, the Tectonic Theatre Company process of moment work, where everybody comes in with 18 ideas. So one of the moments we worked was "How do we kill the Boy? How are we going to do this?" And we killed that—well, we killed that Boy. We killed that Boy so many ways, like, here's another way we could kill the boy, here's another way we could kill the Boy, and here's how Fluellen reacts to killing the Boy. Here's one thing Fluellen could do, here's how he can handle it. And we just played with it and played with it, until we found moments that worked. And we knew: "Those moments, that's right." It gave us chills. "Two of you are crying. Done. That's how we're going to do it." And then we stuck it in the play. So I would say that that helped there. So the casting, and then the moment work that led to really specific moments in the play. And then probably the third thing would be what we talked about, is the idea of having the contemporary feel to the show, and using hip-hop for Fluellen. That developed directly out of the class. And it wouldn't have happened had we not been playing around with hip-hop and Shakespeare. And it probably also wouldn't have happened if I hadn't had an actor who could do it. But those three things came together nicely.

EH: Okay. Very cool. So I know you talked a lot about movement within the class, and then you said that you approached the show thinking about movement, and you mentioned, I think, there were three dances or big movement pieces in the show itself. Is that right?

MSJ: Yes. And the reason I know that is because of the pain in the butt it is to get the rights to dance to music. Because when you have music that's just underscoring a scene, and you're not moving in time to the music, it's a very different price fee—

EH: Really?

MSJ: —for copyright rules than it is if you're actually moving to the music, and we had to be very careful to delineate, this is one where we're moving in time to music, therefore it's a dance, therefore we'll pay you more. But we kind of choreographed the whole thing. And this, I think, is an answer that goes back to your first question as well, in that the only other thing that seemed pretty clear that could be troubling and problematic with young audiences is the extent of the violence. Because it is a very violent play. Lots of people die. The Boy dies. Everyone dies. It's a slaughter. And so people are hurt and wounded, and when you see film representations of it, or I've seen some stage versions of it that are very bloody. And lots of death. And that's the only thing that I thought, "We can't do that, really, onstage." And then, another thing that came as part of it, is we very much wanted to update it. Our theme song for the production was "Welcome to the Black Parade." My Chemical Romance's

"Black Parade." We also used the song "Sail" by AWOL Nation. We used Imagine Dragons, was Henry's theme song. We used the song "Carry On" by fun. It was a very contemporary musical soundscape. And I could send you, if you want—my beautiful costume designer sent me—I think I have all of the original designs that she took photos of.

EH: Oh yeah, I would love that.

MSJ: So everybody's wearing high tops and skinny jeans and graphic t-shirts. But then over the top of that, they would be wearing leather jackets that had been altered to look like chain mail. And so it was this weird medieval mix. And so one of the first things we thought about is, "Well, obviously if we're doing it in this contemporary, they're going to be using guns. That would be happening." But I'm not going to send a whole bunch of fairly tough-looking mohawked, skinny jeans, leather-wearing, chains around their wrist college-aged adults into an elementary school with guns.

EH: Right.

MSJ: That would just be ill-advised. So then, I decided, okay, well then we won't use guns. And we won't even use swords. We'll just pull it back and make it all very theatrical, through the movement. And so the way that we solved the violence is that it was all heavily choreographed so that it didn't even look like stage combat fighting. There was a little bit of that, but very little. It looked a lot more like *West Side Story*, in terms of its flavor, in that it was dancing fighting. Our only weapons were sticks. I think we had three or four long poles. Literally wooden dowels that we wrapped in black tape, and then we had some shorter dowels that we could use as shorter swords or knives, or whatever you would have them used as. But as a result we could knock them and hit them, and it would make noise. We could also bang them on the ground to make sound effects. They turned into oars when they were sailing to France. And one of those poles became the mast of the ship. So we just used the sticks only. So we had six blocks, and six sticks, and that was the whole of the set. With the movement, the main dance sections—we actually had a dance in the opening and ending of the show, to the song, "Welcome to the Black Parade," they did a dance that was strong, with sharp angles, picking people up, rolling on the ground, stamping, knocking the ground with sticks, and it was kind of this vibrant opening to the show. And then we repeated the exact same thing at the very end, where we wrapped it up and used the end of the prologue, right, there's the lines at the very end, "Now that we've done this show, we hope you appreciate it." So we used the—I think the character is "Prologue," we used the Prologue lines at the beginning and the end in conjunction with this dance. So that was one of the things that we called a dance. Because it was a fully choreographed and performed contemporary dance. And it didn't further the show in any way, other than to establish character, mood, time period, and serve as a visually interesting backdrop to the prologue. And the epilogue that the Prologue speaks. The second dance was

getting to France—so they make the decision to go to France, then they have to get to France, and then we've got that very first battle that includes the "Once more unto the breach, dear friends." Which we had cut down quite a bit, and so that whole thing became a huge sequence, so they started moving the blocks, and then the blocks turned into music. That's when we used the song, "Sail." So we created a boat out of the blocks, and then they rode in time with it, and then that morphed into another music piece, so, that was sort of—I can't remember where we pulled it from, I think it was from some World War II epic battle movie, that just was sweeping strings, and sort of, like, "And we're in battle now!" And then we ran lines along the top of it. But all the fighting was, you know, you do two barrel rolls forward while you're doing a kick up and over, and then let's go boom, boom, boom, boom, and then everybody in unison go boom, boom, boom, boom with the sticks, to make it look like it's a battle, but it's not really a battle, nobody's getting hurt or anything like that. That was the second dance. And then the third—oh, the big battle. The Battle of Agincourt. It was fully choreographed. And we choreographed it so that there would be—I don't know, balletic fighting? I don't know what it was. I mean, none of these kids were dancers, and so it didn't look like ballet onstage, it looked like movement, but it was very specifically choreographed. And it was choreographed to go to music, and then there would be pauses where the lines would come in and out, and then somebody else would come in and do part of the movement piece that was to indicate fighting, and it became just a big montage battle. So Agincourt was the third place that we did that. And it culminated with the death of the Boy, which we used a bunch of slow motion—so we had everybody running, the whole cast was running in slow motion across the stage, and then the Boy got stabbed, but we never showed the French army, it was all the English army, and so when the Boy gets stabbed, she just collapsed in on herself, and then fell. And because she stopped moving and everyone else was still moving forward—it was beautiful. The kids reacted—it was really interesting, because once we got to that point—because it was exciting, up until then, you know there's this yelling and fighting and waving sticks, and the kids were like "Yeah, oh, yeah!" But with the slow motion section, and when the Boy died, and then fell, and the music faded, the kids were just dead silent. They'd just sit there. And Fluellen came on, found him, and then rapped his mourning monologue. I had some great actors. So much of this wasn't me, it was the cast saying, "Well what if I did this right here?" And I just went, "Uh huh. You do that." That was my largest job as the director, to go, "Uh huh. What you just did, you do that."

EH: That's great. That's very cool. And, yeah, that was—part of my first question was about the violence, because there is so much—so many battles that happen onstage. So that's good to know.

MSJ: Well, we just choreographed it, so—and the reason you choreograph it is to make it look cool, which it did, but we also tried to keep it sort of rough and violent, and I think a large part of that is yelling. So if you're doing a thing where you're supposed to go, knock, knock on the sticks, drop to your knees, do a roll over on the

ground, hop back up, do a turn and then knock, knock on the sticks, it could look very dance-y, you could make it look very modern. But then when they're screaming at each other in Shakespeare, which made it seem not as poetic, hopefully, so that there was a sense of the real violence, but none of the stakes of the actual thing—we weren't teaching the kids proper stabbing methods, and there was no blood or anything like that. So, the hope is it struck the right balance, so that it was properly chilling, because violence should be, but it wasn't actually terrifying, it didn't feel like anyone was actually in danger, and that there wasn't imagery that the kids would take home, and have nightmares about. So we tried to find that balance, of troublesome, but not damaging.

EH: Yes. Yeah. That can be a tough balance, but, but it sounds like you found it, so that's good.

MSJ: Yeah. Yeah. Who knows? (*laughs*)

EH: Yeah (*laughs*) My last question is just that, I know you mentioned that *Henry V* was assigned to you as a show to direct. But I was just curious if you know any of the reasoning why or background behind why it was chosen for that season.

MSJ: No.

EH: Okay (*laughs*).

MSJ: My guess is, we do try to work through the canon a little bit, right? And because we tour annually, and we tour Shakespeare annually, it seems that we try to balance tragedies, comedies, and histories. And—I don't know exactly, I'm sure there's a way to look back up over the past ten years of the Shakespeare shows we've toured through, but my sense of remembering back, when they first said, "Well, what would you think about doing this?" was that it was time to do a history, and that this seemed like a good one, and I do remember having conversations around, like, "Is this possible? Can you do this?" And because I always choreograph my plays (*laughs*)—it is my directorial style. I came at directing from choreographing, as a professional dancer, so I was able to easily go, "Oh yeah, I can do this, it should be okay. The way I would do this." And there was some hesitancy, I think—concerns about the violence, but then I think maybe the nice confluence of the facts that, one, I'm interested in doing these shows, for my own personal scheduling, two I enjoy doing adaptations, three, I was using a class to develop the show, and four, the producers knew that I choreograph violence,. And, sort of went from there. Like I said, we seem to try to move through things. Tragedies are harder, you know, taking *Macbeth* to kids, taking—I'm trying to think, I don't think we've ever taken *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. We usually take comedies, it's just easier, or we take problem plays. We've done *Cymbeline*. We've done—and there's a "P" one. *Pericles*?

EH: Yeah.

MSJ: Yeah. We've done *Cymbeline*, we've done *Pericles*, we did *Midsummer's* last year, and then I'm doing *Twelfth Night* this year, which means probably the following year they're going to need to look at doing something a little more serious.

EH: Yeah. I mean, those are harder.

MSJ: I think we'll be trying a tragedy that time.

EH: Yeah, I know, those can be more challenging, because especially with kids, it's easier to get them engaged—and, any—I mean, I like watching funny things, but (*laughs*) easier to get them engaged in over the top physical or verbal comedy.

MSJ: Yeah. Well, and one of the things that we have too, is that if we only toured to the schools, that would be one thing, but we do also a whole run at BYU for college audiences. So, for me, these plays, it's the Young Company, it's for the elementary school audiences, but you can't have it be—I don't think theatre for young audiences should be dumbed down in any event, but I do have to keep in the back of head that this is going to be for adult audiences as well. And so one of the things that we did to try to adjust is that the conversation around violence and war and fighting and the military is different for college aged kids than it is with younger kids. The idea of a coming of age story, of the, the gender reversal that I was doing was clearly read differently in adult audiences, where they were like, "Yeah. Good for you, doing a feminist revision!" And I was like, "Yeah, or she was the best actress. Take your pick." But, of course, it was also a feminist revision. Overtly so. But one of the things we did too is we did an outreach, where every other night, maybe—I think we had five or six—every other night that we did it at BYU, we had invited different military personnel to share their experiences of war, or being at war, or connected to war, their understanding of war, with the audiences. And so it ended up being sort of a package deal, and so the audience would watch the show, and then they would stay for the lectures. And then a question and answer and I loved that piece of it at BYU. How we brought in military people and said, "This is a play about war. What do you—" I mean, not so much what do you think about war, or tell us your war stories, but how did serving your country impact you, I think was the prompt question. And we had a range of people come in. It was very cool.

EH: That's really interesting. And were there a lot of college students who stayed for those discussions, or was it more adults, or was it a mix of both?

MSJ: I went to two of the five, two of the four? I can't remember how many we did. The two that I went to, everybody stayed.

EH: Wow, that's great.

MSJ: Because it's a college group, and it's a 45 minute show, so it's not like they're

like, "Ooh, I got someplace to be, it's so late." And we had advertised it well enough, and tried to hop on, and I'm sure there was a couple of people that left, but for the most part—and I flew my dad in from Seattle to do one of them, because my relationship to the military, my dad was a career Marine Corps officer, who did two tours in Vietnam. So I have a very personal sense of military violence and war, having been raised in that culture. And it was a sold-out show, and everybody stayed. And my dad talked for maybe 15 minutes, and then there was another 15, 20 minute question and answer. It was super great.

EH: That's really great.

MSJ: Yeah, it was great. So he was Marine Corps, we had a Navy guy who'd served, or Army guy who had served in Iraq, we had a mom who was a Gold Star mom—I think it's called Gold Star moms, who had children who'd died in war, I had a Gold Star mom come and talk, we had a reservist come and talk. So, yeah. That was a cool part of it too.

EH: Yeah. That's really great. I think those are all my questions for you. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me.

MSJ: You're welcome. Talk to you later.

EH: Okay. Bye.

Lillian Kass 2015a
Interview with the author via phone
6 Apr.

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): I know you mentioned that the first step in the process for you, or the first thing that you did with Chicago Shakespeare was the summer professional development— the teacher training.

Lillian Kass (LK): Right.

EH: Can you tell me a little bit more about that, and what that professional development and training consisted of?

LK: Sure. It was a week in the summer with maybe about 20 other Chicago public school teachers. We were all high school teachers, mostly English teachers, and then I think there were one or two other special ed teachers. And there's a couple drama teachers. And—how do I describe it, it was—they had a few different presenters, just talking about different ways to work with difficult language, and text with difficult language, obviously focusing on Shakespeare, but all the strategies and activities we did could be applied to any text. And just ways of both really getting deep into the language, but also doing it in a way that's fun and accessible to students. But it was presented to us in a very hands-on way, so basically we were the students going through these activities, and then we would talk about how to adapt them for our classrooms. So everything from—there was an activity where everybody was given one or two lines of text. We were working with—I believe *Macbeth* was the play that we worked with throughout that week so everybody was given one or two lines of *Macbeth* and we were just told to go through what ended up being a similar text work process that we did in the CPS Shakespeare production, but just to do some text work, so, look up the unfamiliar words, and try to see what your two lines mean, but then walk around and say your two lines out loud to yourself, and play around with how you say them, and they would give us instruction about different ways to play around with it. So, you'd say it to yourself and everybody's saying their lines to themselves, so you're not being heard by anybody else at first, and then you gradually start going up to people and say, "Okay, now I'm going to say my line to you," and had individual exchanges that way, and then we would read our lines for the whole group individually. So something like that, where you're really getting into the language, but you're also getting on your feet and moving around, so all of the activities were ways of helping students access the text without making it overwhelming. That's just one example.

EH: Yeah. And it sounds like, from what you mentioned, that a lot of it was—in accessing the text, a lot of it became on your feet, and performing the text, or at least speaking it out loud. Is that accurate?

LK: Yes, absolutely.

EH: Okay. So then, from that training, can you tell me a little bit about, CPS Shakespeare aside, what teaching techniques, or what tools from that training you've used in your classroom, or what has worked especially well in terms of those things that they did in the professional development?

LK: I don't know if I use every activity, that we did, in my classroom, but I use a lot. So I teach Shakespeare, most years, I'll teach one play, and I definitely adapted the activities that we had done at professional development and used them in my classroom. I continue to do so, both with Shakespeare, but sometimes also with other texts. For instance, with one of my senior classes that I co-teach, we often read *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which has dialect in it, and that's also difficult for our students, so things like translation—I call it translating the text, to find how would you say this today. I use that all the time. And it helps the students, if you go line by line, or if you take one specific line—how do you translate this, then you can build from there, and it really helps to do that with all kinds of difficult texts. Again, I'm using that one example, but there are countless other times. At this point—I did the Bardcore program five or six years ago, so I almost don't know every—how much of it came from that, because you forget where an idea or a strategy comes from as you adapt it and change it. Definitely when I'm teaching Shakespeare, my entire approach was shaped by what we did in Bardcore, and then what I've done since with CPS Shakespeare as well.

EH: Yeah. So, sort of switching to, specifically, CPS Shakespeare, can you just walk me through what the process of working on the show was, for you and your students, and what that process was like.

LK: Sure. So there's one week in the summer, which is a lot of—to me, it seemed like it was a lot of building the confidence of the kids, and then building some kind of camaraderie in the group. And, so, again, a lot of stuff that's on your feet. There's activities that encourage kids to take risks, they encourage them to access different emotions, to prepare them for being onstage. So just tons of activities about using your voice, and standing in a certain way and moving in a certain way, or moving in different ways, and what you can convey through your movements. And then just fun activities that build the team, to learn each other's names, and for working together, and reaction time, things like that, that are also sort of team building activities, but also are going to be helpful for a performance. And then we also in the summer talked about the themes of the play. So we started with a summary. One day we read a summary of the plot, a two-page summary, maybe. And then eventually we read through a draft of what would be the script that we used, so it's an abridged version of *Othello*. We read through that together as a whole group out loud, and would pause at various points and talk about it. So that was in the summer, and then the last day in summer, there are auditions. So we also started the process of the text work, where you sort of dive into a few lines of one speech, and figure out, you know—what does this mean, and what's the best way to say it, how do I emphasize

different things, and talked about both meaning and different poetic devices— alliteration, assonance, metaphor, rhythm, rhyme, and then we talked about those things, and started to, a little bit, talk about, how do you use those clues to affect how you say the line. The last day is an audition, so everybody—you have a choice of a few different speeches, and everybody has to do two of them, in private, in front of the director and Marilyn and whoever else is running the show. So that's the summer. It's all in one week. And then you come back in the fall, and you start some of that process all over again, and the fall is—it's kind of amazing, when I think back, how much you do in such a short amount of time. It's really intense work that you put in, but it follows the cycle of cycling between some of the whole group activities that you did in the summer that were more team-building, and, again, encouraging the kids to take risks, and helping them build their confidence, and their voice. There's those whole-group activities, and then there's individual text work, or small-group and individual text work, and small-group scene work, where the teachers and the students are working on really getting deep into the language of their lines, and then working with the other people in that particular scene to figure out in context, "Okay, well, what is this character saying, and what is that character saying, and what's really going on in the scene," and gradually building up from that text work to, "Okay, how are we going to move." So some of that is done very independently, with just whoever's in the scene, the students and maybe one teacher if there's a teacher in the scene, or a teacher's sitting by to help out if needed, but mostly the kids take a lot of ownership. And they're really encouraged to figure it out on their own. No teacher is sitting there, saying, "Well, no, that means blah blah blah." We're not doing that. We'll get out the Lexicon, and now you have ten choices of what this word means, (*EH laughs*) and what fits in this sentence, and why do you say that, and the kids have to really come to discoveries on their own. And the adults too—there's words that we think we know what they mean, and then you go look it up in the Lexicon, and you're like, "Oh, well, Shakespeare meant it this way, I didn't know that." (*EH laughs*) So we're all going through the process together, and students and teachers are more or less viewed as equals. I mean, obviously, there's some distinction, because we're adults and we're still their teachers, but we're treated as equals by the director, and we engage in the process as equals, where we're all discovering the play together. So you did the scene work, in your small groups, and then you had scene work with the director helping you work through whatever you need to work through in that particular scene, and then there's individual extra stuff, based on who needs it, so if there's a fight scene, there's a fight choreographer who will help the kids work out the movement for the stage fight. My student was really struggling a lot, both with the text work, and with some of the vocal stuff, and so the fight choreographer also—I can't remember what his other title was, but he worked with my student on projection, and standing onstage with confidence, and saying the lines so that they meant something. So the kids who need it would get some extra one on one, or (*unintelligible*) support, depending on what they needed. And then the students—a lot of students return, and do it for two or three years, so those students who returned also take a little bit of a mentoring role with the new students. I think it was about, maybe, half of the

students were returning students, and half of the students were new to the program, and so in any scene, you'd have a mixture, and the people who had been through it before often would step up and just be leaders in that work. I don't know if that fully answers your question.

EH: No (*laughs*), it does. You mentioned that the kids really take ownership of the scenes and of the text, and I know when I was talking with Marilyn about the program, she mentioned—she was talking about the production of *Taming of the Shrew*, but that sometimes the director, Kirsten Kelly, would have the students stage key scenes in several different ways, and then, as an ensemble they would come to a decision about what the best way to stage that scene was. And I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit about that happening in *Othello*, and how that worked for the kids, and for the teachers.

LK: Sure. So those choices as an ensemble, that's really imbued throughout the whole process. So even from the beginning, when we first read the draft script, we pause at different places for discussion, but a lot of that discussion is generated by the students, so they're asked very open-ended questions—and I know, I sound like I'm not answering your question, but I'll get there (*laughs, EH laughs*). Kirsten would ask super open-ended questions, just to inspire them to make choices, like, "Well, what do you think of this scene?" Right, those kinds of questions, so whatever comes out, comes out, and based on some of those conversations, and what the kids and the group as a whole is focusing on and thinks is more important, that actually affects her writing of the final version of the script. And then there's always a discussion of, "Well, this is our production, it's not Kirsten's production, it's our production, so we can make these choices." So, again, and that happens again when they're talking about the meaning of any given line, if there's more than one interpretation, "Well, what do you think it means, or what do you think this character is feeling, and what do you think your character's motivation is," and obviously it's done in the context of the play as a whole, but—and sometimes the kids are wrong, right, they have an interpretation that just doesn't quite make sense, but eventually, usually they get there. After they start seeing what's happening in the other scenes, or they get a different understanding, they're like, "Oh, that's what this means." And sometimes the kids have an interpretation that none of the adults would have had, but it's eye-opening for us, right, so we're like, "Oh, I never looked at it that way (*EH laughs*), and that totally makes sense," and it's a new way of looking at this particular character, this particular scene. So it starts from the very beginning with that ownership, and then again, when the kids are doing their text work, they're figuring out the meaning of it, to work together. They work together, and then they'll start staging things a little bit on their own, and Kirsten will definitely guide them, like, "What if you do this?" or "What if you do that?" So, I'm trying to think of—there was a scene I was in, where Desdemona is pleading with Othello to reconcile with Cassio, and we staged that in various ways, so—is she going to touch him, how close are they standing, and what's the tone when he's telling her no, is he angry? So my student was Othello in the scene, and at one point,

he was laughing, and then it turned into, maybe Desdemona tickles Othello, and he's laughing and saying no. And so there were multiple different ways, and I can't even remember now how many different ways we tried that scene, and that interaction between the characters. And then we ended up, "Well, what do you—" and then Kirsten would say, "Well, what did you think of that, did that work?" And she would ask everybody who was in the scene, so Othello and Desdemona are the main characters in the scene, but there's other ensemble members there, so, "What do we think of this, as a small group, and does this one work, or does that one work," and definitely the choice came from us as a whole. Does that get to your question?

EH: Yeah! Yeah, it does.

LK: I know it's a long way around.

EH: (*laughs*) No, it definitely does, and as a follow-up to that, just from your observation and experience, did having that kind of ownership—I guess, how did it affect the way that the students were able to engage with the play, and the text, and the themes that were present. Did it affect their engagement, their relationship with the play?

LK: Oh, absolutely. I think it affects it in multiple ways, like for one, it forces them to really know what's going on, they can't—we can't sneak by and fake it. Because nobody's telling me what to do, you have to really get it, but also that engagement when you're up on your feet and you're playing around with the different ways—and in many of these situations, there's no right answer, we don't know, there's so many different ways you can play these characters. And so, you know, it could be that Othello's really mad at Desdemona in that moment, and just bothered by her, because he's focused on something else, or it could be that he's still loving and playful and laughing and joking with her, and I think it allows the kids to—one, to understand the different possibilities. They understand that there's not a right answer, which I think often in the school setting, or even in a production with a different type of approach, it would be, like, "This is the way it's going to be," and then there's this right answer, so you don't engage with the text in the same kind of way, you don't engage with the meaning of the play in the same kind of way, if you think there's just one right answer. So it allows them to engage with those possibilities, and to think about all of the themes much more deeply. And then in making choices, it also allows them to bring themselves to the play, their own personalities, their own experiences, their own connections, and I think that's really powerful, because then, again, it's not just, "Here's this thing that's separate from you, and who you are, and you're just learning it," it's—I think the thing that's so powerful about Shakespeare in general is the connection to humanity, and how we live, and our emotional space, (*EH laughs*) and all of—I mean, Shakespeare's plays really show a really deep understanding of people, and you don't get that if you don't bring yourself to it, if you can't make those connections with your own life, or who you are. And being able to make choices about the production really allows the

students to be themselves and make those connections with the play.

EH: Yeah. In that vein, of making connections and engaging with the themes and really having that deep understanding, a big part of what I'm looking at, as I mentioned, is dealing with complex or challenging or difficult themes, and *Othello* has lots of issues about race and racism and discrimination, and I'm just wondering how your student who worked on the production, or just the students in general—how you saw them, or if you saw them, engaging with or processing those themes of race in *Othello*.

LK: So we did, but at first—and I remember we also had some meetings, just with the teachers, to talk about how things were going, and I remember in one of our early discussions, we were all sort of surprised that it didn't come up more with the kids in our initial read-through of the script, but they were focusing a lot more on some of the other themes—jealousy and betrayal, which is much more true to what most teenagers are experiencing in their daily lives, right? And, again, not that they don't experience racism, but some of what they connected to was, at first, not necessarily focused on race. And we did eventually talk about it and discuss it, and the kids had some really great insights, and I can't now remember anything in particular, but I think as adults we focus much more on that in *Othello*, and we lose some of the other themes, or we take some of the other stuff for granted, and for the kids that we were working with, a lot of it—with a lot of them, the discrimination piece was one of the things that they sort of took for granted a little bit, and they're focused much more on the more relational stuff in the play. So it's not that it was dismissed or that the kids didn't engage with it, but it wasn't necessarily the most compelling aspect of the play for them. At least that's how I remember it. (*laughs*)

EH: Yeah, and that's what Marilyn Halperin said, when I spoke to her as well. Do you think that was because the relational themes are just more immediate in their day-to-day lives, or it just happened that way, is there a—yeah, I guess I'm just wondering if there's a specific reason you think that it shifted that way.

LK: Yeah, I mean, that was sort of my sense of it is that, in their daily life, what are they dealing with, right?

EH: Yeah.

LK: And I remember one of the girls talking about the stuff about Desdemona and her father—which isn't a huge part of the play, but that was one of the things that struck a chord for this one student was, you know, how her relationship with her own parents compared with Desdemona's relationship with her father. And then the kids were really—you know, the jealousy and the betrayal between friends and between couples, and the sexual tension, and all of that is just much more in line with what they face on a day to day basis and what they experience, and what they care about. And a lot of our kids—you know, Chicago's very segregated, and, well,

the school I teach in is—I don't know the actual percentages now, used to be 99% black, and then we had some incoming students whose school closed, so we have some Latino students as well, but there's no white kids in my school. And in an all-black neighborhood, and the only white people that my students see for the most part—there's a couple white people who live in the neighborhood, but for the most part, the white people they see are cops and teachers and, maybe, you know, doctors and nurses, and that's it. So they're not experiencing that kind of discrimination, because they're in a homogeneous community. And not that they don't face discrimination, or it doesn't affect their lives, but they don't see it, it's not concrete for a lot of my students, unless they go somewhere outside of their community.

EH: Yeah.

LK: Some of the kids were certainly coming from much more diverse schools, but it just wasn't—you know, they understood it, when we did talk about it, they clearly understood, oh, yes, he's being discriminated against, but I think part of it is, it just isn't connecting personally, and I think part of it is, to them, this is just how the world is. Right? It's expected. And so for those kids, it just wasn't as compelling.

EH: Yeah. That makes sense, as a reason behind that. Now, have you taught *Othello* in your classroom, or is CPS Shakespeare the main time that you've worked with that play?

LK: That's the only time I've worked with the play. I'd love to teach it in my classroom, but I haven't actually done that yet.

EH: Okay. Just in general, then, can you tell me a little bit about what differences you noticed in, or if there are differences in students' engagement with Shakespearean text in general and connecting with the themes and things like that, participating in the performance vs. working with the text in a classroom setting.

LK: Oh, I mean, there's no comparison. Even when I work with my students in class, and I do as much as I can of these types of activities, and they certainly get engaged, and they enjoy the themes, and they get into the characters and the events and the intrigue, or whichever play they're reading, there's just a different level of engagement when you're putting on a production and in class you can maybe have kids act out a scene or two or whatever, but to really engage in that really deep way and to have to get into the characters to the level that they do. And there's also—they are more than one character in different scenes. So my student was Othello in one scene and Cassio in another scene and Iago in a third scene, so they get a chance to—to engage with other characters—but in whatever scene they're in, so, really engage with that character, to the point of putting on a production—I mean it's just different, I just don't think, unless you're in a drama class in school and really putting on a production, you can't have that same experience. And there's also something about being in a real theatre, and using real costumes, and real sets, that

is really powerful for the kids too, and so that pushes them to, also, a different level of engagement, because they're doing something that's really special and they want to do it right, and do it well, and you have to know and understand the lines, the themes, and the characters on a different level if you're actually performing it than you do, even if you're just acting out a scene in class. And my student, in particular—Friday was my student, and he really struggled at first with the reading and decoding the meaning of the text, and really understanding—getting the understanding of what each line meant was really hard for him, and I don't know that in class, even with the hands on, up on your feet types of activities, that he would have ever gotten to the depth of understanding that he did with studying in CPS Shakespeare.

EH: Yeah. Yeah, and that makes sense. I don't know if I mentioned this in our initial conversation, but when I went to Chicago Shakespeare, I was able to see the archival video of the production, and it—I mean, it was really cool, just to see the costumes they got to use, and the set, and how engaged they clearly were with the text while they were performing, which was awesome.

LK: Yeah. Yeah. And you didn't get a chance to ever stop by and see a, a practice or (*unintelligible*)? Because that would be awesome if you could.

EH: Oh, I'll have to try to. I try to get to Chicago, because, my family's there. So yes, I'll have to try to, because it seems, from what I've heard from you, and from Marilyn, and just from what I've read about the program, it seems like such an amazing whole process, from rehearsal through production.

LK: Yes. It's sort of hard to—and I'm sure Marilyn's probably better at describing the process, but it's sort of hard to really describe what it's like without being there. I don't know, I have a hard time (*laughs, EH laughs*)—and I feel like I didn't—I sort of gave you the structure, but to articulate what some of those moments are like is difficult.

EH: Yeah, it seems like there are a lot of—I know one of the things that Marilyn said in describing it was the discussions are the level of discussion that every teacher has as the ideal, just this wonderful kind of discussion about themes and getting really deeply into—I think she called it the Platonic ideal of getting into those themes and really engaging with them, which is really cool.

LK: Yeah. Yes, absolutely. And some of it also comes from just the amount of time that's spent doing what are essentially, I guess theatre activity kinds of things that really build the kids' confidence and allow them to feel comfortable taking risks and feel safe with each other. You know, putting on clown noses and acting silly serves so many different purposes at the same time, because it allows the kids—I mean, one it helps the kids tap into that silliness, right, so they're doing scenes, but makes it okay for them to be silly, and to take risks and to not have to be cool or on guard

all day. Which, you just sort of take it away from, when they're around their peers at school. Because there is all the social drama and whatever at school that doesn't exist in the same way at CPS Shakespeare, because it's a, a contained, sort of separate activity and place and group.

EH: Yeah, that's so interesting to hear, because Ohio State partners with Royal Shakespeare Company to do a lot of training, and one of the things that they really emphasize for the Columbus City School teachers is doing those theatre games and trying to build ensemble in their classrooms to try to find that level of trust in a classroom, to take risks, and they talk a lot about how important that sort of ground work is, so it's really cool to hear about that happening at Chicago Shakespeare.

LK: Yeah, totally, and it's huge. It's huge, and I don't think—you can't have that level of discussion without it, without the students feeling comfortable and safe to take those risks, and they don't—they're not going to learn as much either, and it sort of opens them up, to be ready to take things in as well.

EH: Yeah, that's—it sounds like that ability to understand and engage is kind of a combination of preparing for production and having that trust within the group.

LK: Yes.

EH: So I just have a couple more questions about the process in general. For your student who worked on the production, did you notice—what effect did it have on his engagement with schoolwork, or just, effects in general, if any, that you noticed after the production, that it maybe had on him as a student.

LK: So, it's interesting, because this is a student that I had known in—primarily just from—I hadn't taught him until his junior year, which was the year that he did this program, and I actually had him in a math class that I was co-teaching, and he's—I didn't know, because I only taught him in math (*EH laughs, LK laughs*) I didn't realize how he struggled with language, and math was really his stronger subject. And I don't actually know—he had failed some classes freshman and sophomore year, and was a little bit of a clown at school, and was seen by some teachers as a troublemaker, and while we were in the production, he was doing great in school, and part of that, I think, was I was able to really bank on the relationship that I had with him from this production, and so—and shortly thereafter, it totally boosted his confidence, he felt really great about doing this, he was super proud of himself, his family came to both shows. He has, I don't know how many people came, tons of people, I mean, he's got a lot of brothers and they all came for him (*unintelligible*) were there. Anyways, but he just had this huge confidence boost from it, and was still struggling with some other stuff, and so there was sort of like a short-lived boost from it, and then his academic performance at school overall declined and he ended up leaving my school and going to an alternative school for second semester of his junior year, and doing well there, and part of it was, I think,

he needed to get away from the social stuff that was going on for him at this school. There was that, and it was just a better setting. So he went to an alternative school for second semester, and he did really well and he passed all his classes, and when I saw him that spring, I kind of asked him how this was going, and he said, you know, good and bad, good because I'm doing well in school, but bad because I miss being at Austin, and he was going to come back, in fact, he did come back briefly at the beginning of this year for his senior year, but he went back to the alternative school and he's finishing up at the alternative school. But he is going to—he is on track to graduate on time, so—it's hard to say how Shakespeare affected him, because he got a lot of out of it, and I think it's one of those experiences he'll never forget, and he has confidence there that he didn't have in a lot of other places in his life, and it was confidence that came out of struggling through something, and being successful, as opposed to, oh, this is something that I'm pretty good at already. Which I think is much more powerful, that knowledge that you can face something that's challenging and difficult and push through and the outcome of that is just—I don't know if that's the word, it's just really powerful, and it's just very—it's confidence-building. I think his academic decline, it wasn't really so much of a decline as it was a return to where he had been before, and so, for whatever reason, he couldn't translate some of that. And part of it was because there were people in the school who already had a preconceived notion of him, and they didn't see what I saw, right, they, they didn't go through that process with him, they didn't see how he had worked at CPS Shakespeare, and what challenges he had overcome at CPS Shakespeare, right, they didn't have that other side of him. And so he was sort of already stuck in being seen a certain way, and he needed to get away from that. And I think also one of the things about the alternative program that he's in is I think it's more self-directed than a typical classroom, and I think CPS Shakespeare was—it's similar, right, it's more self-directed. Teachers are there pushing you, a little bit, and you're—also your own problem, then, is they're pushing you, but you have to do the work, and nobody's telling you what's the right or wrong answer and nobody's telling you how to figure something out, right, they're supporting you in doing it. I think being able to take that kind of ownership over something is what he needed, and I think that's true of the alternative program he's in. It's a lot more independent than a typical classroom, and he's being very successful there, and we've had other students who go there and they drop out in a month because they can't do the self-directed thing. I don't know if I really answered your question.

EH: *(laughs)* You did, yes.

LK: But that's Friday's story, and he is, you know, he's going to graduate, which even at the beginning of his junior year, was questionable, which, like I said, I didn't know, because I didn't know how he had done in his other classes.

EH: That's great. So my last question for you, it's sort of a broad one, but for you, what was the most enjoyable or the best part of the process, and the most challenging part of the process of the show?

LK: Well, I'll give you my most challenging part first. (*laughs*)

EH: Okay. (*laughs*)

LK: Which was actually about Friday. There were a couple of days that he refused to attend, and—no, I shouldn't say that, I think there was one day he refused to attend. There was one day where he was suspended, and he was supposed to meet me back at the school, and he didn't show up, and what I didn't know at the time was that he had shown up at the school and been arrested before I got outside, so that was one day that he didn't come, and that wasn't really his fault. And then there was another day—maybe there were three days he didn't come. There was a day that he left school, and didn't come to the program with me, and I had to drive around and look for him and find him on the street on his way home, and convince him to get in the car, and there was another—so I guess he did end up coming that day—and there was another day where I did the same thing, and I found him on the street and he wouldn't get in my car and come to the program. And that was just really challenging, to try to work with a student who I have a very good relationship with, and who I know respects me and who I know, overall is enjoying this program, right, it's not like he didn't want to go because he didn't like it there um, and just feel like I couldn't—here's this program that's helping him more than anything else is, and that's giving him this confidence and this opportunity that ended up being so good for him, and for him not to be able to be consistent about it, and to not know how to address the other issues that were getting in his way. So that was really challenging. And then, I would say, the best part for me was seeing how he changed and how he grew and what he got out of it and how confident he was, and how excited he was and how proud he was by the end. And seeing—this is why we teach, right, seeing kids grow in some kind of way, it's the biggest reward there is for anything that we do. But it was really powerful.

EH: Yeah.

LK: So, the struggle was worth it. (*laughs, EH laughs*)

EH: Oh, that's really cool to hear. So those are all my questions. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today, it was so helpful, and really great to hear your perspective.

LK: Oh, yeah, no problem.

EH: Wonderful.

LK: Of course. My pleasure. Thank you. And, have a great day.

EH: Thanks, you too! I'll be in touch soon.

LK: All right.

EH: Bye.

LK: Bye.

Teresa Dayley Love 2015
Interview with the author via phone
13 Mar.

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): I'm thrilled to be able to talk with you, after reading about some of your adaptations, and my first question is, when you've adapted the Shakespeare plays for Brigham Young, especially *Shrew* and *Merchant of Venice*, and *Cymbeline*, how did you approach those? Can you tell me a little bit about the underlying considerations that you kept in mind while doing that?

Teresa Dayley Love (TL): Well, at my core, I'm an artist and I want the piece to be engaging and entertaining, so I want their attention (*laughs*), so I think—yes, I look at the big things and think, "Oh, this story would be great," but I also don't believe in didacticism, or—I seldom like the moral just being pounded in until they're like, "Okay, I got that." Which, you know, is part of the reason that they feel the Shakespeare is that the themes are worded and presented in such a way that if you can have ears to hear, you can hear it, and if you're not—if your heart's not ready, or your mind's not ready, or just developmentally you're not ready, it can still be an interesting show, and interesting time.

EH: Yeah.

TL: So that's how I go about it, and as far as being asked to do it, we have a tradition here at BYU of doing, with our Young Company outreach touring, that we do what we call, loosely, a Shakespeare one semester, and a contemporary, in quotes, the other. And so it was time for the Shakespeare, and I think the first time, I think for *Shrew*, that they suggested it to me. But *Merchant* and *Cymbeline* were my ideas, that I pitched.

EH: Wow. Can you tell me a little bit about what led you to those, just because *Shrew*, I've seen a good number of companies do for young audiences, but *Merchant* and *Cymbeline* are much less commonly done, so I'd love to know more about what appealed to you about those shows for young audiences.

TL: Sure. Well, *Merchant*—and I think I might have told you before about Elizabeth Nesbit⁹¹, who's done the Shakespeare stories for kids, and I had looked at some of her work, and she was a good storyteller. I also teach storytelling. And frequently, as I'm approaching any sensitive subject—like I've done a Cinco de Mayo show that talks about the genocide in Mexico, and I've done a Martin Luther King show, certainly all those issues that went with the Civil Rights movement, and his assassination, so I've been experienced in presenting challenging ideas to children before I started doing the Shakespeare adaptations. And when I saw that Nesbit was such a good storyteller, and how she—and I want to say this in a clear way, how she

⁹¹ This is a reference to author Edith Nesbit.

was able to go to the essence of what the story was, and actually being able to edit parts of it that might harrow kids' souls up, because they might not be ready for such sort—we'll call them adult ideas, adult information, maybe. But she was able to just make it apply well to the story, to the story arc, and that was—when I read her *Merchant*, I totally credit her with the idea that there wasn't really a mention—I think she's got two different versions, but in one of them there was no mention about Shylock being Jewish. Or very little mention, you know what I mean?

EH: Right. Yeah.

TL: Enough that I went, "You know what, here we go. It's not about being Jewish. At all. It's not even about being religious. It's about being 'the Other.'" And once that—that opened up my mind to the possibilities, because if you're going to do the tough stuff with kids, you certainly want to give them context. And by the time you give them the context about Judaism (*laughs, EH laughs*), and everything, well, everybody's laying on the floor sad.

EH: Yeah.

TL: There's a wonderful story there, but it has nothing to do with the story that we would really want to tell. And you'd sort of bore them with the context, and so that they don't care about the story. So going to what the essence of the story was, to what is this really about, and then hanging it on the structure of a good old Aristotelian plotline that kids are wired for, and all that kind of stuff. That's what opened it up, for me.

EH: I've read a little bit about the—in *Merchant*, the kids—the review I read mentioned that the kids chose the nationalities and the jobs for the characters—

TL: Yeah. Yeah.

EH: It sounds like part of that was just about focusing on Shylock being the other, but can you tell me a little bit more about how that worked for the audience and for the actors and sort of how it went in performance for them?

TL: Sure. Well, my thing about theatre, especially theatre for young people right now, is for it to be relevant to them, it really needs to be different than every screen that they can pull up. I mean, no theatre artist can compete with Minecraft (*EH laughs*), by recreating, by trying to recreate that on a stage. It's not the same medium, and even trying to recreate natural, regular life or setting, film does that so much better, so to me, it's like—embrace what theatre is, which is the live people at that moment, in that room. This group will never be here again, at this time, on this day, so let's embrace that, because that's what's different about theatre. And we can use the technology and all that kind of stuff to support that, but I think that's where it has to live. We can't recreate a box set anymore and expect people to be that

interested. Or kids, especially, to be that interested. So I'm big on the idea of choice, and I want the plays to talk to where they are living right now. So what would happen, is we would go out, and ask them about—give them a chance to pick the different possibilities of who the others were, and the location, and stuff like that, and they tended—that year, I think, was the first year of—oh, holy cow, I can't even remember—Katniss and all of her—

EH: Oh, *The Hunger Games*. (laughs)

TL: *Hunger Games*, and is District 9 in that? I can't remember.

EH: Yeah, District—she's District 12, there's—yeah, all the different numbered districts.

TL: Right, okay, yeah. So, sometimes it would reflect—that movie had just come out, and so sometimes it would reflect whatever popular culture thing was happening at the time. Which is fine—but there were enough choices that they didn't—they tended not to just recreate a *Hunger Games* situation. Although that would not be a horrible thing. If that's what they're thinking about, and talking about, and reflecting about, and carrying around in their heads, why not. If you're asking them what's on your mind, and they pick it, well, let's use that. And it required the actors to be aware—they have to be aware of popular culture that's floating around with children, in case something came up, so that they could incorporate it or be informed by it. So, some people might be disappointed by that, but I'm like, "Yeah, that's fine, that's great." Or, it could be—sometimes, they just picked random silly things, just for the delight of thinking, "Oh, I'm going to throw them a curve, and let's see what happens." Again, to me, what theatre is about—and then, the more choice they get, the more invested they are, "How are these actors going to deal with it? Are they going to—is my choice going to be in this play, or is it just a gimmick?" And, I don't think that kids would think that, but I think that they would feel that, if it was just a gimmick.

EH: Yeah.

TL: And it very much kept the actors on their toes throughout. To me, it all goes to the moment, to that live, magical thing of having—and the privilege of having all these people in the room at the time for us to discuss, to be engaged. I don't want theatre for young audiences to be a screen—nothing wrong with screens, but I don't want this to be a screen for them. And I really want them to be able to engage in really clear ways, and go, "Oh, my opinion matters, or has an effect or is honored." So, that's why I did that.

EH: Yeah.

TL: I was kind of hoping that every once in a while, it might actually reflect the

school's social climate. And I can't tell you if it did or not. I don't know. But that's really what it speaks to, in devising it that way, but, like I said, I don't know if it did.

EH: Yeah. Did you get the sense—and, again, this may not be something that you're sure about—but, when they did use—like, throw out more pop culture choices, did you feel like that element, or the way they made those choices, did that seem to help them connect to that theme of the other in a way that was stronger than maybe leaving it as it was originally with the idea of Judaism?

TL: Oh, I'm sure it did.

EH: Yeah.

TL: I'm sure it did. I don't even think—I think, maybe, in our teacher materials, we might have reminded the teachers that this was written around the themes of the other being Jewish, and Christian, and all that kind of stuff, but I don't think that the kids—unless their teachers pointed that out to them, I don't think that they had any idea. And, frankly it's not an issue at this time in central Utah.

EH: Right.

TL: So they need to talk about other things. This is where I never want actors to come in—because even actors that are as young as students, because we have students as young as 19, 18-19 in some of those roles, but they're considered grown-ups to these kids, and you don't want to go in with the idea that you're begging them to think that you're cool enough.

EH: (*laughs*) Yeah.

TL: I want to offer the kids the idea that, that—I mean, there's nothing sadder than to see grown-ups trying to go, "Oh, I'm so relevant to you." (*EH laughs*) I like to create an atmosphere in which you all—put your hand out and say, "You want to do this?" and they go, "Yeah, I think I do!" And then we've got a good alchemy going. It's authentic to everybody, and the grown-ups don't have to work so hard to be relevant to the kids (*EH laughs*), and the kids don't have to—there's nothing wrong with kids going to grown-up theatre, but this theatre's devised for them, so I think it really should be more about them than about us. (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) Yeah. In reviews I'd read of all three of those adaptations, *Shrew*, *Merchant*, and *Cymbeline*, I read a little bit about the—that some of the characters in each performance were played by audience members, and I'd love to know a little bit more about where that came from, or how that worked, and sort of how that affected the performances.

TL: Yes. Well, I've been doing theatre for young audiences since I was in my early

twenties, and I'm in my late fifties now, so I have a bank of experience (*laughs, EH laughs*) about what works and what doesn't work with young people. And, we forget—when kids are young (*laughs, EH laughs*), you don't have to teach them how to play pretend. They come just the same way they come being able to move and to dance, and you don't have to say, "Okay, this is a dance, put your foot this way," they just respond to music, and it's very strong, and it's the way they learn and interpret, and make meaning, and all that kind of stuff, and there's not—when you watch kids play house or something, and somebody comes in, the kids, in an improvisational way, catch them up on the plot and say, "Okay, so what do you want to be? You want to be the dad, or the daddy, or whatever?" It's very clear that, to the new kid coming in, that this is play, and I'm going to take a part, and the other kids acknowledge it, and it doesn't mess up the play. It's not—somebody doesn't go, "Okay, you totally wrecked my (*unintelligible*) here, I can't play house anymore with you." (*EH laughs*)

EH: Yeah.

TL: So it's very strong with them when they're young, and after they—they start to be suspicious to grown-ups as kids—if a kid wears his Spiderman outfit to the grocery store or something, they're like, "What's wrong with this kid?" But, to me, they're still playing, they're still acting this out, they're seeing how it works in their—but for some reason, we don't continue to plug into that play thing, and yet kids up to sixth grade, they're still playing with their Legos, making the voices, and all that kind of stuff, right?

EH: Yeah.

TL: So, to me, it's this sort of latent power that an actor has, where the kids are still so close to being able to just jump into that play real easily, that if we invite them, they will come in. And so that's why I like working in the round so much, because the actor can just turn and look for someone to play the servant, and say, "Here, go take this over to him," they can go, "Oh, okay, yeah, I will," because you don't have to explain it to them, right? (*laughs*)

EH: Yeah. (*laughs*)

TL: You just say, "Go give it to him," and he's like, "Okay," and then you say thank you, and then your part's done. And it's, again, working on their playground, and not the grown-ups' playground. And I try not to put them into any situation that would—I give them the easy parts, or we give them choices and then we honor their choice, like, if we say, "Do you want to do this or that," it's not going to mess up the story that the—the whole big storyline for everybody, but they'll just be able to play, and we'll honor, and we'll just go on. And then the kids who are watching are more engaged, because one of theirs is up there.

EH: Yeah.

TL: Yeah, I even use that—and we do take the Shakespeare play to a couple of junior highs here in Utah, and sometimes the actors are afraid to do that, because they're used to the younger kids, and I'll say, "You know, what's great about doing it in junior high, that same sort of play, is that the focus then goes on—it's taken off of you." By junior high, they're weighing you, to try and decide if you're worth listening to or not, and they're making all decisions, it's kind of a group thing going on, *(laughs, EH laughs)* It's the, "Are we all going to think this is cool or are we all going to think this is stupid?"

EH: Yep. *(laughs)*

TL: But when you judiciously pull out a kid who is the popular kid, or a show-off kid who wants to be up, the attention goes to them, and it becomes a story about the kid with the actor, and you can quit worrying if everybody's going to be interested in you. They are going to be interested, if one of their own is up there. *(laughs)*

EH: Yes.

TL: So it even works with the older kids, but with younger kids, it's their vernacular, so if you invite them in, they will play, and they stay engaged. When I do it proscenium-style, it's harder. For example, *Shrew* was done proscenium-style, but it had—I don't remember which version of script you might have gotten, but there's sound effects tables, and stuff, so the kids not only just play characters, but they're instructed to, at a certain time, make some kind of funny noise with some instrument that punctuates the circus—and my motif was the circus. And so they're still contributing, but it's—when you're in the round, you can just turn around, and there's all this playing space, in the middle, down the aisle, around the back, there's lots of physical, easy ways to engage with kids, but with a proscenium, you have to go out into the audience, and it's more of a big deal, and you have to figure out how to keep the focus, and then regain it back up on the stage again.

EH: Yeah.

TL: Stuff like that. So it's a little bit harder. But I think it's worth it. I have a hard time now even doing plays without bringing the audience physically in anymore, because it's so effective. *(laughs, EH laughs)* And actors don't have to work so hard. Once they learn the techniques about how to improv with them, and use them, and all that kind of stuff. And the relationships are—I mean, after the play, everybody wants to talk to you, because they've seen you be accessible to everybody else. Anyway—I'm going on, I'm probably off topic.

EH: No, this is really great to learn, because I have not—I've read a little bit about some theatre for young audiences that uses this kind of participation, but I haven't really talked to anyone who's doing it in Shakespeare for young audiences in the U.S.

TL: Yeah.

EH: So I'm really fascinated by getting to talk to you about it. I just want to make sure that I'm clear—are the Young Company shows geared towards elementary school ages, then, generally?

TL: Yes.

EH: Okay.

TL: Yeah. Although, like I said, there's—we are in the enviable position that we fill up our touring dates really quickly, so we're not having, at this point, to look for new audiences. And there are a couple of junior highs who want to have us for the Shakespeare, they don't have the contemporary ones, they have the Shakespeare ones, but we haven't had a need or felt a need to design them for older audiences. When I was in Los Angeles doing my own company, which was—I was a partner with Open Window Entertainment, I still am, and then Imagination Company. We had, in the Los Angeles area—I don't know if you know Will and Company. But they do—I think they're still around, there was such a purging when schools had a nickel to spend every—with all the budgets, but it's coming back now (*laughs*). But they kind of had a lock, but they had done—when people wanted Shakespeare—we offered a few Shakespeare, we did a *Green Eggs and Ham Hamlet* (*EH laughs*), I put Pyramus and Thisbe in a couple of plays within a play type of things for junior high, but in Los Angeles, the primary bringer of Shakespeare for young audiences, say middle school and some high school was Will and Company, and so rather than fight that, we, we stayed in our own niche. (*laughs*)

EH: I just had one more sort of clarifying question on the adaptations. When you adapt these Shakespeare plays, do you retain any of the original Shakespeare text, or do you tend more towards paraphrasing to tell the story?

TL: Oh no, I keep the text that I can, and I imagine—I call him Bill—I imagine Mr. Shakespeare standing behind me (*laughs, EH laughs*), and saying, "So, you're kind of going on and on here," and he's going, "Yeah, I know." Because—and I've had to cut here some beautiful things that, number one, contextually, the kids just—it's too much to try and explain it to them so that they get it, right?

EH: Yeah.

TL: I mean, second graders barely get knock knock jokes (*EH laughs*), so you're not going to expect them to get play on words from the fifteenth century. So some stuff I take out. But I try and keep as much as I can in, and I try to keep the intent, because I—who am I, I don't want to—these are masterpieces, I don't want to change Mona Lisa's smile (*laughs, EH laughs*), I want to keep the smile, but if all that background

isn't important to appreciating her smile, then I might cut that. You see what I mean?

EH: Yeah. Yeah.

TL: And also I try—he's got—these little kids can obviously understand intertwining plots, like in *Phineas and Ferb*—do you know *Phineas and Ferb*?

EH: I know a little bit about it, I know of it.

TL: Okay, so it's a Disney cartoon, and there's two plots always going, they intersect at the climax, to finish. Kids can—they love that, however I generally keep one story going, and eliminate the backstory of somebody that's going to come in. I try and keep just one very clear storyline going.

EH: Yeah.

TL: So, I do that. But I sit with the text, and I sit with the—I've been using, like I said, E. Nesbit's stories, so I've got that, usually on my phone, because it's public domain, and then I've got the Shakespeare text. Sometimes I use No Fear Shakespeare to form that also. And then I just try and make sure that the story structure's clear. And, every once in a while—there's a few places where I've wrote my own verse, to summarize something, or something like that.

EH: Yeah.

TL: But mostly it's eliminating long speeches, just getting down to what he's really saying (*laughs, EH laughs*) And again, I try and check it out, but I want them to hear things like—oh, I don't know—well, I'm working on the Scottish play for next year, and I want them to hear "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow." Because part of this exercise in bringing Shakespeare to them is that they become literate people, that they have—there's all this challenge for kids to understand text-to-text. Well, if you've never had any Shakespeare, (*laughs*) how are you going to be able to interpret it when it's in, I don't know—how are you going to be able to see it reflected in an Iranian novel if you never have had it as a kid, right?

EH: Right.

TL: You're not going to notice it. So I try to keep some of the main things there. And, again, I'm taking three hour plays and trying to get them down to an hour, so many things have to be sacrificed (*laughs*). There you go.

EH: (*laughs*) Can you tell me—moving on to the most recent one—more about *Cymbeline*, just because I've not seen really any other adaptations of *Cymbeline* for young audiences, and I was fascinated that you did it, and that you did the two

different versions of the fairy tale and the film noir, so I'd love to just know more about that adaptation and production.

TL: Sure. *Cymbeline* was a great pleasure, and you know, I have—after doing my own company for years, and worrying about commercialism and all that kind of stuff, while our plays need to—I can't just put on anything, but I had people—I had my department chair, and the producer and all—trusted me enough from my other work, that when I say, "I'm going to do two versions of *Cymbeline*, that's never been done before," that they backed that. So that's a great luxury, because if I was doing it for my commercial company, I'd be going, "Okay, can we sell this," and it would be no, we probably wouldn't be able to sell this. But we can do it—I mean, we're selling it here at BYU, but it won't mean the demise of the company—like if I was doing it in my old company, I'd go, "Okay, yes, five people have booked this, so we can't do this show. We need 150 performances in order to be able to do this show." So I will say that—I was given latitude to say, "What play do you want to do?" And when I came, they listened to my pitch, and looked at me quizzically (*EH laughs*), but gave me leeway to do it. They just trusted me. So when I looked at—when I read *Cymbeline*, I—honestly, Elizabeth, I'm not even sure I'd ever read *Cymbeline* before—but, again, it was another one that E. Nesbit had adapted into her stories for young people, and I thought, "Well, this is really interesting," and then I started doing the research, and it's just a mess. (*EH laughs*) *Cymbeline* is just a mess, but it has all these tropes—the princess, and things that I knew that children would relate to, but I could see that if I went the princess route, and—it really is Imogen's story—if I went the princess route, I could just see those sixth grade boys in the back going, "Why am I here?" (*EH laughs*) And, even worse, the sixth grade teachers going, "Why are we here?" Because they're the gatekeepers, and I want to be back in that school next year.

EH: Right.

TL: And then the other thing it reminded me was a detective novel, and I love the Lemony Snicket stories. Daniel Handler has—besides Lemony Snicket, besides *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, he's got that other series that's written like noir, it's written like Chandler. And he does such a great—and I actually discovered those after I had this idea, and my daughter said, "Oh, do you know this," because she worked, at the time, in a library, and I was like, "Oh, my gosh, yes! This is great!" And I will tell you, there was another inspiration—and I say *Phineas and Ferb*, there's a *Phineas and Ferb* cartoon that is done in film noir, and the boys walk around—the young kids, the protagonists, they're in black and white, while everybody else is in color, (*EH laughs*), and they—you know, sounding like Humphrey Bogart (*EH laughs*), and I thought, "This is so fun," this whole idea of what design does, and style, and genre, and that's what's—fifth and sixth graders are talking about that.

EH: Mm hmm.

TL: Well, I thought, "What do I want to do here?" And we hadn't really done

Shakespeare for the very, very young for a—I don't think they'd done it for a long time. I've only been here doing—I think this is my sixth year of teaching there, and Young Company's been going on for forty years, so (*laughs*), I thought, "Well, I think that I have a strong enough idea that the youngsters, the very, very little ones would be able to hang on this princess in danger story, as long as we gave them the symbols and the design choices that they recognize. You know, princess in danger, he's the hero, he's the bad guy, all that kind of stuff that they recognize. And I think it would be fabulous if they could go, 'Oh, Shakespeare's fun! And funny!' when they're in first, second, and third grade." Yeah?

EH: Yeah.

TL: But if I was going to reach the little kids I knew I was going to lose the older kids. And that's when I decided—and, again, because this is university, I had more freedom. In my commercial company, the company in Los Angeles, the most actors I ever had was four, and for a lot of my plays, I would do with three actors, simply for actor salaries.

EH: Right.

TL: But here, I could cast as many people, honestly, as I wanted. Usually we tour in a van, and they eventually gave me two vans, so that I could cast as many people as I wanted, so that play has—I think this is right—I think we portrayed twenty three characters.

EH: Wow.

TL: But we had two companies, so on any given day, we were portraying 56 characters, and so—like I said, I've been, I've been doing this for a long time, and I need to stay engaged and interested also. (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) Yeah.

TL: And I thought, "This is a challenge, this is a great story, these are fun stories, it has a little bit of everything—there's a little bit of *Romeo and Juliet*, there's a little bit of *Winter's Tale*, there's a little bit of—" all this stuff. So that when the kids come to the next Shakespeare play, they'll have dipped their toe into that—"Oh, yeah, yeah, I recognize that, or I recognize that," and, "Oh, yeah, there's cross-dressing here, and then there's an evil queen here," and they all know evil stepmothers, and that's (*unintelligible*). So, I just thought it would be a lot of fun (*laughs, EH laughs*). And if you're going to throw yourself into these very challenging and difficult ideas for kids, you'd better have more than an earnest desire to teach, you know what I mean?

EH: Yeah.

TL: I need to be able to figure out how in the world is the queen eventually going to turn into the Roman guy, and—as an actor. How am I going to get that actor to be the queen, when does she need to leave so that she can get dressed, and come back as somebody who's in the battle and all that kind of stuff. So—I hate earnest children's theatre, do you know what I mean?

EH: Yeah.

TL: If we become too earnest, over and over again, about these difficult ideas, then they begin to fall on deaf ears. Sort of like, "This is what you want, what you care about for me to understand, and you keep pounding it into me." I want to go another way, I want to make the story so intriguing that they just sort of rise to—that they want to engage in my discussion, not me telling them what to think.

EH: Yeah.

TL: And so, while the film noir—I was hoping that, say, the fifth grade girls were getting the fact that Imogen just hadn't come to terms with the fact that she was a princess, and she had power, and that she needed to make a decision, and she—there were things that she probably could have done, even as a woman, that would have prevented her husband being banished, and this whole turn of events. I'm hoping that they're seeing that once she steps up, yeah, things got worse, but eventually it all worked out. I try to offer that to them, and if they hear it, they hear it. But they can get a lot more simple idea from the main story, if it's entertaining, and if that's what they want to carry away, they can carry it away.

EH: Yeah.

TL: I, I had a weird experience—one time I did a *To Kill a Mockingbird* for young audiences. And we were on tour, and we had told people in our material that it should be—I think we said—we might have said fourth and up, but I think we said fifth and up. It was a one-act, and this school brought in—I think we were performing at a theatre, maybe a college theatre or something, and they brought in third and fourth grade kids.

EH: Wow.

TL: And I'm like, "Oh my word, what are we going to do?" But we had my years of—and with that particular ensemble of actors, we'd been performing for children for a long time, that we were able to—and I used the words, instead of "rape," I said, "take advantage of," and once—the kids who understood what "take advantage of" was, understood, I think the kids who didn't still got that it was a bad thing, and they didn't particularly need to know it was rape, they just knew that it was a really bad thing that was—someone was hurt and abused, and if they wanted to talk about it to

a trusted adult later, fine, or they just carried it going—you see what I mean?

EH: Yeah. Just, talking about those themes, and the discussions that it sounds like happen post-show, I was just wondering if you had had any, or if you know of any memorable discussions, or moments that you know of where the students did engage with or talk about the more difficult themes in shows like *Shrew* or *Merchant of Venice*.

TL: Well, with *Shrew*, at the time that—we weren't doing post or pre-show workshops.

EH: Okay.

TL: So, I have no idea about *Shrew*.

EH: Okay.

TL: With *Merchant*, I didn't direct that one, I adapted it, and I'm sitting here thinking—I don't remember if I constructed the workshop that went with that.

EH: Okay.

TL: Let me think. I don't know.

EH: Okay.

TL: And with *Cymbeline*, our workshop was not about—our post-show was not about the themes. For the older kids, it was about design, and they were actually pre-show workshops, so we would show them things like a *Star Wars* poster, and say, "Okay, how could you—if—" and we tell them that we're going to do a, a certain genre, and they—how would costumes change, how would characters or intentions change, blah, blah, blah. So it wasn't any of that. And with the little kids it was all about story, story structure, fairy tale.

EH: Yeah.

TL: So I can't tell you that. However, I can give you the e-mail address of our Outreach Coordinator, who keeps all of those pieces of paper that the kids send, and teacher reactions and stuff like that, and she might be able to answer that question.

EH: Oh that would be great. I would love to be able to speak with her. That would be wonderful. Thank you so much.

TL: And you might want to ask her, too, about—because we did do a *Hundred Dresses*. Do you know that book, and play?

EH: I do. I read it when I was younger, and I've read about some theatre adaptations of it.

TL: Oh, yeah. And (*laughs*) that is a killer play, that's—I'm still guilty of that. (*laughs, EH laughs*) I think, "Was I that mean girl?" But they did a lot of outreach with that, and they collected dresses at the schools and stuff—the kids could bring in stuff that then went to charities and stuff like that. So she might have something to say about how that all went. And also, if you wanted to talk to the director of that show, Julia Ashworth, I could give you her e-mail address.

EH: Yeah. That would be great.

TL: And in that one, in that one, I did the workshops for that.

EH: Okay.

TL: And, in that one we did address—it was about bullying, and we did address, with the actors, and the kids—we did theatre games and learning activities that dealt with bullies. But, since it wasn't my show, I didn't—I went to the workshops, and I saw the kids, like I said, but I didn't file it away so that I could really answer that question well.

EH: Yeah, but I would love to speak to those folks, just about how those went. That would be wonderful. Let me see what other questions I have. One of my questions, and I kind of mentioned this earlier, but I have been looking for other companies that do this kind of work, with such heavy audience participation, and I was wondering if you know of any other artists or companies that do this kind of audience participation-heavy work with Shakespeare at all.

TL: You know what, no.

EH: Okay.

TL: It was a strange evolution for me, in how, how I came to it, because—I don't know, it—people are always amazed. I go places, and they're just like, "Seriously?" (*EH laughs*), and I'm like "Yeah, it's what we do." (*laughs*) You know? So, I know that there are people who have been in my company who have their own company now—oh, you know what? One of my actors that used to work with my company in L.A. is named Elizabeth Tobias, and she does the young people shows for Theatricum Botanicum, which is in Los Angeles, and they do mostly Shakespeare, and—but I haven't—I'm still Facebook friends with her and stuff, but we haven't, sat around, talked shop in years. And I know she does—in fact, she was so funny, she started mounting some of her own shows, and she was like, "Teresa, I really think we should—" She was feeling sort of awkward about using some of the techniques

that she'd learned in my company for audience participation. I was like, "Elizabeth, it's not like I have a copyright on audience (*unintelligible*)" you know what I mean?

EH: Yeah.

TL: But she felt it was idiosyncratic enough, or different enough, that she wanted my permission to, to use those techniques. But what I'm saying is, it's unusual, but she's probably done that, she's probably built on that more over the years.

EH: Yeah.

TL: So you might want to talk to her about that. Let me think, who else—I don't know. Not that many. A lot of audience participation is kind of, especially for little kids, it's like, "Everybody in the audience, put your hands up and wave your hands like you're in the wind," which is fine, but it's not—I like to give them more chances to affect the play than just pretending that they're waves. There's nothing wrong with pretending like you're waves, I've done that many times. (*laughs*) But I like a robust audience participation. (*laughs*)

EH: Yeah.

TL: So, I honestly—I'm thinking about a different conference that I've been to and stuff, and I mean, this is weird, but I don't know anybody who does it as robustly as we do.

EH: Yeah. I've been trying to research it, and I haven't read—I mean, I read some stuff about people like Brian Way doing it a while ago, but not recently.

TL: Right. Right. And Brian Way was a big influence, I read his books when I was a new practitioner in the 1970s (*laughs*) and went, "Oh, this is cool, I haven't seen that."

EH: Yeah.

TL: So some of my early plays were like that. But I think the in-the-round format lends itself to it and it gave me confidence that I could do it with Shakespeare. If we were up close and personal, that we could—so that it didn't take the kids out of the story, or we weren't making—it wasn't a gimmick or anything like that, it was just part of the play, was part of the experience. And that came after a lot of years of trying to see what worked with kids, what didn't work with kids, what the difference was between proscenium and non-proscenium shows, and also, directing in the round is not a skill that a lot of people—well, here's the deal. When you work in front of children, what's great is that they are bellwethers. If they are not interested, they are not going to give you their attention, and most in-the-round work is done for grown-ups, who will sit politely and engage, and think, "Oh, this is

kind of interesting or neat," or, "This is weird," but at least they'll stay kind of in. But kids who don't have the structures—they don't know that everybody on the planet doesn't come and do Shakespeare in the round, right?

EH: (*laughs*) Yeah.

TL: It's their first time, but they're having tons of first times, so they just come at it, and open it with their regular heart. In fact, the only time I ever get questions about in-the-round from kids is when it's privileged kids, because their parents have taken them to more standard theatre stuff. So they—just like a grown-up, they think, "Oh, it's supposed to be like this," as opposed to the rest of the kids, the kids who've never been to a live play, they come in and go, "Oh, okay, all right, I see how this goes." (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) Yeah.

TL: So, the way I got good at doing theatre in the round was doing it for those bellwether audiences, for those kids who—I could see what worked, what didn't and all that kind of stuff. A lot of grown-ups who do theatre in the round have never had that experience, they've just had polite adults who listen to them.

EH: Right (*laughs*)

TL: And so by doing it for kids who are so honest and in the moment, and all that kind of stuff, I got facility enough that I said, "Now, let's try it with something much more complicated." Let's try it with Shakespeare, will it work with Shakespeare, or will it work with any hard thing. I've done lots of plays that are not Shakespeare that deal with hard issues, and what we've found—we find that that in-the-round thing really helps, and all my in-the-round work then informed my proscenium work also, about engaging kids. So, I guess what I'm saying, it's not surprising that it's unusual, I think I had an odd alchemy of things that came together that said, "Yeah, you can do this, you can do these hard things with these kids if you do this, that, and the other, and that will keep them engaged, and if you take a break here." All that kind of stuff.

EH: Yeah.

TL: Just the really technical part of directing for children. And there's plenty of—I mean, who makes a living at this, there's plenty of people who just don't get a chance to make the mistakes that I got to make, and then learn from them. So, that's probably another reason why they go (*laughs*), "Let's do this in this standard way, because I know how to do that."

EH: Right. Yeah. So when the kids in the round are participating as the larger characters— because I noticed, for *Merchant*, Nerissa and Gratiano were played by

audience members, are they usually guided by an actor—how logistically does that, do they know what to do, I guess?

TL: Yeah. Well, we train the actors. So, I will say—because kids are suggestible, and because they want to play, and they also wouldn't want—even a seven year old doesn't want to be made a fool of in front of the whole school—you have the actors, for example—I think, with Gratiano, it was like, whenever they wanted him to say yes, they would just nod their heads up and down a lot, and then the kids would go, "Oh, I see." You know, leaving heavy hints. And it becomes a story about Joey playing this part as well as this whole big theatre story, which is really fun to watch too. Again, offering an entrance way for a lot of different people. The very sensitive kid who's getting the overarching theme of the Shakespeare play (*laughs*) or the kid who's going, "Oh, that's so funny, there's some physical comedy here I like," or Joey's on the spot. So I just train the actors. Most of the time they get a prop or a costume piece that will help them in the pretending, and a task to do. I make really sure—I try and train them so that they can—whenever there's audience participation in my plays, I always make sure that the actors are out there, either seating the kids in the way we want them seated, or assisting the teachers, or just—there's none of this hide behind the curtain thing, and then come out and do the show. Because I want the actors to have a relationship with the kids before they even start, so that—frankly, so that a kid can go, "Oh, that guy talked to me. Yeah, I'll be quiet and listen, because I like him, he was nice to me." And while they're doing that, to notice the kids that might be leaders or that you see that are excited to be there. I mean, every once in a while, an actor will pick a child who, once they get up there, gets really shy, and so I say, "You just stop the play, you just say, 'So, do you want to go sit down? Are you not—'" you know, and a kid'll say yes, and you say, "Okay, great, and then we'll give this boy a hand, thanks for joining us, is there somebody else who would like to take this part," and then of course a hundred hands go up (*EH laughs*), and they're able to pick someone who then will just buy in, because they wanted to do it. So there's a lot of training about children and the developmental, social—sometimes, with the older kids, we'll go, "Yeah, pick that kid that you can see that is the one that everybody likes." Sometimes we pick the kids who just—we hardly ever ask the teachers who (*laughs, EH laughs*), because they don't—the teachers don't really know what we're asking for. And sometimes you get some little kid who is just—this has happened lots of times, you get some little kid who is completely quiet in class, who raises their hand up, and you can see them, the teachers will be sitting off, going, "Oh my word, I cannot believe that Maria is doing this." And those are the days where you go, "Oh, I'm glad I got up out of bed this morning, and saw that." (*laughs*)

EH: Yeah. (*laughs*)

TL: And I spend a lot of time making sure that this is for them, make sure—you will never make a joke at their expense, you will never—at the character's expense, that's different, if they've bought into it, but not at the student's expense, we want

this to be a thing that they will remember with fondness all their life, and not, "Oh, no, I can't believe I did that that time." So there's a lot of care that goes into that. And the whole idea of actors treating kids with respect—that you just are further along the line, you've just had more experience. They could be way more intelligent than you, you have no idea, they're still developing. Just coming at it that way helps a lot. And I look at that in casting. I don't cast people who tell me, "Oh, I love kids!" (*laughs*) I'm like, "Oh, seriously." You need to love people. And, so it goes to the casting also, and the type of people that we put in shows.

EH: Yeah.

TL: So they can't be divas.

EH: Yeah. Yeah, it sounds like—I mean, for all children's theatre, you need to have a generosity, and especially, I think, for this kind, it sounds like.

TL: Yeah, because you really are asking them to step up into a world that they never knew existed. These stories—they probably don't know *Taming of the Shrew*, and they probably don't know all these things. And you're asking them to take a big leap of faith, and it's very, very sweet, however, like I said—as I tell them over and over again, the actors, this is a language that they understand, this pretending thing. So they'll catch on way, way faster than grown-ups, and won't be as self-conscious. So that helps a lot. There's no way I would do *Merchant of Venice* for people over—I might do it for some college students, who are still trying out things in their lives, but grown-ups 35 and up (*laughs*) aaaahhhh! They will worry too much about the idiom of what they're in, and are they going to make fools of themselves, are they going to make mistakes, all that kind of stuff, so it really is a purview of the way we are—I can just say in the United States, because I haven't toured these—that when you're a grown-up, unless you're going to the dinner theatre where they serve drinks, (*EH laughs*) that you're not going to participate in the same way.

EH: Yeah.

TL: Or, maybe some of the new circus, because you go into it knowing—or the new vaudeville—that they're going to use audience, but—and it's why I like living with these human beings who are still trying to figure out the world, and they're just so open that you can try all these things, and actually effect (*unintelligible*) (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) Yeah.

TL: They're willing to try it.

EH: Yeah, I feel like the older you get, the more you have that fourth wall when you go to see theatre, and people are not as willing to break it.

TL: Yeah. Yeah. Although, it's interesting, when we run the shows on campus at BYU, we get tons of grown-ups—parents who bring their kids, obviously, families, but some kid fulfilling his assignment to go see a Shakespeare play, and they don't know whether it's a children's play or not, and we get people who just buy season tickets who come to the children's theatre anyway, without a child. I feel like kids—because they are still masters at adaptation and understanding systems, like when they're in their classroom, in Mr. Jones's class, this happens, and then they go across the hall and there's a whole different thing, and they're expected to be able to do that. Or that the lunch line with the one lady is different, or, when you get on the bus, it's a different system, and when you go to dad's house, it might be different than when you go to mom's house.

EH: Yeah.

TL: They are amazing about systems, if you are clear with them. So all of my shows, especially these ones with the Shakespeare, we really show them at the beginning what's going to happen here, that there's going to be multiple characters, and that there's going to be this type of language, and we're going to interact with you. We do a—for a concert, they bring in a different act that says—a different musical act that warms the audience up. We have to do it ourselves, and as soon as, then, they understand the system, then they'll relax into it. You can't just go in and just expect them to jump into this participation—if you haven't given them some sort of indication at the beginning, either explicit or implicit, about how it's going to go, so that they can read and decode what's going to happen in the play, they'll be nervous the whole time and not know. But if, as soon as you—as soon as they can grab onto the system, then they're fine. But you do have to give them an idea about what's happening. Do you get what I'm saying?

EH: Yeah, they need to have some sort of structure or something to know what's expected of them in some way, yeah? When they're going in?

TL: Yeah. What's going to happen. What—are these grown-ups going to—if the first time they see that somebody's playing the multiple characters, and it happens when they're up there, well, they're going, "What? What are you doing?" But if you've shown that in some way within the story, or it happens in the exposition, or even in the introduction of the play. Like in *Shrew*, they had had the tradition at BYU of having the actors come out and introduce themselves and their characters in the Shakespeare play. That was what they did in every play. So, to me, that's like ugghhh, that's boring. So, I did that whole beginning part with the Ringmaster introducing them—"So and so's going to be this, and so and so's going to be that." And there was a little bit of pushback, going, "I'm not sure they're going to get that." Well, the director didn't realize—he hadn't directed Shakespeare for young people before, and so he didn't get that's what that piece was for, and so I was like, "No, if we just—honestly, if you just don't speed through that, I know it's boring to you as a director, (*laughs*) but if you don't speed through that, and let the actors connect with

the audience and show who they are, and with their name, and some interaction between the other characters, so that they know what's up, then you're not going to have to come out—" Because then they wanted to have a thing still where somebody came out, and they said all their names. I was like, "No! That's what that piece is for." To help the kids understand the system, and as soon as they understand the system, you're good to go, but if you rush through that, they are going to be confused.

EH: Yeah. Well, I think the only question that I have left is, I was just curious, if any of the scripts for the shows that you've adapted are archived at Brigham Young, or if there's any way that I could possibly see an adapted script for any of these shows, because I'd love to see what was done.

TL: Did I ever send you *Merchant*?

EH: I don't believe so.

TL: Oh! Okay. Well, here's the thing, the way it's worked, not that we've talked about it that much, but, as the commission has worked—so these are still my plays, mine and Mr. Shakespeare's plays.

EH: Yes.

TL: So I can send them to you to look at.

EH: Oh, thank you. Thank you so much. That would be wonderful, I'd love to see the adaptations, and what was changed and edited and everything.

TL: Yeah. And honestly, because they're quote-unquote new work—because it's not like I workshopped them before, it would be smarter to look at the—if you were really, really interested, you probably should look at the stage manager's book.

EH: Right.

TL: But—and I don't even know—I'm not sure, I think they keep all of those at BYU, but I'm not sure.

EH: Okay.

TL: So, there are changes, but most—I'll give you the last version that I have.

EH: Okay.

TL: And I think we've got some video that you could probably get ahold of too. If you want me to check on that for you, if you're interested.

EH: Yeah, if there's any way to find out, I would love to see anything that I can of the productions. That would be wonderful.

TL: Okay. And have you seen any of the—they do little promos. So, have you seen any of those—those are on YouTube.

EH: Oh, I haven't. I didn't check YouTube, I looked on the Brigham Young website, but I didn't see a link, so I will look on YouTube for promos for those.

TL: Yeah. Not for *Shrew*, but I think there's one for *Cymbeline*, and there's one for—I don't know if there's one for *Merchant*, again, because I wasn't the director on that, but I think, you also might want to look at—we did an original adaptation of *A Wrinkle in Time*.

EH: Oh, yes, I remember you mentioned that.

TL: And there's a promo for that. I know they videotaped that whole production, but—well, you know. You already know this, it's just really hard to capture what's happening. *(laughs)*

EH: Yeah *(laughs)* Yes.

TL: Yeah. Because we were looking at one the other day *(unintelligible)*, and went, "Oh my gosh, that just looked like a big old stinking—" But I happen to know that the audience was leaning forward at that point, and really engaged, you know? *(laughs)*

EH: Yeah *(laughs)*

TL: Whereas this just was like, an actor on a ladder. *(laughs)*

EH: Yeah. Live theatre. *(laughs)* Yep.

TL: So if you're interested in any of that, I can see if I can facilitate that for you too.

EH: Yeah, anything, I would love to see. Because I've watched a couple archival videos of productions, and even though, like you said, you can't capture it, it's still great to see as much as I can, as much as possible.

TL: Yeah.

EH: Yep. So do you have any questions for me about my research or dissertation?

TL: Oh, no, I just want—of course, I have a ton of questions. *(EH laughs)* But I just really want to stay in touch with you, I think this is such—I'm so excited there's

somebody doing this, and I want to know what your research is. Where do you think—are you going to publish articles too, or what's your plan?

EH: I hope so. The next step is I'm presenting some of my research—Ohio State is having a Shakespeare and Education Festival in May.

TL: Oh, wow! Are you going to AATE?

EH: I have not been to AATE for a while, so I should know where and when it is—I know there's the one conference in Chicago this May, but I don't think that's AATE. So I don't know—where and when is it this year? Because I was there when they partnered with ATHE.

TL: You know what, that's so funny, because I'm not going, but I thought you could connect with some of my other people—because I'm not going, I don't know where it is. But I'll look it up for both of us right now.

EH: (*laughs*) Okay.

TL: Milwaukee.

EH: Milwaukee. Okay.

TL: (*laughs*) If you want to go to Milwaukee in August.

EH: I am in a show in Columbus in August, so I don't know if I'll be able to get there, but I will try to.

TL: What are you doing?

EH: I'm in a production of *The Miser*.

TL: Oh, fun!

EH: Yeah, we have an outdoor theatre company in Columbus, so I'm performing with them this summer.

TL: That sounds great. *The Miser* would be fun for children!

EH: (*laughs*) It would. I haven't seen much Moliere for children.

TL: I know, see—this is why my work's in such a—but, here's the deal, there's just all these wonderful classics that—they don't have to swallow them whole, but we can introduce them in ways that—I don't know. I was a big fan of—how old are you?

EH: 28.

TL: Okay, so did you ever watch *Wishbone* on PBS?

EH: Yes! Yes, all the time. (*laughs*)

TL: (*laughs*) Yeah, my daughter is twenty-five, and I think watching some of those were—some of them were more successful than others. But they're lovely attempts. And she was fascinated by it, she just absolutely loved it

EH: Yeah.

TL: And I think that's another place where I went, "Oh, well"—the first place I went where I thought that kids could understand the most complicated thing in the world was when we staged the story of *The Nutcracker*, not *The Nutcracker* ballet, but the story, E. E. Hoffman's story, which is a crazy, crazy thing, and they were following it just fine, and that's when I—I think that's another part of my evolution of, "Why not bring them Shakespeare?" And then I realized, if they can follow Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh, they can follow these crazy, crazy stories. You just need to make the system clear to them and then sort of play on their playground and they'll come with you.

EH: Yeah.

TL: Anyway. Okay, well, I won't keep you any longer. I'll send you an e-mail right now, with e-mail addresses of our outreach for Young Company, I'm sure they won't mind. And then I'll e-mail Elizabeth Tobias, at Theatricum Botanicum, if you want to talk more about participation.

EH: That would be wonderful. Thank you so much, and thank you for taking the time to talk with me today, I really appreciate it, and it's so, so helpful.

TL: Oh, well, my pleasure. Okay!

EH: All right! Thank you so much, and I will be in touch again soon. Bye.

TL: Bye.

Maggie Lou Rader 2015
Interview with the author via phone
20 May

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): So my first question about Project38, is when teaching artists and teachers started this work, did they start off with ensemble building or intro to theatre exercises, or ground rules—just, can you tell me a little bit about how they started doing this kind of performance work, since it's not something that students generally do in a usual classroom setting.

Maggie Lou Rader (MLR): So students with—just with PROJECT38 in general?

EH: Yeah, with PROJECT38—because I know a lot of the programs that do performance-based work or on-your-feet work in a classroom will sometimes start with some ensemble-building stuff, just because being on your feet in that way can be so new for students, and such a different way of working.

MLR: Sure. And something that I always tell the teachers that go out for me, is the more we can get kids out from behind a desk, the more different senses are locked into doing the work than just sight, and you know, if everyone looks stupid, everyone's kind of okay, and that's a big part of it as well. Anything you want me to be more specific about?

EH: I guess, maybe just going along that, did any of the teaching artists ever encounter resistance to getting up and getting out behind their desks, and if so, how did they work with those students to work past that?

MLR: Sure, sure. I think generally, in every class, there's a certain level of resistance, and the good thing that we've had with PROJECT38 that I know CSC has not had in the past, is that a lot of times when we go into a classroom, it's a one-off thing, you know, we spend one hour with this classroom ever, just going through some speech and text workshops that we have, and then we're done. And the great thing about PROJECT38 that was new to our company was getting to work with the same kids all year long, and I think that was a huge part of it, just developing a trust and a relationship, and I know the teachers—I mean, obviously the teachers that are most successful getting kids behind a project are the ones that are the most passionate about it, so if the teacher's willing to get up, and look silly and look goofy, then, I—you know, as an adult, it's—I see someone willing to go out there and go far, it makes me much more comfortable doing the same, and it's human nature, and I think that's what we experienced most of the time. Giving our teachers the confidence to go for it and go too far, and to be big and brave, and give their students the same freedom and responsibility.

EH: Yeah. So I know you mentioned on Saturday a little bit that the amount of time that each teaching artist spent in schools varied, just depending on what support the

school needed, and that kind of thing. But in general, about how many times did the teaching artists go in, or what was the range in terms of amount of time that the teaching artists spent with the students and with the classes they were working with.

MLR: Sure. The vast majority was between 3 and maybe 6 or 7 visits. The visits started—and next year we're doing this a little bit differently, but this year, the schools got their play in late August, and they didn't get a teaching artist until early October, so we really didn't have any visits until November. Next year's a little different, I'm actually working on their play-to-school assignments this week, I have most of them done, but I'm still waiting to hear back on a few things from a few schools. So from November to April, between 3 and 6 or 7, and the other thing was that the teaching artists were available in a multitude of ways too. Like the school that had *King John* was really far away, and the teacher wanted more help—you know, I feel comfortable teaching Shakespeare, she just needed help cutting her script, for the most part. So I know Jeremy, her artist, spent a lot of time cutting the script down, and was kind of available as, almost like a cheerleader for the teacher, through e-mail and phone calls and whatever she needed. And she felt comfortable in a classroom with them, but she wanted Jeremy more—I don't want to make her sound selfish, she wanted more support for her, and to give her a new tool for her toolbox, rather than bringing Jeremy in, and that's how that one worked. 99% of the schools brought the teaching artist in and they spent time in the classroom. But they usually had between four and ten hours in the classroom—you know, a few schools that have little to no theatrical support, we gave them a little more time, and the schools that have all the amenities in the world, some of them just needed a little less.

EH: Right. So, were the schools—I just wanted to make sure that I caught this right—were the schools assigned the play that they were doing, back in August?

MLR: Yes.

EH: Okay.

MLR: They filled out a questionnaire, that was actually made up before I got the job, so it wasn't—the play-to-school matching assignments this last year was very difficult, because the person that made it didn't know a whole lot about Shakespeare, so they just wrote all the plays and said, "Pick the ones you're interested in." Of course, everyone wanted *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet*, and *Othello* and *Lear* and *Mac*, and no one wanted anything else. So this year was a little tough, but this year I made the application online and we broke the plays up into four categories, you know, "Popular comedies," "Histories," "Popular tragedies," and "Are you serious, Shakespeare wrote that?" (*EH laughs, MR laughs*) And so this year, I'm—I think I actually had two more schools sign up today really, really late, so I think it's possible that every school is going to get a play that they selected, because

they had to select at least one play from every category.

EH: Oh, nice.

MLR: Yeah, and so I think everyone is going to get one of the plays they selected, which is a huge win, as I'm seeing it.

EH: Yeah. That's great. So as I mentioned to you in my e-mail, and on Saturday, so the thing that I'm looking at really specifically are plays with particularly challenging themes. So for the schools in PROJECT38 this year that were working with plays like *Taming of the Shrew* or *Merchant of Venice* or *Othello*, how did teachers and teaching artists, handle that material and go about working with students with those plays?

MLR: In a wide variety of ways (*EH laughs*). We actually had two schools working on *Othello* this year. One did a full production and one did a visual arts project. And—I guess I'll start with *Othello* first—and the full production was very successful and beautiful, and they didn't use their teaching artist very much, because it's one of the best theatre programs in the state, and they were very capable of handling *Othello*, and it was a lovely production of beautiful poetry, not to undermine it at all, but—it was a lovely production of beautiful poetry. The school that did the visual arts project was Lakota East freshmen, and the school itself is a fairly well-off school in kind, but the students that were working with PROJECT38 were an alternative ed class, and a lot of the kids are—a big percent of non or reluctant readers in the class. And so when she initially wanted to do PROJECT38, we talked about, what are some plays that have some scenes that these kids, can really get behind because they're not going to be sitting and reading it—what's a play with some scenes that they can just grab, hearing what the story's about. And when we decided to work on *Othello*, and because a lot of the kids are not proficient readers, Darnell—a guy called Darnell was their teaching artist, and I know that they watched the movie in class once, to get the basic story, but their time with Darnell was spent doing character workshops. They did a lot of movement work, because they kind of had a general idea of the characters, and he did a lot of space walk—going through a day in the life of Emilia, and Iago, and Othello, and he took the boys through the girls' arcs, and he took the girls through the boys' arc, and so the class wasn't divided in two. So they did a lot of movement-based character exploration. Just how these people feel, living in Venice, how they feel now that they're in Cypress, how does that change who these people are in the world, who would—and they talked about who would Othello be—or, who is Othello in the army, who would he be if he wasn't in the army, how would that change him as a person, how would that change how people look at him in this society. And each student picked the character that they identified with the most, and they made a mask based on that character. Some of them looked like animals, some of them didn't even look like people, some of them just like cut half of the face away. It was one of my favorite projects of the entire Festival. I don't know if you got a chance to see them in the art gallery downstairs in

Memorial Hall.

EH: Yes, yeah, I remember seeing them, when we were there. They were great.

MLR: They were so great. Oh, I was so happy with the way they turned out, and I was thrilled that a lot of the guys—and the male students picked Emilia, and a lot of the female students picked Iago. They didn't stick with their genders, which I thought was just wonderful. And the kids came and did kind of a visual art presentation, if they wanted to talk about their experience, they could. It was, one of my favorite days of the Festival. So many of the kids talked about, you know, "I was actually really mad when we found out we were going to have to do Shakespeare, because I don't like reading, and it makes me uncomfortable, and especially reading something that I thought was going to be as hard as it was, and it wasn't," and they talked about how that was their favorite part of the year.

EH: That's great.

MLR: And kids talked about how they bought into the story, because they saw how these people treated Othello, and he's a good guy, and they don't understand why they treated him that way, and it was so cool to see him in the position that he was, even though he's treated that way in Venice. And it was so great! I mean, they just got it, exactly how horrible does that feel. And they just totally got into it, and a lot of the kids got into the issue of race, because so many of the girls talked about Emilia and—how lost Desdemona must have felt in this man's world, and post-wartime in Cypress, and just stuck in this masculine den and how awful that must have been for her. And so they talked about much more than the issues of race. And I think it was such a great play for them to work on. It turned out really great. And I think they're going to work on *Mac* next year, from the looks of it, which will be a lot of fun.

EH: Cool.

MLR: *Taming of the Shrew*—I will say this, because I was working on all of this last night—I was shocked that, on the application for this year, 80% of the schools want *The Taming of the Shrew*, and that—I know a lot of that's because a lot of them probably came to see us do it on our mainstage last year and liked the production, but I was shocked that 80% of the schools wanted *Taming of the Shrew*, and I was just very, very, very surprised. But the school that had *The Taming of the Shrew* this year, it was—and they also worked with Darnell—it was a school called Butler Tech School for the Arts, and it's a group that—they're not necessarily high school students. A lot of them are home school kids, or kids who go to a different school that don't have arts programs, or some of the people that were in that school are even up to the age of 20, but they just want more arts opportunities, and they're not getting them in their lives. So Butler Tech did *The Taming of the Shrew*, and they worked with Darnell, and these kids—they're so talented, so many of them are dancers and actors and they have costumers in the group, a very multi-faceted, very

talented group of kids. And they wanted to showcase all of that, so they decided to do a live silent film of *The Taming of the Shrew*. And all the characters dressed in grays, black and white, gray tones, except for Kate and Petruchio, and they dressed in color. And they told the entire story through mime—you know, like in the style of silent film, and they had projections on the back with some excerpts of the Shakespearean text, to kind of –like, when Petruchio enters, "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua!" (*EH laughs*) And then they keep acting the regular story until they show some more text. But they did such a great job. It was one of the best, one of the better, more original performances in the Festival. And I think they very much bought into the idea that there's the Induction, so—I mean, *The Taming of the Shrew* is a play within a play, so let's think about—let's look at different styles of theatre, and (*unintelligible*) just because it *is* a play within a play, and there is a level of detachment, and that was a part of their discussions, as well. But they did this really great thing, when they got to Kate's speech in the end, the projections went away, and Kate started the speech, and the cast joined in and it became an ensemble choral telling of Kate's final speech, and they changed the pronouns—instead of saying "a wife," you know, "to her husband," this is what a wife should do for her husband, they kind of kept—this is what a partner should do for their partner, this is how people love each other, this is how people treat people well, and they kind of took the gender out of it in the end. So the entire project was very big and stylized, and then it all rounded off with everyone gaining their voice, because everyone except for the two of them had been silent for the entire project, so Kate and Petruchio handed off their voices, and everyone finished the story together on a much more naturalistic—on a naturalistic and human level, to say that this is a story to tell how we should be kind to one another, because all of this could have been avoided if people were just kind, and it was very lovely. They did a really great job of telling the statement they wanted to tell. (*Laughs, EH laughs*) But, it was very sweet. And *Merchant of Venice*. *Merchant of Venice* had—it was a really neat project too, they did—it was like news coverage of the trial of Antonia. It was an all girls Catholic school, and they really wanted to do *Merchant of Venice*. They had a big—that particular class is led by a teacher who loves Shakespeare and wasn't afraid to tackle more—a play that deals with some really tough issues, and he was really brave in wanting to take it on and really being fearless in taking it on. They had a whole segment this year about studying the Holocaust, and they thought working on *The Merchant of Venice* would be a lovely pairing with that unit of their study this year. And I think it was—the teacher said, "You know, our final project may not look as great as a lot of others, but it has spurred the most wonderful conversations with this class all year long." And that's great. PROJECT38 is a culmination of work that's been happening all year long, and we're just seeing the tip of the iceberg, so that is the point, and we've been so happy to hear about it. And their project turned out great, they had a girl playing Shylock, and a girl playing Antonia, and a boy playing Bassanio, that they were in a relationship, and Bassanio came back to help her whenever she was on trial. But it was really interesting seeing an all-female Catholic school work on that play, and I know so much of their discussion was about Christian—not to say Christian tyranny, but how Christians have abused the

teachings, and abused their power and status in various places in the world, and just talking about, "Well, okay, from Shylock's point of view, where is the story? From the Christian point of view, where does the story lie," and it was really cool that they put it to a news conference. And they showed both sides of the story, and they had this breaking news thing at the very end, saying that Shylock had killed herself and they were talking about the ramifications of that. And it was a lovely take on the issues in that play. The ideas were so great and the script that they put together was so wonderful. And we can tell that they weren't afraid of the issues in that play, and they talked about it, and they wanted to present both sides, and present them accurately as well, and talk about—the Christians aren't the good guys in the story, and why is that, and what they have done, and what could they do differently, and what have we as Christians done poorly, and what could we as Christians do differently, because this was obviously not fair. So, yeah, they did a great job with that one.

EH: Yeah. That sounds really interesting, and really cool that he wanted to do that play, and that it led to such a deep and thoughtful discussion of those themes. That's really cool.

MLR: Yeah.

EH: So I know you mentioned on Saturday, just kind of going on that same topic, that you really encouraged the teaching artists to jump into those difficult conversations, but I'm wondering, similar to what Robin had brought up in that panel discussion, and what I've thought about sometimes, is, were any of your teaching artists nervous about starting those difficult discussions, and if so, how did you keep encouraging them to just jump into those discussions?

MLR: Sure. I know, especially this year being in its first year, our teaching artists—our teaching artists are so spoiled. In the past we've always worked with schools that can afford to bring us in, which are usually model students, have no problems. The kids that come work with us in our Groundlings, our acting classes are just top notch, 100% of the time. One of them always wins the Ohio ESU competition, they work so hard and they're so talented, and a lot of the training of this year was saying, "These kids—90% of the kids you're going to be working with aren't Groundlings. You're going to be going into schools that may not have a theatre program. You're going to be going into schools that they haven't read the plays because some of them don't read. They can't—that can't read. You're going to be going into schools that maybe can't afford to buy the script, so they haven't read it." And just really taking our teaching artists back a few steps. Or preparing them to go back a few steps to explain what we don't think needs to be explained. And so it was one of the biggest things I wanted to stress with the teachers this year was just the fact that every one of these schools is unique, there are no wrong questions, be prepared for anything, deconstruct, deconstruct, deconstruct, go back if need be. And I know a lot of my teachers were nervous about the kids that they would have,

much less issues, and it was a lot of support throughout the year. I had everyone fill out a report every month, regardless if they went to the school that month or not. I just wanted to know if you'd been talking with the teacher, what kind of issues are they having, if you did go into the classroom, tell me exactly what happened, how did you feel, how did they seem to feel, let me know. And I did the same for the teachers in the classroom as well, that they had to fill out a report every month to tell me how they were doing with the kids, what issues have come up, how was your time with the teaching artist, did you have them in class, things like that. And it was a lot of one on one coaching. We have a tour of six people, that they do all the mainstage shows, and they go out and they do touring productions of a few plays, and they do the majority of our teaching in schools, unrelated to PROJECT38, but they also do PROJECT38 schools too, and a lot of them, this year was their first opportunity teaching. We had a kid named Andrew—he's not a kid, he's a grown man (*EH laughs*). We have a guy named Andrew, and he'd never taught before, ever, and he was working at—one of our really inner city schools is a school called Aiken, and I put one of our best teaching artists, her name's Miranda, she's the best teacher I've ever seen, but I knew that this was a rougher school, so I basically wanted to give her an extra body, in case she needed an extra set of hands or an extra voice in the room, and so that school had two teaching artists, and I thought it would be great for Andrew, because he could watch one of the best teachers I've ever seen work. So they went four times together to Aiken, and Miranda went a few times on her own, because Andrew was busy, and I had Miranda fill a report out, and I had Andrew fill a report out, and Miranda told me that Andrew, the first time they went, was scared to even be in the room with these kids, just because he grew up in a very rich town with a very rich family, and he had no idea what to expect. And the second time he was really comfortable, and he even started, kind of telling Miranda—like Miranda would ask him stuff like, "Well, what do you think, Andrew? What did you think, Andrew?" And he'd tell her what he thought. And the third time, he would give notes to Miranda to give them, and she's like, "No, don't—give them your notes! Give them the notes, tell them!" And I saw their last time together, because I went to check in with them—they were performing at our main Gala event, and Andrew took over, I mean, Miranda had to go in and out of the meeting, and he took over working with them, and giving them direction and giving them notes, and it was—I saw Andrew blossom as a teacher, and it was just wonderful. I was so proud of him. But it was a lot of things like that, one on one, Miranda telling me that, okay, Andrew's still having this problem, I'd say, "Okay, well, let's just make sure that his voice is heard at least 5 times, next time you guys go, to the entire group." And it was a lot of that with talking about issues, because we did go to different levels of schools—we went to very conservative Christian schools, and we went to Butler Tech—before every show, they put all their hands in a circle, put them down, and they all say, "Fuck, yeah" (*EH laughs*) before their shows. And so it's like we're going from Cincinnati Christian schools to, "Fuck yeah". (*laughs*) And everything in between. So there was a lot of gauging from the teachers too, it's like, "Okay, how comfortable are they," but I always wanted to push them on the side of, ask the questions, pose the questions, and see how their response is. See to what level they

want to respond. Pose the question for the discussion, and see how far they go, and I think you'll be able to gauge pretty quickly how PG or PG-13, or R-rated you can be with every group. Because we never want to offend, but we do want to talk about the play. And so it was a lot of saying, "Pose the questions, see where they go, and if you get the idea, take them as far as they are willing to go, and see where they end up." So it was a lot of individual coaching in that way.

EH: Cool. All right, so I have a couple specific questions also about those three plays that we talked about. For *Taming of the Shrew*, how did they decide on doing a silent film style performance? (*MR laughs*) Because it's just—it sounds so cool, but it's not the first thing that would pop into my head, so how did they come up with that? (*laughs, MR laughs*)

MLR: That was Darnell's idea. He had a phone conversation before he ever went in the classroom with their teacher Coleen, and she put him on speaker phone to the whole class, and it was just basically a brainstorming session, so, "Great, what are your skills, what are your talents, what are your passions?" And they went, "Dance, costumes, acting, singing, everything." And so Darnell took a few days and thought of a few different approaches to handling—what could this project be? Because their teacher, Coleen, who's a wonderful teacher, she's always handled the technical side of theatre, she isn't one of the performance teachers, so she relied heavily on Darnell—which was great—to handle putting it together as a piece of theatre. And so Darnell came up with all these different ideas of how they could handle *The Taming of the Shrew*, and he said, "I got the idea to do the live silent film, just because we could incorporate so many different things in it," but he said, "I put it at the bottom of the list, because I have no idea how to direct it or handle it." (*EH laughs, MR laughs*). He called the class back the next week, and read off his list of ideas, and the class just went nuts at the idea of doing a silent film. He was like, "Oh, God...oh no..." So he was really intimidated, he really regretted doing it for a while, but it turned out really great. So it was Darnell's brainchild trying to take all their ideas and put them into one piece of performance theatre. (*EH laughs, MR laughs*)

EH: That's cool. You mentioned on Saturday, I think, that commedia was part of that silent film presentation?

MLR: It was! You know, it's in—there is a line in *Taming of the Shrew*, Lucentio calls Baptista—oh, what is that commedia character's name—a Pantaloon?

EH: Mm hmm. Yes.

MLR: Yeah, and there's a direct line, because it is a play within a play—the stock characters are just there, and, you know, Darnell was trying to think of a way to work on the storytelling without words, and he thought, "Oh, that's the perfect—let's work on some commedia stuff." And so one of the times he went to work with them, they spent time working on these commedia stock characters and getting to

know them. And there's very detailed—you know, I'm sure you know, very detailed, specific descriptions of how all of those characters walk and move and think and act, and they're all in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and it was a wonderful way to get the kids to be big in their physicalities. And it's cartoons, you know, they're characters we still identify with. We see someone coming in clutching their purse, and they're hunched over, and older, we think, "Okay, great," we know exactly who this person is, just by how he's walking. And so they did a whole day working on the commedia stock characters. And you could tell, in their performance, you could totally tell. They really committed to the exaggerated physicality of everything while still being honest to the characters, not cheapening them, but making the storytelling physically big, and it was very successful.

EH: That's really cool. I've heard about a lot of productions of *Shrew* that use those commedia elements, so I was just really interested as to how those kind of worked in. So did they keep the Induction in the silent film telling?

MLR: They didn't. It was part of their classroom discussion as to, you know, if this is highly theatrical, that's okay, because when you are doing *The Taming of the Shrew* with the Induction, there's a level of theatricality going, moving from the Induction to the play within the play, and it was part of classroom discussion—that high theatricality being okay. And being part of the world and not necessarily part of the silent film treatment of the *Shrew*, but part of *The Taming of the Shrew*, that it is one of the more theatrical pieces of theatre, probably, that Shakespeare wrote. And that being okay. But, no, they didn't do the Induction. It was only about 30 minutes long, if that, may have even been 25.

EH: Okay. Cool. So they ended pretty much with Kate's final speech.

MLR: Yes.

EH: Okay. Got it. So for *Othello*, shifting over to that performance, I know you mentioned that they had a lot of different themes that they really talked about, and I'm interested just because I had talked to Chicago Shakespeare Theater, and in their production of, of *Othello* that they did with students, I know they mentioned that race was not necessarily the theme that students connected with most, and it was much more the themes of jealousy and betrayal, so I was just wondering, in terms of the Lakota West and Lakota East work on *Othello*, did you notice—did they connect more with race, less with race, more with other themes, I guess, what did you notice in terms of those connections, for them?

MLR: Right. Lakota West—they did the whole show—absolutely race was, because—I mean, I guess it isn't really because of, but the African American community in that school is so small, that I wish the discussion would have been more on race with them, because they—the kid that played *Othello*, and they actually had an African American Emilia as well, but they feel so comfortable in their

skin in this world. It's a very well off school that even—that the kids that are of color, it's not something they struggle with, or they feel excluded because of. It's just not really—to those kids, as we were working with them, it quickly became apparent, "Oh, this isn't really an obstacle here, is it. Okay, we are all very liberal-minded, free, loving people—okay, this isn't really a thing for this—it has been so much a part of their lives, dealing with—" And they latched on to the jealousy and the sexism, they went on and on about, "Can you imagine, being Desdemona and Emilia in this world? That would suck!" And (*MR laughs, EH laughs*) those are the issues that they really latched on to. The Lakota East kids, it was a little different story. A lot of the kids latched on to the issues of race, but I was surprised that—it was pretty across the board with the Lakota East kids, when it came to race and misogyny, and jealousy and betrayal. It was kind of all over the board, with so many issues for that play. One of the girls talked about the, "But I do think it is their husband's fault if wives do fall" speech, talking about the women in her family, and that she'd seen that happen, that good women in her family have terrible lives now, because of the men that they've associated with. And this is just me, I'm currently reading *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, the woman that worked in the woman's prison in the mid-80s. And it's—I mean, so many women are in prison because of who they chose—they just chose to love the wrong man. I mean, didn't choose, but they loved the wrong man. And Lakota East talked about that, and they'd seen that in their families. And suddenly, the boys talked about—a lot of the boys talked about betrayal, and that they can understand how Othello—it was great, that they could understand how Othello got to where he does by the end of the play, but they could identify with him in the beginning, and they were alarmed at how long they identified with Othello's choices and actions. And that's something that they've experienced—it was great, hearing those kids talk about *Othello*, because it wasn't just about race. It was all across the board.

EH: Yeah. Yeah, and that's really cool and interesting to hear about them not only connecting with those themes, but connecting really personally with those themes. And you talked about that a little bit for *Merchant of Venice* as well, how they were talking about their own connection to either the Christian story or the Jewish story, for *Merchant of Venice*. Do you know, for *Shrew*, did they have those same kinds of personal connections with the play and those themes?

MLR: I talked to Darnell a lot about—he's also a very good friend of mine, and he's actually working in Kentucky with me right now too—and he talked a lot about how the girl that played Kate, who's a beautiful young woman she—you can look at her and tell she developed very early, and she's got a very full figure, and, you know, she's not short. She walks into a room, and you see her, everyone sees her when she walks into a room. And Darnell talked about how, when they had a day where—after they had been cast, and they had been working on it for a while, he told them to bring in clothes that made them feel like their character. And he was shocked, he said, she brought in this low-cut shirt, and a corset, and this big, almost Victorian looking skirt with all those bustles in the back, and she walked in, and was so

uncomfortable in her own skin wearing those clothes, and Darnell said, "I think you chose the right clothes,"—and she is comfortable with who she is—and he says, "You aren't wearing those clothes. Wear those clothes." And he said it was fun to see this girl embrace—embrace her sexiness and her sensuality, and being okay with that. She has been a fully developed girl in a world full of men that have beaten her down for it, and he said it was so great to see her enter that, you know—"Kate, for that is your name, I hear"—with all the confidence in the world, and it was—he said it was difficult to get those women—they talked a lot about Kate, and how comfortable she was in her own skin, and how much they, the kids, were not for a while, and they talked about it a lot, how Kate is a woman in a world run by men, and how does she handle that, how does she live in that. And it was a lot of just taking charge of your own body, taking charge of your own person, but they—he said it was just great to see her wear those clothes finally.

EH: That's great.

MLR: Yeah.

EH: That's really great. So you've mentioned a little bit about this, but just generally, what kind of responses have you received from students and teachers who were involved in those three specifically, or just in PROJECT38 in general, which I realize is kind of a big question, (*laughs*), but just, generally, what kind of response have you received about their experience, and how it's affected their classes, their work?

MLR: It'll be interesting doing this for a second year to see if maybe those select plays just had a very special group working on them, but the schools that had those particular plays, I have a much more involved relationship with them, just because they asked me more questions and I feel like I know those schools better, than the school that did *Midsummer*. They were fine, you know, nothing really came up, they worked on "Pyramus and Thisbe," and had a good time, and it was cute, and it was great. But the schools that worked on those particular plays seemed to get a lot more out of it. And I hope that's the same for this next year. I'm not quite sure, but looking back at them, they weren't the—they were a unique group, but not necessarily—I mean, Lakota West has this lovely theatre program, and I know that Lakota East kids were kind of a unique case and Butler's a unique case, but Mother of Mercy that worked on *Merchant of Venice*, they're not. We have lots of schools like them, but those schools seemed to have a more memorable experience than most, I would say.

EH: Cool. Were there other plays that sort of did the same—that were also challenging and had that—and ended up with schools having a more memorable experience, just because plays like *Measure for Measure*, or *Cymbeline* come to mind as also very challenging, and I don't know if you had a similar reaction to the schools that worked with those plays.

MLR: Yeah, the school that Miranda and Andrew went into, Aiken, that worked on *Macbeth*, they had one of the most—they were one of the most memorable groups that we had, because—well, the kid that ended up playing Mac—theirs was only about 15 minutes, and it was in music class. They told *Macbeth* through modern music, so when Lady Mac was washing her hands, they all sang that "Take me to church"—that's all I know of that song, and there's a song about being a warrior that they sang at the very—and they kind of act through the show, in big stylistic movements, while singing these songs, and the kid that played Mac, a kid named Nathan—and last year, we basically had 38 kids from 38 different schools, we used Shakespeare lines, and we put together this 10 minute performance that we worked on for three hours. And Nathan was the kid from Aiken that worked on it last year, and the principal came up to us, or told me at the beginning of the year, she said, "I sent Nathan because he was doing really poorly in school, and we knew he was a good kid, but he was going down a really bad path, and we just didn't know—he needed something good. He needed a win." So they sent him to PROJECT38. And Miranda said that every time they went, those kids just looked to Nathan like he'd hung the moon. Nathan would say—he would tell them all about when he went last year—"Oh, well, when we did—after we performed, we got to go downstairs, and we had good food," and he told them about the food that he ate at this party, and was just so proud of his experience. And Miranda said—and their teacher's wonderful, they have an incredible teacher named Kara, but she said Nathan led that group, and he made this cool from day 1. His enthusiasm and passion made this cool for everyone else, from the first moment that they started working on it. And the principal told me this year, she said, "That kid would have dropped out of school if he hadn't had this." He wore his PROJECT38 t-shirt every single time that Miranda and Andrew came, and the night of our big Revel event, which is the big fundraiser after PROJECT38 was over, we selected one group to perform, and we selected Aiken. And they were just so proud, and it was just life-changing. These are kids that had never really been outside downtown Cincinnati, and they still weren't, but they went to a black tie gala and were treated like movie stars, and as—well, as I wish they all could have been, because they were, and they were just so excited to sing and dance and act at the same time, and they have no idea how talented they are, and I think for one night they got to see people appreciate how talented they were. And their teacher said, "They're not the best singers, they're not the best dancers, they're not the best actors, but they worked so hard," and they spent a year working on this story, and they just fell in love with it, and their passion carried them through, and it was—that was a really special group too.

EH: Yeah. That's great.

MLR: Yeah.

EH: Well, those are all my questions. Thank you so much. Bye.

MLR: Bye.

Michael Rohd 2015

Personal interview with the author at Northwestern University
19 Feb.

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): So, because I'm looking at specifically already scripted productions, mostly, I was looking at Sojourn's production of *The Visit*, and I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about the process that you and the company went through to adapt that script, to address the core question that you developed, with the community.

Michael Rohd (MR): Yeah. So I would say that project—we have this history of adaptations amidst our larger body of work which is more fully original devised work that engages community. The adaptations, especially the early ones, which would include *Rhinoceros*, *Tartuffe*, and *The Visit*, did not have a lot of community engagement in them. *The Visit*, for instance, was really developed through—the company identified the core question we were interested in, and then we really approached the adaptation as an exercise in how we wanted to bring the story into the contemporary world, in a way, rather than working with community participants on it. So I'd have to say, in terms of all of our work, that show is probably one of two that we have done the least community-based work on. And that was exciting and satisfying, because that's one of the ways we like to work, is a studio-based company, occasionally, because that's not frequently the way we work. That show, the research was us going out into the world, honestly, and testing a variety of ethical dilemmas, in sort of invisible theatre kind of ways. We did a lot of work on the public bus system in Portland, exploring different moments that might occur that would get people to say something, or acknowledge them, or not. We did work in stores, in public cafes, again, kind of invisible work, where we would kind of make something happen to sort of observe what the social and individual response would be around it. We interviewed some people. I think one of the things we explored in that show was—you probably know the play, right?

EH: Mm hmm.

MR: —was Claire's sense of her fate in relation to her gender, and how women were treated in the village and in her time and in her era, and so we did some work around analogous narrative circumstances and how they related to women today, and there's a monologue in the adaptation that I wrote out of some of that research that was the character of Claire at the beginning of Act Two, basically having this long monologue, just to the audience, where she talked about how women are supposed to be silent and not visible, and that she had developed a life for herself where people had to see her, she had to be seen and reckoned with, and that that was partly out of the experience of being so non-reckoned with, and people just assuming that it was her lot in life to deal with whatever life threw her way, quietly and passively. And she also, in that monologue, we got a little bit into the veil, in Islamic culture, and if you sort of look at the Quran and you look at different

writings about where the veil and the woman being not seen comes from, it is of course, so temptation is not present for the man. And to allow the man to—and this is not just in Islamic culture—I mean, in Judaism, genders are separated in synagogues and some of it has to do with a belief that one gender is smarter than the other, some of it in different cultures has to do with a belief that the intermingling just isn't useful, but some of it has to do with temptation and keeping distraction away from the man in pursuit of his religious piety and study. And so part of her monologue was talking about how she was made to feel that what happened to her when she was young, her rape, her pregnancy, the illegitimate child, the way she was treated, was because she was somehow asking for it, that whole kind of conversation. And so in this monologue she explored how—she talked about how historically and in contemporary culture, women are asked to be invisible so as not to be in the way or make waves, and that again, that she had risen to a place in society where nobody could ask her not to make waves, and she could do whatever she wanted. So that was maybe one place that sort of the world and some research came into effect, but again the show really got developed mostly by the company, through research we did around the community, but more invisible performance research than interviews, and then a sort of generative process in the rehearsal space that I wrote out of.

EH: So, in thinking about the other—you mentioned *Tartuffe* and *Rhinoceros*—did one of those two involve more community engagement?

MR: I—those three projects are the ones that involved the least. *Good*, our adaptation of Brecht's *Good Person of Szechwan*, did involve a bunch, because at that point, that was in 2007, we'd already moved—when we started as a company in 1999, we made fully original devised work that dealt with, sort of, social issues and attempted to engage communities in different ways, and we made these adaptations. And then all the work, the threads started coming together, till by 2007, 2008, all of our work was sort of of a piece, even though every piece feels and looks different, there were certain elements in research and generation that involved an engaged community that began to be consistent. So for *Good*, we—*Good Person of Szechwan*, which, our adaptation was called *Good*, and was an adaptation not of the Brecht play, but of the Chinese folk tale that the Brecht play was based on, we did a lot of work with business leaders, we did work with folks in unions, working class folks, folks with day jobs, learning about the core question of that project, which was, "What is the morality of profit, in a world where some have more and some have less?" And so we tackled that from lots of angles, we would do these public events. There was one event where we interviewed a muckity-muck from Nike alongside somebody with a human rights organization, and that was when that was a particularly hot public issue, sort of having conversations about that.

EH: So, when you're thinking about audience engagement, because I know I've looked at some of the work that Sojourn does, and it seems like there's a lot of different ways, that audience is engaged, between *Built*, and then other—that's the

one that I've looked at the most, because there's a video clip—

MR: Yeah. Yeah.

EH: How do you, as a company, or as a company working with the community, figure out the most effective way to engage the audience, or what does that process look like?

MR: It is process, but some steps we take are we think about what are our values, what are our intentions, and what are our goals. And then, if we're working with partners, what are their values, intentions, and goals, or if we're not in service to partners, but working towards an audience experience, what is our intention in terms of the experience an audience has, and what does the event need from the audience to be a successful event. So, *Built* needs participation, and it needs candid participation, passionate participation, to be a dynamic event. So, the engagement both in the development of the piece and then in the show itself through participation needs to be designed and executed in a way that makes for dynamic, candid, passionate participation, so the strategies come out of what does the show need, what are we trying to do, what are partners trying to do. And then in process, figuring out what the strategies are.

EH: So, if someone were to approach you, and say that they were a company wanting to undertake some sort of adaptation process looking at a challenging issue with a scripted play, in partnership with a community, what sort of advice or suggestions would you give them to undergo that process?

MR: Well, I would say, are you wanting to do that for an audience made up of that partner's people, constituents, or do you want to actually work with the partner to figure out what the issues are. So, I would ask, "Are you collaborating on the front end? Or are you interested in making something and then hoping they'll bring people to your event?" And the response to that would really dictate the next steps. If you're wanting to really partner with and collaborate with, then I think you have to find a way to put that play, that script, that story into a space where you and that partner are gathered, in some kind of context, where together, you experience—you read it aloud, you do whatever you do, and then you think about, "How does this speak to us? What questions are in this that might be useful in your community, in our community? What are we drawn to as artists, what are you drawn to as 'blank blank,' whatever it is bringing you here," and then sort of figuring out, again, like, "Okay, so we're all interested in this question that we have found together. How do we investigate that with people in your world, on the way to making the show, so that our investigation with the people in your world can help us figure out what the show is going to be." Or, if you say, "Well, the partner's just to help us get an audience that's interested in the topic," okay, then you maybe do some research, some interviews with them, and then you're going into the studio, and sort of figuring out your adaptation process. I would say, be really clear on what your

intentions are and what you want out of a partnership, to begin with.

EH: When you have done the partnerships with Sojourn, because I know I've read some of what you've written about the mono—I don't know if I'm going to say it right—monological—versus dialogical.

MR: Yeah.

EH: How has that collaboration—when it's been a partnership where the artist's tools are really meeting the needs of the community—how has that partnership started, or how has that, sort of, especially beginning process?

MR: Well, I would say that the adaptation work we do does not exist in that model so much. For me. The civic practice work, the dialogical work, is really about—we have made shows that were partly created in response to what we've discovered about partner needs. But I don't think we've had an adaptation in that context. But we've made shows—and we've also just made theatre practice, like, projects. I think of *Islands of*—have you looked at the *Islands of Milwaukee* stuff online?

EH: I haven't looked at that. I will.

MR: Google *Islands of Milwaukee*, and then look at some of the videos and the information in there, and there's some useful links, some interesting stuff, I think.

EH: Okay.

MR: Monological and dialogical, for me, has to do with whether artists and/or an institution see themselves as deliverers of product or partners in exchange, and that can be around how we think about our season or an individual show, but then civic practice, which falls within the dialogical framework, civic practice is more project-based rather than show-based. So civic practice might be, "Oh, I'm working with Chicago parks and they're struggling with getting participants in their community to have meaningful conversations about what a cultural center should be in their neighborhood." So we bring some theatre tools into making a space for that, and helping them plan and deliver that. That's a civic practice project. Or, there's a school, and the faculty is really struggling with behavioral issues with students, and we're going to help create a series of workshops for the teachers to deal with that thing they're dealing with. Or Working Women's History Project is a not-for-profit that tries to move stories of working poor women into the forefront of public discourse to make policy more favorable towards poor working women. They're having trouble moving what they learn through research into the world, so we're going to help them develop a performance piece and help them find HR directors and policy-makers and ways to get that piece into spaces with those folks. So those are all civic practice projects as opposed to a show that we start out to make, and work with partners to develop it, and have dialogue as a part of the process, but

we're doing it because we have this idea for a thing that we want to build, as opposed to the idea for the thing comes out of the relationship.

EH: Okay, and that would be more a civic practice project.

MR: That would be a civic practice.

EH: Okay.

MR: Yeah.

EH: So, in thinking about the civic practice projects, because I know I read about some of the Hope is Vital work. Would doing the work like that be something that might be part of that?

MR: Well, that's an interesting question. So that's back from the '90s, right? So I certainly didn't have any language around it, then. Is Hope is Vital a civic practice project? I mean, yeah, in that Hope is Vital would get invited into a community and then there was this structure, this process, these tools I had that I had developed, and then someone would say, "The issue we want to deal with here is—and we want to do this," so I would say Hope is Vital lived in a civic practice paradigm, but it was also mostly aimed at young people. So it had a lot to do with educational—well, it wasn't educational theatre, but it lived a lot in young person contexts, which civic practice can—yeah, Hope is Vital was certainly closer to civic practice than much of Sojourn's work. The Center for Performance and Civic Practice that I started, that's all civic practice work.

EH: So, speaking of Hope is Vital and its aim at young people, I noticed that one of your specializations or courses is Devising with Youth, and I wanted—

MR: You know, it was, I haven't taught that since 2007.

EH: Okay (*laughs*)

MR: Yeah. Yeah.

EH: I was just interested, because my work is looking at theatre aimed at young audiences, and I'm just wondering if you can tell me a little bit about the work that you've done, and sort of how you approach working with youth differently?

MR: I try to approach it not differently at all. I actually try consciously to—not differently at all. Certainly, being aware, developmentally, in the end, that there's content, but I try to make work—if I'm making work for middle school or high school students, other than language—curse words, based on the host or the situation it's going into, or graphic sexual talk, I don't think about it differently in

any way. And I get—I don't know if challenged, but I've had people say to me, "But is that idea too complicated, or is that too dark," or whatever, and no, I don't think so. So process-wise, form-wise, intention-wise, aesthetically, it's really related. I do make shows—I had a show up this fall at Flint Youth Theatre in Flint, Michigan, which was a piece I'd made over a couple years with them, for young audiences. I have a show going up at Steppenwolf next year, in the Steppenwolf for Young Adults mainstage season, that I've been working on for a couple years. Sojourn hasn't made a work for young people in a while, but we used to tour shows to high schools.

EH: So, when you're doing devising with youth, is it for young audiences, or with young actors as devisers, or both?

MR: It's been all those things.

EH: Okay.

MR: It's been awhile now since—with *Hope is Vital* and in the years following, I worked a lot with teenagers and college students. A whole lot. I'd say I've done much less of that in the last batch of years. Much less. Between 1992 and 2002, those ten years, I mean I worked all over, all the time, with teenagers and college students. And I think, honestly, I still really like that age, but I think as you get older—you can still be effective, I think in those, but as the energy and age was closer, I think it made more sense for me, and now I feel a little bit more removed. So I find it very fun, but I don't think I would want to, nor could I do it day in and day out now.

EH: (*laughs*) Yeah, it takes a lot of energy.

MR: It takes a lot of energy, but, it's honestly—I still have the energy, but it's a matter of, there is something I could give when I was a bit younger that is a different thing that I give now, and I think at—there are amazing teachers in their 70s who work with high school students, so it's not that—just for me, personally, as an artist and a teacher, I think that my best work with that age was then, and I still really love and think I'm productive when I do now, but I just don't choose to do it as much now.

EH: I know I talked to Chris Anthony a little bit about their Will Power to Youth program, and some of their model, particularly the facilitation work, which is something that I'm really curious about because I'm trying to look at those challenging themes, and how to tackle those. So I'm wondering what your experience is with that, with Will Power to Youth, but also just the facilitation that's necessary when working with this kind of challenging issue with anyone.

MR: Well, it's everything. It's everything. I do a lot of facilitating, I teach a lot of facilitating. I actually don't completely remember what was specific or unique about

Will Power to Youth and—I just remember there was a really good facilitator, but I don't remember a model. I remember there was a model of how the shows were developed, and so there was a teaching artistry, kind of pedagogy to that, but I don't particularly remember a facilitator model.

EH: I think—the thing that I had talked to her mostly about was the facilitation groups, because—and I don't know if it's developed a little more in the past few years and I may be saying it wrong, I need to look back at my notes, but it's something—because there's so much of a focus on the human resource, or human connection aspect, of Will Power to Youth, that the teaching artists also double as facilitators, in terms of talking to the young—to the participants about what's going on for them, and where, sort of—how they see those themes in their own lives, which I'm really interested in, just because I think that's something that doesn't get addressed, as much.

MR: Super interesting. Let me think about that for one second.

EH: Yeah.

MR: So if I'm not speaking specifically to them, to their work, but just in general to facilitation—how can I be helpful around that?

EH: Yeah. Well, I guess something that I talked to Chris Albright about was, specifically, I think something that intimidates me about tackling a show like *Taming of the Shrew* or *Merchant of Venice* for young audiences is that there's that potential for—or to really address those issues, is that there's a potential for a kid to be triggered, and for it to go sideways, and not knowing how to deal with that.

MR: When you say triggered, do you mean get upset or do you mean triggered with a trauma that they're holding?

EH: I guess specifically more triggered with a trauma that they're holding.

MR: There's certainly, in any group of human beings, statistically, there's always people in the room with trauma, right? So if we're involved in theatre, and wanting to deal with drama and issues, there is absolutely always that possibility. I think facilitation-wise, you can't avoid that. If you're sort of always trying to avoid discomfort, it's pretty hard to deal with anything, but you can make a safe space, and I think—so the facilitator's responsibility is how to build a space and a process that is safe and that allows people to opt in and out, based on being responsible for themselves to a degree, which a young person can do, if the space is set up well. How to make sure people have an escape portal if something gets intense, or they get—that you are prepared for that. But I think what I mean to say is ground rules, a sort of moving into a process, with an intentional pace, being conscious of—if you're dealing with intense stuff, *Taming of the Shrew*, you don't say, "Hey, so here we're on

Day 1, let's do a warm-up game, and this game is about a really bad personal experience you've had around gender and stereotype." You wait on the personal until you're building that safety and that trust. So I think it has to do with timing, with pace, with the dramaturgy of when you introduce what elements, and building a sense of shared investment in the room in the process and goals. So if we're going to deal with intense material, what are we hoping to get out of that? What am I hoping to get out of it, what are you hoping to get out of it? You have to be careful about, on the front end, saying, "Hey, this is going to be really intense," because then people will look for that, but it's just making sure that there's a process—I think it's okay, I think people get more nervous about it than they need to, I think if you're responsible and just sort of being conscientious, your space, in a way, will support depth and complexity. It's when we are reckless or careless or especially not thinking about how we begin that I think we run the greatest risk of that. And, that said, you also need a resource. If you're going to go in and work in a school around intense material, you want to know where the school counselor's office is. You want to tell them, "I'm going to be doing this today, so if anybody needs it, is it okay if I send them to you?" You know, that kind of thing.

EH: If you were going to go into a school and tackle an issue like that, or have a performance of *Taming of the Shrew* and then want to really delve into what is happening there, would you—

MR: With the audience?

EH: With the audience. In an ideal world, would you want to have a longer residency where you see the show, and then have days to process it, or process before seeing it as well as after?

MR: If your goal, with a show like that, is to get into sort of complex and deep issues, I think the last thing you want to do is do the show and then do a 30 minute talkback. You want to do process. The fantasy is you do some work beforehand, they see the show, you do work after, so they're involved in small groups, in classes, in whatever it is. So I think you know the answer to that. *(EH laughs)* You know?

EH: Yep. Yep.

MR: That the assembly and then whole school community processing of something can be okay as a starting point, but is not where you want the bulk of the work to happen. And is actually a very unsafe space, in general. One of our, in my mind, epic failure learning moments was at the very beginning of our company's life, in Virginia, before we moved to Portland in 2000, when we were touring *Look Away*, which was our first company show, formally, where we had the name Sojourn and we were doing—it was a show called *Look Away* about youth and violence. It was a very intense show, made for high schools and conferences, and one of the early performances was at a big public high school in rural Virginia, near Blacksburg

where we were. And the show dealt with homophobia, and the audience—it was really intense. Really intense—there were some really upset people, there were almost fights—it was bad, because we didn't plan to do a talkback, but the principal said—right after the show, we were going to be doing workshops for the rest of the day, and he said, "I really want you guys to, sort of, do a thing." We were like, "No, no," and, and the host who'd brought us in said, "You have to. The principal wants everyone—" We were like, "Okay," and we weren't smart enough, I wasn't smart enough to be like, "Nope," and just leave. So we started it, and all the stuff came out. Bad stuff. It was bad. Never done that again.

EH: Yeah. So when you do those kind of workshops what kind of—this is a super broad question, so, (*laughs*) you can say it's too broad, but what—if you were to do workshops after a show like *Look Away* that dealt with really intense material, what kinds of activities would you focus on or go to?

MR: We would start, we did start, we do start by giving folks reflective space with a person or two, so real tiny groups, dyads, triads, talk about what's on your mind right now having seen it, talk about a response. 60 seconds, 90 seconds. Now, whole group—what were you just talking about? Okay, now maybe one more prompt. Talk about a question you might want to ask about it. Okay, let's have some questions. Or, everybody up and we might do some image work. So, let's make some images from the show that kind of held for you, let's work with them, let's talk about them. Or, small groups—each group make an image. So we would get people, not alone, but not as a whole group, in task-based moments, and then we would go task-based back to whole group, task-based back to whole group, and be really conscious about—we wouldn't say, "What were you most upset about," or "What was—", we would just be asking, "What's sticking with you, what are you reflecting on," and then start to listen to what's coming up and follow that in terms of what activities we might use next.

EH: So, doing sort of, like, more neutral questions and then—

MR: Yeah. Just to take the temperature, and give people a chance to process in different ways.

EH: I think those were my big questions for you. Thank you so much.

Elizabeth Tobias 2015
Interview with the author via phone
13 Apr.

Elizabeth Harelik (EH): My first question—when we were talking a little bit about the work that you do at Theatricum Botanicum, you talked about how much the themes of Shakespeare speak to young people, and I'm looking particularly at challenging, difficult themes like *Taming of the Shrew* and gender, and *Merchant of Venice* and religion, and I'm wondering if you've worked with any plays that have particularly challenging themes, and if so, how you've worked with kids to, kind of process or discuss those themes.

Elizabeth Tobias (ET): Sure. We do *Taming of the Shrew* at a school every year, which is a combination of a performance and they work on it in their English class, so we're performing, they're performing, they're really digging in. So I can start with that one. Because one of the ways that I think is best to answer this question is, we, as adults, when we are reading a play, we read it with our own framework. Or when we're experiencing a play, and sometimes we forget that kids approach it with their own framework. And it doesn't mean that we shouldn't introduce to them some of ours, that it isn't worth having them start to think about certain things that they may not have noticed, but we presume as adults that ours is the more correct framework, and it's not, it's just appropriate for our age and our experience, so a person in their twenties or thirties is going to approach *Taming of the Shrew* very differently than a person in their forties or fifties, very differently than a person in their early teens. And all of those—this is our philosophy—all of those approaches are valid and all of those approaches can learn from one another. Forgiveness—*Taming of the Shrew*, with middle school kids, is so incredibly clear to them, and so none of the stuff that hitches us up as adult men and women, hitches the kids up. It's all simple and clear. These are two strong-headed people. She's pissed off because she's not treated fairly, because she's a girl, and they fight each other until they like each other, and then they want to be together all the time. It's very fourteen. (*laughs, EH laughs*) Their relationship is very similar to what it's like to want to date the bad boy in your seventh grade class, or to want to date the strong girl in your seventh grade class, it's very similar. Now, when they come to that ending speech, they all go, "Hey!" (*laughs, EH laughs*). And then it's a very simple conversation, and—but it's not rife with baggage of what we find out later, and those things are totally real, that it's like, "Wow, I'm a 45-year-old woman with two degrees, and I am the leader in my field, and I regularly make less money, and will always make less money than men who do my job not as well. That sucks." (*laughs*) Right? And that brings a different level of stress with it, and it brings me to a different place when I watch something like *Taming of the Shrew*. But I love seeing it through the lens of kids, because it's simple. They see the relationship, they understand the dynamic between those two characters, and then they have a very simple response to that end, when she talks about putting her hand below her husband's foot. They just kind of go, "What? Why's she doing that?" And then you can open a dialogue, because the fact of the

matter is Shakespeare doesn't answer that question. We don't know why she's doing that. She doesn't say it. Maybe it's a trick. Maybe it's between the two of them. And we can always go back to, this is all a big, fat joke. This is not a real play, it's a play within a play, a joke played on a drunk man. That's what the play is about, it's not real, so it—but the more important thing, and to answer your question about themes, is we let the kids lead us, most of the time. Now, there are plays where you must—where the adult or community reaction to certain themes is so volatile that you must take—hit it head on. Like *Merchant of Venice*. And we did *Merchant of Venice* a few years ago, and again, the kids—it's very simple and clear to them. This is written in a time of anti-Semitism, and this guy's mistreated, and he also mistreats others. They are really clear about it, but the adults around them have a ton of totally justifiable baggage around anti-Semitism, and you must address both of those things with a play like that. It's like a play with an African American issue, you can't pretend that it doesn't resonate in the community right now, because it's so intense. And so then we head it off at the pass, and we—if they're coming to our field trip, we make sure that we address it in our preparatory workshops. And if we're doing a longer residency in a school, that's what I talk with the teacher about upfront. I ask them, "Why have you chosen this piece to work on?" Like, when we do the *Shrew* every year, I ask that school, "Why do you choose *Shrew* every year?" And they're straightforward, they're like, "Because seventh and eighth graders get it. This is exactly the way their lives and their relationships are." (*laughs*) So, when we did *Merchant of Venice*, we chose to do that play, because we wanted to investigate anti-Semitism in a different way, and so it was up to us to make sure that, in our study guides, in our preparatory workshops, we found ways to start the conversation that don't presume the end of the conversation, because it's not fair for us to decide what people should think. We can only say, "Hey, this is a hard conversation." And isn't it interesting that it was a hard conversation then, and it's still a hard conversation now. So that's kind of the two-pronged attack is, first to remember that kids have their own frame of reference, and they have a right to that frame of reference. And if we can, we try and protect them from the adult frame of reference until they ask about it, until they're ready. But sometimes you can't, sometimes it's too much an integral part of the culture and you just can't, and so you must head it off at the pass.

EH: Can I ask, when you did *Merchant*, what kinds of things did you do in those pre-show workshops or residencies with the kids to head off that theme or get into that discussion before they saw it?

ET: We talked about the historical position of Jews in Elizabethan England. We talked about Queen Elizabeth's relationship—because it's also always good to remember, why would he do this, why would Shakespeare write this. It's a can of worms now, why would he open it back then? And to remember—when you start to give kids the information that Queen Elizabeth had what we believe to be a Jewish doctor, that she protected for a long time until she couldn't anymore, and she got him out—I believe he became a Converso, or he left just in the nick of time. So you

see that Shakespeare takes what was before only sort of a butt of a joke, this idea of the Pantalone character or the miser from commedia, and he gave that character a voice. And, yes, the way that that voice is not the way we would like it to be now, but we have to consider it in the time period it was written, and that was revolutionary to give a Jew a voice. Revolutionary! I mean, they didn't have voices. We didn't—I am one—we didn't have voices, we weren't allowed to have voices, we were the butt of jokes, that's it. We were a commedia character, we were the money-grubbing, big-nosed heathen. So that's the first place, is just to place it in the context of history, and then, to me—and it's funny, we're dealing with this right now, not in a Shakespeare play, but we're doing *To Kill a Mockingbird* as one of our shows this year, for the schools, and obviously we're having a lot of conversations (*laughs*). It's the same thing, where we're talking—when I'm training my teachers, we know what the goal is. The goal is for them to be able to come and see the play, and have a successful experience seeing the play. So then we back up from that goal and say, what might block them from that? Obviously, with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it's simple, it's the n-word. They're going to hear it, and if they hear it for the first time onstage in the show, they're going to react and get pulled out of the play. So let's make sure that we can make a safe place to talk about it in the workshop. And mostly for me, that means posing questions to them, not us telling them—providing information, which is, "When this was written, this is what this meant. But you're seeing it now, so tell me if you have questions or responses," and then we lead a very—we try and keep it calm, but a very honest and dispassionate conversation, so that kids can ask real questions if they need to, or express real concerns. And usually that's all you need to do. Here's another one, we just did *Lear* last year, and that's a whole different thing. *Lear* is full of ideas about madness and family dynamics and dissatisfaction between parents and children and children and parents. For that play we forewent all of our usual plot stuff in our preparatory workshops, and we just had conversations about those major themes. What does it mean to be a parent and a king? What does it mean to be a child of a king? What is madness? What's the difference, do you think, between madness then and madness now? And really, it's just about posing questions and letting them answer them, so that they have a frame of reference to then open to the show in a different way, is our goal.

EH: Okay. So when you're doing those workshops dealing with theme, or discussions dealing with theme, do you also, in those same workshops work in ways to help the students access the language? Are those done together or separately, or how is that handled?

ET: Well, accessing language is different in different contexts. When kids are just coming to our School Days field trip program, where they're just coming to see the play, honestly, we don't worry as much about language acquisition, and I'll tell you why. Because—it has to do partially with our style of performance, but you don't need it as much as you think. Because, just as Shakespeare loved onomatopoeia—it's like I tell my dad, right. My dad is a self-taught man. Graduated high school, didn't go to college, and he's obviously, because I'm his daughter, been seeing

Shakespeare plays forever, (*laughs, EH laughs*) more Shakespeare plays than he probably thought he was ever going to see in his lifetime. And I always tell him, "Don't try and understand every word. It's not about that. Watch the play. Let the feelings wash over you, let the relationships wash over you." And the fact of the matter is, many of the kids that we deal with are in a great situation to do that, because they're English learners. English is not their first language. They're quite used to sitting there and listening to a language that they don't really understand, and getting context through behaviors and actions and gestures and body language. So they're actually primed to enjoy Shakespeare, as long as it's presented in a way that connects to them, and that is very much our style, we connect to the audience, we open up to the audience. There is no fourth wall or any pretended fourth wall, which there shouldn't be in Shakespeare, he didn't have a fourth wall. This precious—the actors are talking to each other and we just get to watch them, that's not Theatricum. That's not what we do. As long as you reach out to them with your heart and your passion, that's all they need, in my experience. Now, if you are doing a program where they are performing, obviously that's different, and then they need to understand everything they're saying, and then we use a variety of techniques. You can do translating it into their own words. Operatives are great, letting them know that, even when we speak English, every single word we say in a sentence doesn't really matter. Usually there's one or two that are the most important. So we help them find those in a Shakespeare line or phrase or thought, and then the clarity of the whole thought becomes more accessible. So operative words, translating it into their own words, if they have a different language that they speak, sometimes we'll encourage them to translate it into their language. Ultimately they will perform it in Shakespeare's language, but those exercises provide them different access points. We do a great exercise called, "A Series of Seven Snapshots," where sometimes we'll take a scene or an act and break it up into just five moments, and the kids have to make a frozen tableau of that moment, and it sort of takes the mickey out of the stress of, "I don't understand every single word." Yeah, but do you understand what's happening here? And if they can crystallize it into one or two or five frozen tableaux, you go, "Great. Now let's find the words that mean those moments." And that's what you lift. That's the operatives, right, so you connect operatives to a physical activity.

EH: Yeah. That's really cool. I've seen a lot of work done with tableaux, in the most important moments in scenes, but I haven't seen a lot of connecting those operative words to those physical moments, which is a really cool way to connect the physicality to the words.

ET: And we'll do that with character too. So we'll give them a character class—how do you show character onstage, with your body, with your voice, so we'll do walks, and gestures and centers of gravity. And then what we'll add to it is—depending on the length of residency, if it's two days, we give it to them, if it's longer, we say, "Okay, go back and find what you think is the slogan of this character, find the line in the text that, to you, expresses who this character is. Now say that while you're

walking in their walk, talking in their talk, moving with their movement." So connecting text to kinesthetic physicality. The more you can do that with them, the more often they will have an epiphanal moment, and go, "Oh, I get it! Every single word does not have to matter. I have to find the moments or the operatives or the emotional heights." Or a lot of it, too, with Shakespeare is, find those critical facts, that's what you have to push forward. Otherwise nobody will understand what the heck is going on (*laughs, EH laughs*).

EH: Right. So going back to what you mentioned about the School Days performances, and connecting with the audience, I know when I talked to Teresa Dayley Love, she mentioned that some of the work that you've done at Theatricum Botanicum involves some of the kind of audience participation that she's done in her TYA work, and I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about how you've used audience participation or interaction in that way and how it affects students' experience and engagement.

ET: Sure. Well, it varies depending on the situation, but for instance, for School Days, one of the first things that happens when they arrive at School Days is they see an interactive living history. So, Queen Elizabeth and William Shakespeare happen to appear accidentally, you know, "Oh my goodness, how did this happen, here I am walking through the woods, and I'm William Shakespeare." And they have—I think we talked about this—they have this scripted, but improv-ed conversation with the kids. By doing that before they see a play, they are more connected to the play, because they've walked on the stage, they've talked to the actor. Now, they may not be doing that during the actual performance, but it provides them with ownership over the space. It provides them with the physical experience of standing onstage and wanting people to listen to them (*laughs*), right? So then they know what it's like for the actors during the show. It provides them with an opportunity to express what they know, and what they believe, so that if they've had a chance first to express those things, then they're much more likely to listen to other people expressing them, i.e. the characters in the play. So it's a very simple part of the day, but it's critical in so many ways. That interactivity isn't woven into the performance, but it is a critical part of the success of the performance. Now we do have some interactivity in our performances. The kids at School Days, they come and they take two workshops, little short workshops in juggling or stage combat or whatever, but some of the kids are actually rehearsed into the play.

EH: Oh, cool.

ET: They will be fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in *Merchant of Venice*, they'll be part of the court, right, when he's being tried. It varies depending on the play what parts we have them do, and look, they have, like, a half an hour to just learn entrances and exits. These are not earth-shattering performances, that's not the point. But when students in the audience see other students onstage, it changes the way they watch the play. It just does. I mean, they're not in costume, even, they just

move onstage and they go to a spot, and sometimes they do a little dance or whatever we've taught them that's appropriate for that play. It changes—interactivity, and I did learn this from Teresa, interactivity is instantaneous. It's an invitation. It's an invitation to be a part. And the minute you, with a welcome, open heart, invite somebody to be a part of what you're doing, it changes the dynamic of everyone in the room. I've done shows that Teresa has written, where we're performing for 350 kids and we're asking for a volunteer. Why should those other 349 kids feel anything other than slighted if they don't volunteer? Because the way she trained me to do that was, it is an invitation to everyone. And whether you get chosen or not, you are chosen, because we are working together now. There is no separation between you the audience and me the performer. This is not something I'm doing for you or to you, this is something we are doing together. And that feeling of invitation is pervasive throughout the School Days experience. It's very much something I learned from Teresa, although they were already doing things like that at Theatricum before I got there. And obviously when we are at a school, or working with them, it's all interactive, it's all their stuff. If we're there at all, we're an afterthought, it's about them.

EH: Right. Going to that work that you do in the schools, can you tell me—I know you'd mentioned a longer school residency as one of the things that you do with Theatricum. Can you tell me a little bit about what that process entails or what a school residency might be like for the students who are doing it?

ET: Sure. We have two different structures for our school residencies. One of them is called "Students Act the Classics," and that's exactly what it sounds like. It's super-simple, we have an edited version of a script, we go in, we cast it, we direct it. And the goal of the school, when they come to us, is they want their kids to do a Shakespeare play, with all that that entails. They make their own props and costumes, they have to memorize lines. Most of the time, when we're doing that, it's in line with something the teacher is working on, but it's not core to their curriculum, it's like this special show that they want to do for the parents. But as opposed to doing, you know, *Grease* the musical, they want something that's got more educational content to it. And I don't mean to pooh-pooh that at all, it's a great experience, the kids learn a tremendous amount about cooperation and collaboration, plus there's no better way to connect to Shakespeare's language than just having to stand there and act it but that is a really simple, direct approach. Right? We go in, we have the edited script, we've cut it for the number of kids, we quickly cast it, we do a read-through, we come back in two and a half weeks, they're supposed to have memorized their lines while we were gone. That's about 50 percent that that actually happens. We rehearse anything from eight rehearsals to twelve rehearsals, depending on how much the school can afford time-wise and budget-wise, and then they put up the play. It's usually a forty to forty five minute version of whatever play it is. And we have those cuttings, because we've been doing this for a bazillion years. The other structure is called "Classics Off the Page." It's a bit more flexible, a bit less direct. And it happens when a teacher is looking for a

deeper investigation of the text, and is less interested in the show. Right? So the show is ancillary, obviously there will be a performance component, but the show is secondary to the process. And then it varies given the different environments that we're in. The goal is to dig into the play that we're trying to investigate, be it *Macbeth* or *Midsummer* or *Tempest* or whatever, and that may be with—you know, always we want them to know the story, so we try and start with a performance that we do, and then this interactive investigation of the plot, so that they know the story. They've seen someone perform it, and they know the story. And then do we focus on two or three scenes, do we focus on a speech, do we focus on character work, do we focus on historical context, do we start doing exercises—you know, if we're doing *Antony and Cleopatra*, we're going to do exercises and investigation in what the heck was going on then (*laughs*) with the political climate, because it's all about that. You can't get half of what's going on in the play unless you have a sense of the nation-building that was happening then. And then also impacted by the kids, you know. We just did this one with—it's a very at-risk group of kids in Montecito Heights, 85% of them are English learners. They're in high school, it's—they're excited and everything, but it's just a different approach, and so we did it with *Macbeth*, and each classroom over their eight sessions, they only focused on one scene from the play. Because the import wasn't that by the end of it they can answer test questions about the whole play of *Macbeth*. It was that they get a deeper sense of the language and the themes. So, one class focused on witch scenes, one class focused on the banquet, one class focused on the Lady Macbeth/Macbeth scenes, and then they hit them different ways. One week they translated them into Spanish, one week they did tableaux of them, one week, the kids were encouraged between the last week and the week before, to come back with whatever they saw as the ideal way to do this scene, and kids came back with everything, from raps to radio shows to movement pieces, to graphic comics. And then, ultimately, they chose as a group two or three of the things, including one traditional version, to stage the scene. So that class got a really deep understanding of that scene, but more importantly, they got a really deep understanding of different ways to access Shakespeare. It was the right thing to do for that school. They couldn't handle the whole play, it was too much material for them. They had too many obstacles. And then we all got to see all the classes' work, we shared at the end, so they benefit from each others' investigation, if that makes sense.

EH: Yeah, that sounds really interesting, and it's cool that there's so many different ways that they can access it. I know some of the people that I've spoken to who've done—a lot of people I've spoken to who do work with performing Shakespeare with students talk about how important it is to do preliminary ensemble work or building trust within the classroom, and I'm wondering what kind of focus is given to that in the residency, or if it's done with the teachers beforehand.

ET: Always, always, always, if we have a residency, at least one, if not two sessions are just that. And in fact one of the ways we do it, when we don't have a lot of time, is we incorporate that into our quote-unquote casting process, right, if we know we

have to cast the play, that's how we do it. We do it by running theatre games that are ensemble-building, so the kids don't even know that that's what we're doing, but we're watching—how do they collaborate, how do they work together, how is their focus. And what they're doing is they're gaining ability to collaborate, ability to focus, ability to respect each other. But absolutely that is a critical component. And we do it with—you know, we're all working off the same playbook (*laughs*) across the country, it's a couple of different versions of Spolin. But it's ensemble-building theatre games, and in an ideal world, we'd have two sessions every time, for any residency, a minimum of two would be focused on that sort of thing. But oftentimes, it's only one, because of time, so we do that in our teacher training too. When we work with a school, if we invite teachers to a professional development, one of the first things we do is try to teach them two or three of those games. And it's funny because classroom teachers will often call them icebreakers, and we try and really dissuade that, because that's not the point. The point is you are building skills. 21st century skills—collaboration, creativity, you need critical thinking, these things that people want. How do you practice that in a classroom—when you have tests, it's not about that. That's what these games do. They force you to literally practice being collaborative, being cooperative, focusing—they force you to do it. You have to do it, or the game doesn't work. (*EH laughs*) It's a very hard thing to practice, it's very hard, but these games are simple ways and they cost nothing. All you need is an open space, that's it.

EH: Yeah. You mentioned testing, and that's something that kind of makes it difficult for some of the skills to be built, and I'm wondering—this is kind of a complex or difficult question, but I know, here in Ohio, a lot of teachers have struggled with the fact that they have so much testing, and there's sometimes just not enough time or not enough funding or grants to do the kind of work that they want to do with Shakespeare, or with artistic stuff like this, and I'm wondering if you've encountered this, kind of logistical struggle.

ET: It's a nightmare. It's an utter and a complete nightmare. And I hope and pray that it will stop. (*laughs*) Because it doesn't do any—I mean, I understand, federal money gets used for schools, and so we have to have some way to say whether schools are doing their jobs or not, and when you're talking about a massive scale—federal and state money, so when you're talking about the massive scale of a district, testing's the only way. You know, private progressive schools or private schools can do portfolio stuff or can be more anecdotal, but when a government has to answer for the tax dollars they're using, you can really only fit that on an x-y graph. That's it, you have to have a spreadsheet with a number at the end that rates. Except by the time you get to that, it means nothing anymore, it has nothing to do with what's going on in the classroom. And, yes, teachers are exhausted and frustrated, and out here we're in the midst of the Common Core transition, and they're just exhausted and frustrated and pissed, and I don't blame them. You know, again, Common Core on paper looks fantastic, except all that it really means is they have to learn a new test. That's all it really means. (*laughs*)

EH: Yeah (*laughs*). A lot of what I'm hearing from people is, to really deal with difficult themes with young people, or with anyone, it's nice to have a slightly extended amount of time to do it, and I know that a lot of teachers that I've worked with would say that they would love to, but struggle because it's hard to take time away from test prep, and I'm wondering if you and the teachers you work with have found a way to work through that or if you're just sort of weathering the storm of the transition until it blows over.

ET: They find ways to work through it. They book it either at certain times of the year, so that it's not around test prep, or, here in Los Angeles, it's not that they don't have to participate in standardized tests, but the increase in charter schools is exponential. There's more and more charter schools every year, and a lot of it has to do with them just pulling out of that district level control over everything they do, so that it frees them up a little bit to have a more creative schedule of their day. It just frees up some of the rigidity of how money is spent and how time is spent, and it allows them to do more project-based work or do more deep enrichment. But not every school that we book with is either private or charter, a lot of them are public, and you know—I've been doing this for so long, it's all about—there has to be a person at the school, and it's been everything from a parent to a classroom teacher to a gate coordinator to an administrator, but there has to be a person at the school who sees the value of it and is willing to be creative and flexible in other ways in order to make time for it in the day. And in the school year. And the reason why we are fortunate is we have a structure that is very different from most other places. Most other arts education providers, because it's the saner way to do it, they have a menu of options. You call them up, and they go, like, "An hour workshop costs this amount of money, and we have these four," and that's it. Or they have the workshops and the assemblies, and that's it. It's a very set menu of what it is. That's not the way our Classroom Enrichment—the stuff that goes into the schools, that's not the way it's structured, it's much more boutique, where I talk to a teacher, and we talk about, "What are your curricular goals? What's your budget limitations? What's your schedule limitations?" And I tailor-make just about every program for them. It's totally insane (*laughs, EH laughs*). It's boutique, there's no mass market in what we do. Every other arts education provider that I talk to, when I tell them that we do it that way, they're like, "How do you do that, it's crazy." And it's very difficult. It's a lot more time consuming to construct programs like that, but it does mean we can serve more schools and more types of schools. And it also served us really well, I have to say, during the recession, or during this transition with Common Core, where we had teachers who—they had it set up for a long time, this is how we're going, I'm going to work around the testing, and then all of a sudden Common Core happened, and everything's changing. Well, they could come back to us and say, "Listen, for this year, or this year and next year, I can't do it the way I've done it before. Can we do this instead, can we contract it to one day, can we take it down to two weeks instead of six." And I can sit and work with them and make it work. And that allows us to maintain the relationships, and it allows us to expand and contract

as we need to, per program, per school, per classroom. But it is a lot more labor intensive.

EH: Yeah. I'm sure the number varies, but about how many schools do you work with, from year to year?

ET: Well, we have these two different departments. The first one is Classroom Enrichment, which is everything that goes into the schools, and then the second one is School Days, which is the field trip program. And our field trip program happens twice a year. The big one is in the spring. We open, late April, and we used to go until the beginning of June, but LAUSD has switched its schedule now, so now we really end at the end of May, because most of the public schools, and now several of the private schools have switched too. Their last week of school is the first week in June, or even sometimes the last week of May now. So anyway, we do five to six weeks in the spring, and then two to three weeks in the fall for School Days. So for School Days, in a spring—last year was a lower spring for us, because we did *Lear*, and so it was just a little bit harder to sell, and we had 79 schools for *Midsummer* and *Lear* just in the spring. The year before, just to give you a little bit of a comparison and contrast, the year before for the spring was 86 schools. And that's just for the spring School Days. Classroom Enrichment, in the 2013-2014 school year, we had in the neighborhood of 55 bookings, at about 40 different schools. So several schools booked more than one thing, and that's in one school year. So if that gives you a sort of ballpark, about how many things we're dealing with.

EH: Yeah. That's a lot to organize for each one, especially.

ET: Yep (*laughs*)

EH: (*laughs*) I can imagine.

ET: Yep. No, it is, and that's why every other place that we talk to, that they're like, "You can't do it that way." (*EH laughs*) Except that's the way it was set up when the programs were begun, back in the late 80s/early 90s. School Days is a set thing, but Classroom Enrichment was specifically set up with this boutique feel, this tailor-making, and working with individual clients, and it's served us really well, but it does have challenges that come along with it.

EH: Yeah. You'd mentioned—and I think this was part of the Classroom Enrichment residency work—you mentioned students doing it with *Macbeth*—that students translate the plays, or parts of them, into Spanish, and I'm just wondering if you could tell me a little bit more about what students do, how that affects their engagement with the text, and how they process it or understand it.

ET: That's not a regular curriculum. That was something that we developed—this was our second residency with this one school that we have a really strong

partnership, and I expect we'll continue to have a strong partnership with them, and when we went back in after the first residency, which was an American history residency, there were a lot of things that were really successful, and a lot of things that were really challenging. And that was the one where we went back in, and in our meeting in between the first residency and the second residency, we adjusted our goals and our approach, and one of the things we came up with in this meeting was the idea that, because so many of the kids were—not just that they're English learners, but that there's a lot of identity going on that has to do with their relationship to their heritage, and their language, and their community, that we gave that as one of the options of the ways that teaching artists would work in the classroom as they were approaching the text. And I think only one of the three classes chose to do that, and it's just that that was—remember, I said each class had one scene, they were given all these different options on different days, and with homework on ways to approach it. And one of the classes did a translation. One of the groups in one of the classes, they chose to translate it into Spanish. And then a bit of that was performed on the final day. That group also, one kid wrote an original poem that encapsulated the theme of the entire play, which is the most beautiful—*(laughs, EH laughs)* I mean, it's a brilliant and beautiful encapsulation of the theme of *Macbeth*. I actually asked him to give it to me, and it's jotted down on a crumpled-up piece of paper *(laughs, EH laughs)*. I thought he was going to e-mail it to me or something, he was like, "Here you can have it." So I have it and I want to transcribe it and, and keep it and send it around. Because it's beautiful. They also, one of them wrote a rap, one of them created this sort of movement piece about one of the scenes. They did all different ways, and translation was just one of the ways that they approached it. Of course, that only really works if you have a bilingual teacher in the room *(laughs)*

EH: Right. *(laughs)*

ET: I mean, what if you can't really assess it.

EH: Yeah. It was so interesting, because I've talked to someone at Chicago Shakespeare, and they do the Chicago Public Schools, CPS Shakespeare program, and part of what they've done a couple years is translating pieces of the play into Spanish as well, so I was just interested that that had happened.

ET: I know there's, I think it might be Shakespeare LA, but they did something like that recently, where they did an *R and J*. They have this program, called Will Power to Youth. It's fantastic. And I think, if I recall, one of our teaching—there's a lot of overlap in teaching artists, obviously, because the combination of expertise in classical theatre plus the ability to go into a classroom, there's a small pool of people in Los Angeles. One of my teachers was working with them on that, and what they had them do, which I thought was really beautiful, was the kids were doing a *Romeo and Juliet* and they were doing the performance for the families, and what they had was a simultaneous—I think it was a reading, actually, they weren't memorized—a

simultaneous translation, so that family members—because that's really where the disconnect is, is that there's family members who don't speak any English—could put on headphones, and have what their kids were doing translated live. But, anyway, so my friend was literally back behind the audience with a mic. It was just him and a woman, and she did all the females, and he did all the males, and they did it live. And he said it was really intense. I was not involved with the program, but I know that's another place where I heard about translation being utilized. I thought it was fascinating, I thought it was a really interesting idea, and a way, again, to invite in members of the community that may feel not invited in by Shakespeare, or really by any theatre that doesn't have an option if you don't speak English.

EH: Wow, that's really interesting. I've heard about Will Power to Youth, I didn't realize they were doing that simultaneous translation. That's really cool.

ET: They just did it this one time that I know of. That's the only time I've heard of it, and it was one program, and I just thought it was a really cool idea, and worth looking at ways to make it more viable. It was very interesting.

EH: Yeah. Well, I think those are all of my questions. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me. It was so helpful to hear about your work at Theatricum Botanicum.

ET: Of course. Take care

EH: Thanks, you too!

ET: All right, bye.

EH: Bye.