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Daniel Francis Lenzian

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Both Hands

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Lee Abraham

Brant Pope

James Daniels

Both Hands

by

Daniel Francis Lenzian, B.A., B.F.A.

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Dedication

To my family

Abstract

Both Hands

Daniel Francis Lenzian, MFA

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Supervisor: Lee Abraham

This thesis is an in-depth analysis of the role of Voice in Suzan Zeder's *The Edge of Peace*. A brief description of the author's acting work before matriculating into The University of Texas' MFA Acting program is described. The author then describes the skills learned in graduate school needed to perform the role both in Texas and Seattle. He briefly describes prior acting work at the University, and details some plans for the future of his acting career.

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Chapter 1: Beginnings

For me, it was the closest I had come to playing myself. It was the first upset to my 'glory' theory of acting. That theory postulated that the actor's job was to go on making more and more extraordinary shapes, using a more and more varied palette: the actor as juggler, as a magician, but also as a weaver of spells and a raiser of spirits; the actor as druid, dealing in images and archetypes; the actor as imitator, stealer of faces. What I had ignored, or avoided was the actor as himself, member of the human race, fellow sufferer, man in the street. Simple-mindedly, I had seen all the variations and colors as impersonal, external. I hadn't seen, or hadn't wanted to see that an inner journey would produce another range of colors and resonances. I was playing with only the right hand of the keyboard. Now I found the courage to open up the closely guarded secret places of myself. I had, as it were, found the left hand. Later (slow developer!) I discovered that you could play with both hands simultaneously, and that was by far the best. (Callow 59)

This passage from *Being an Actor*, by Simon Callow, is the reason I came to graduate school. My history with Callow's book is somewhat mythical. When I was living in New York, after my undergraduate education, I received a box of books from my college mentor and former professor, Mary Charbonnet. The titles in the box included *Being an Actor*, *True and False*, and *The Practical Handbook for the Actor*. I was immediately drawn to Callow's book, and devoured it in days. This book was eerily close to my own life and journey as an actor. Many of the struggles that Callow faced within the book (identity, weight struggles, the personal armor/ humor that he deploys for protection) were the same struggles with which I was wrestling. In fact, I felt that the book was either written for me, or that I was reading a book that *I* had written in the future and sent back to myself, secretly and magically, hiding my own memoirs within Callow's dust jacket. While doing a show in Times Square, my backpack was stolen, and with the bag was a journal and my copy of Callow's book. I was bereft, and immediately ordered another copy. This theft, however, did prove to be fortuitous, because when my

new copy of the book arrived, I realized that Callow had published a new edition, further chronicling his journey as an actor. I immediately reread the book while working as a temporary receptionist of the Estée Lauder Headquarters. When I read the aforementioned quote, my jaw dropped open, and the above words punched me in the gut. I knew that at that point in time, I could play only with the metaphorical “right hand” and not the left. I could physically transform into characters, play archetypes, and stole many scenes, (the right hand), but I could not simply be present onstage, and listen and react, and try to effect change in my partner (the left hand).

During my undergraduate education, my weight, demeanor, facility with language, and knack for impressions guaranteed that I would play every old man and character part in every play produced on campus. I never played a person that could remotely be construed as an extension of myself. In addition to the department’s propensity to cast me in these roles, the program that I attended also lacked a fundamental part of actor training. The program was predominately filled with musical theatre actors, who were being trained for the ensembles of non-Equity bus-and-truck tours. When we asked how to craft a scene that included crying, we were encouraged to “play the opposite and laugh instead.” We were, in fact encouraged to “schtick it up” [sic] in a number of productions. Luckily, we did receive a lot of training in specialty areas. I took many excellent classes in voice and text, commedia, writing for solo performance, stage combat, dialects, etc. However, I left my undergraduate education feeling like I had received a lot of “icing” but had no “cake.” Callow’s book describes the same feelings or sensations. It is only *after* his training, when he is working on a

production of *Passing By*, by Marc Sherman that that the aforementioned passage takes place.

Like Callow, I had moments of lucidity that illuminated what I hadn't learned during my undergraduate education, and what I still needed to learn to be the artist that I wanted to be. The one that immediately comes to mind is the following: It occurred during the rehearsal and production of a play called *Making Sonnets by Moonlight*, which was a mash-up of George Bernard Shaw's *Dark Lady of the Sonnets* and a random collection of Shakespeare's Sonnets, that were littered throughout Shaw's text like ill-advised lawn ornaments. The director was Meisner-trained, and started to get me to listen and react to my partner. She also got me "on my voice,"¹ and demanded I use it fully to communicate. Because this work was a quick fix, and I was not steeped in the technique, I quickly lost any strides made in that production. I was so distraught by my inability to recapture the magic of that production that, years later, I sat with one of the cast members of *Making Sonnets by Moonlight*, weeping in her arms on top of a picnic table on the campus of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey. I really felt as if I had been living truthfully under imaginary circumstances in that play, but I didn't know *how* I did it. It felt as if something beautiful and great had slipped through my fingers. I could not even describe what I had done, other than to sob, "it was just so beautiful," as I sat atop that picnic table.

¹ "On one's voice" describes the ability to use the full power of one's vocal ability, by using the full capacity of one's breath, vocal range, and vocal resonators. My voice was pitched high, sat in the nasal resonators, and was often apologetic. This director helped me free my voice to its actual octave, breathe fully, and allow my voice to resonate at its full capacity.

I knew that I needed to get more training, so that I would be able to, as Callow put it, play with *both* hands of the piano. I thought that graduate school was the answer. How fitting, then, that my capstone role would require literally none of the special skills that I had gained in my undergraduate training experience, and utilized so heavily during my career in New York. I had come to graduate school for the cake, and here it was completely “icing free.”

This paper details the circuitous route that I navigated while working on this role. The part of Voice, in *The Edge of Peace*, provided me with particular challenges because of the specific nature of the role. This paper will detail how I overcame these particular challenges, and the specific skills that I utilized from my three years of training in order to do so.

My role in *The Edge of Peace* has proven to me that I now possess the acting technique and skills to understand, analyze, and perform any role in any play. I now feel confident in the mastery of technique that I felt slip through my fingers after *Making Sonnets by Moonlight*. The skills that I have acquired in graduate school can now be married to the skills that I formerly possessed, and I can now, as Callow puts it, play with both hands of the piano.

Chapter 2: Analysis of the Role

I was initially a little disappointed to be cast as Voice in *The Edge of Peace*, to be produced during my final semester at UT. I feared that I would be in a chair on the side of the stage “reading” lines for the deaf actor playing Tuc. (I was not far off in my estimation of the role; reportedly, this is how the show was performed in Chicago.) I had worked so hard to develop my body, voice, and acting craft during my time at UT, and my ego was bruised that I wouldn’t be able to show any of it off.

But the more I thought about the upcoming process (because I had a year to think about my role in *The Edge of Peace*), the more I realized how damaging “show[ing] any of that off” would be. My ego was justified in being bruised, because, I soon realized, that to be effective in *The Edge of Peace*, I would have to approach the role from an ego-less place.

Playwright Suzan Zeder created the role of Voice as a solution to a dramaturgical dilemma. Zeder’s script stipulates that a deaf actor must portray the role of Tuc in *The Ware Trilogy* (*Mother Hicks*, *A Taste of Sunrise*, and *The Edge of Peace*), and the role of Voice was created in order to have Tuc’s signs understood by hearing audiences. With the creation of Voice, Suzan Zeder allows both hearing and deaf audiences to enjoy the character. Upon reading the script, my gut reaction was the following: “How am I going to do this?!” There didn’t seem to be an easy answer.

On paper, there was little guidance to explain the device of the role of Voice, and I had a hard time conceptualizing what this character was. In the original draft, it seemed that Voice spoke all of Tuc’s lines, but there was no instruction in the stage directions.

Voice also seemed to work in tandem with Tuc, handing Tuc milk bottles and catching Tuc's bike as he pushed it offstage. I was struck by a moment, late in the play, when Voice and Tuc face each other, sign "finished" and exit in opposite directions. Utilizing David Ball's script analysis, from his book *Backwards & Forwards*, I thought about the final image of Voice onstage. Ball encourages the actor to consider the imaginary events after the play as a new play or story. Once an actor does this, he can see where the next journey begins for his character, and therefore a clear understanding of the character's journey in play proper. Ball states,

The ending of every play (the moments between climax and final curtain) could be the beginning of a new play. Because it is stasis, and stasis begins plays... The play following stasis should be considered too. This helps illuminate the action of the larger scope of its world, not merely as an isolated series of events. (Ball 93)

In order to see the "new journey" for my character, I had to think of his final moments onstage. According to the script, the last action Voice performed onstage would be signing the word, "Finished" and exiting in the opposite direction of Tuc. Therefore, I thought backwards² from this, the final moment of my character's stage time. Directly before Tuc and I sign, "Finished," Tuc says his final goodbye to Nell, his mother figure. Directly before that, Girl says her goodbyes to Nell, and is off to Avenger Air Field to resume her adult life as an aviator (return to stasis). Directly before that, Tuc agrees to take the mechanic job in a deaf community in Akron, Ohio. If we organize these events back to the order in which they are intended (acceptance of the job, Girl says goodbye to

² Guest Director John Langs orally instructed the cast of *Love's Labour's Lost* at UT to think of a play as a series of dominos (actions) that fall, one action leading to the next. David Ball, in *Backwards & Forwards* further describes this, in saying that a "trigger" is the first event of a new action. A "heap" is what connects triggers to triggers, forming subsequent actions. Ball states that "If you can discover connections between events, you will be able to take us, step by step, event by connected event, action by action, right to the heap... at the end of the play." (Ball 12)

return to stasis, Tuc says goodbye to Nell) Tuc signs “finished” to Voice, and Voice exits the stage to leave Tuc to a new stasis, then we learn something about the function of Voice: He is only ever-present until Tuc no longer needs him. Once Tuc has grown up, and has made the decision to join a deaf community, he no longer needs Voice.

The only given circumstance that directly relates to Voice occurs earlier in *The Edge of Peace*. Tuc explains Voice’s presence in the lines, “When I was a boy, I made up a friend who lived in my mirror. I could sign to him, and he could sign back to me, and he always understood me perfectly.” This line clearly states that the only person who can see and communicate with Voice is Tuc. Because I could only communicate with Tuc, and was always helping him (be it a menial task or major life decision), I originally conceptualized, privately, that my character was Tuc’s guardian angel. This initial idea allowed me to start taking on points of view³ about the characters who surround Tuc in the town of Ware, Illinois. I started to think of the familial relationship⁴ that Tuc and I would have, and I thought that a guardian angel would look at the person that he is taking care of as their child. Therefore, I looked at the people in Tuc’s life as would his putative father. My “point of view” was then constructed on this. Nell was the kind and generous woman who took care of my son in my absence. Girl was the sister that Tuc never had.

Margaret had given my son the greatest gift of his life. Also, in conceptualizing myself

³ A point of view is a specific way of looking at a character or a situation in a play. This point of view can be determined by looking at a given circumstances within a script, and working from them. One can also determine point of view by using these given circumstances and determining how a character sees another (i.e. in the case of Margaret in *The Edge of Peace*, Tuc initially thinks she is a slick woman from a large city, but she is actually an old dear friend from long ago). A synonym for point of view is a change of self (the idea that the way in which we would speak to our mother is very different than the way we speak to our best friend or worst enemy).

⁴ A concept introduced in Guest Artist and Artistic Director of The Professional Actor’s Lab, David Rotenberg. These familiar relationships quickly codify concepts of points of view, and Uta Hagen’s changes of self into immediately playable scenarios.

as Tuc's guardian angel (father), I was able to add some background for my own character. The conflict between my character and Tuc can be perceived as small. I wanted to, as Professor and Director Brant Pope helped me to understand during *The Cherry Orchard*, paint myself into a metaphorical corner, creating great stakes for my character, and what he had to accomplish. Thinking of the archetypal guardian angel character of Clarence, from the Frank Capra film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, I mused, What if my character has been with Tuc for 30 years, and cannot move on until Tuc has left Ware and gotten a job and life of his own? (I use "move on" because "getting one's wings" did not resonate with my imagination) I conceived that I could return to my "home" if I got Tuc to grow into his adult life. I conceptualized this place as somewhere between the traditional notions of heaven (white robes, clouds, streets paved with gold) and nirvana (an omni-present, all encompassing peace that contains the energy of everything – the sound of "OM."). Thinking back to Ball's method of analysis, I knew that journeying to this space would be the start of Voice's new play. This, then became my character's super objective. With this realization, I understood the importance of Voice telling Tuc to take the job in Akron. The words "You know, and you know you know," took on a heightened meaning because I realized that Voice *had to* get Tuc to take the job in Akron. With this secret history, I felt prepared to start my script work on *The Edge of Peace*.

Chapter 3: Pre-rehearsal work

When I received my hard copy of the play, I reread it to see if any major changes had occurred. Luckily, the script was basically the same. I then started to break each scene up into “units of action,”⁵ I then named the units with titles that would make sense to me. Titling the units allows me to keep track of the dominos of the play, and allows me to connect actions to the script.

I then went through the script and wrote every one of my lines on an index card. While I am doing this, I look for the action cue, or impetus to speak, and underline it in red ink in the actual script. The red ink works on my subconscious, forcing me to respond in a visceral way when the underlined statement is heard aloud. I then take an index card and write the line cue, or words that are stated directly before I speak, on one side of the card and my lines on the other. I have always used this system, but actively committed to it after taking Professor Lucien Douglas’ class, where the importance of writing out lines without punctuation was stressed. I do this to allow the words of the script to affect me in the most organic way possible. Honoring written punctuation and stresses when first learning a script can lead to generalized line readings and rote recitation of dialogue. I started to learn the lines using the index cards as flashcards, and was very familiar with them when starting rehearsal.

⁵ Professor Lee Abraham described these units of action to me in my first semester of graduate school.

Chapter 4: The Rehearsal

When the production got underway, I knew that I had to approach the initial rehearsals with an open heart, but also needed to convey gentle authority on my character. As a young actor, I had felt that a director always knew more than I did, and I often looked to be told what to do. Before graduate school, I thought that an actor's job was to perfectly enact a director's vision of any particular role. I thought of myself as a highly skilled marionette who needed permission and instruction for everything. However, my perception of the actor's job changed after taking Professor Steven Dietz's collaboration class. I realized then, and during my summer work, that I needed to be an expert on my character, and that it was my job to collaborate with a director, rather than passively wait for direction. I mentally prepared for rehearsal by telling myself that my fundamental idea of my role in *The Edge of Peace* could change, but the ways of working and my ideas about what this character was, were ultimately my own.

At the first rehearsal, I met Robert Schieffer, the deaf actor playing Tuc. I was relieved to find out that he could read lips, and was a kind and collaborative actor. In meeting Robert, I knew that I had to "match" his energy and performance. I immediately started to look at his hands, and his particular style of signing. I compared his signing to that of the interpreters and ASL coach, and found that Robert had a kind, soft, but direct way of signing. Compared to the interpreter, who was very dramatic and large, Robert had a masculine delicacy to his signing. This observation unlocked something inside of me and helped me understand Robert and my job as an actor in a different way. From the moment that Robert started signing his lines, I kept my eyes trained to his hands and his

method of communication. This was in order to sync my lines to his movements, but also to sync my impulses to his. (I was not looking to give specific line readings to his signs, but instead took Robert on as a character, looking at his reactions in order to temper my own. I was, in effect, learning to live truthfully as Robert/Tuc).

The first few days of rehearsal were actually very helpful in figuring out what I was doing. Instead of immediately going into a table reading and discussion, our first rehearsals were spent rough blocking scenes, and we did not move in sequential order. Linda Hartzell, the director, did not always have a translator for Robert the deaf actor, and a lot of time and care was spent in communicating with him. Linda was “giving” blocking to Robert and the other actors involved in the scenes, and was not working with me. Linda kept assuring me that she would “get to me after the rough sketch was complete,” but I was not worried. Using kinesthetic response, spatial relationship, and the ideas presented in *The Viewpoints*⁶, I was able to block myself. I quickly found out that I could move only when Robert moved. Any extraneous movement would quickly distract from the primary focus of the show and create confusion within the audience. Blocking the show came fairly easily, and I was often left to my own devices. About a week and a half into the rehearsal process, Professor Suzan Zeder, the author of *The Edge of Peace*, came and saw a run of the show. After some conferring with the director, she gave me the note that she sensed that there was some kind of separation between Tuc and me. I was told that I needed to provide more vocal variety for the character, and that I had to change the idea of being separate or once removed from Tuc.

⁶ Introduced in movement class by Lecturer Tom Truss, and reinforced in Professor Kirk Lynn’s directing new works class. *The Viewpoints* is a movement vocabulary taken from Anne Bogart’s book *The Viewpoints*.

According to Suzan, I was Tuc and Tuc was Voice, we were not separate, but the same character. It was explained to me that Robert and I were playing the same role. In some ways, I felt as if the “homework” that I had done prior to this rehearsal was for naught. In some ways, I wished that I had received this instruction prior to the start of rehearsals. Luckily, I still had the moments where I served to help and guide Tuc, and stepped outside of our shared experience. I felt that the work I had done before this new direction would still serve me in these moments.

In order to become Tuc, and respond more freely to the actors in the scenes with Tuc, I spent a number of rehearsals taking my focus off of Tuc, and looking at the actors in the scenes. I had memorized the blocking, and knew where I had to move at any given moment in the show (which, admittedly, was not often). Rather than feeling the split between my character and Tuc, I started listening and responding as Tuc in all of the rehearsals. This proved to be much more fun and dynamic to play. Although I did not feel the same sort of connection one feels in a scene between two people, I was able to allow myself to be affected by my partner and try to affect them directly and get what I needed from them in each scene. This work felt closer to all of the Meisner work that I did in Professor Lucien Douglas’ class in my first year. Although I felt physically constricted (the other Tuc still needed to perform all of the real blocking), I felt less vocally and emotionally constricted. I felt more autonomous than I had previously. Unfortunately, I did feel that my newfound autonomy would not suit the story that was being told. The director eventually told me that my focus needed to return to Tuc and only Tuc. I was able to then re-conceive how to think of my presence onstage. I had

seen the puppet musical *Avenue Q* in New York when it first opened. Being a person who loves puppets, I read a lot of interviews about the making of that show, and the way in which the actors interacted with the puppets was fascinating, and stayed with me. I remember that the actors were acting as the puppets, but the puppets always had primary focus. Something about this symbiotic relationship clicked with me, and informed how I could relate to Tuc. Although he was not attached to my arm, we were, in effect, attached in an equally important way. Tuc's reactions would then have to inform the way I allowed the lines that I would say to flow out of me.

I was also a little worried that I would not be able to effectively receive what my scene partners would be sending me, because my final scene partner had become, in effect, the back of Robert's head. Luckily, I had done a production of *Butterflies are Free* at The Winnepesaukee Playhouse after my first year of graduate school that proved to me that I did not need to be looking at my scene partners in order to have an emotional relationship with them.⁷ In that production, I learned to rely solely upon the technique of "listening and responding," which was a major topic of discussion in rehearsals for my first year of the Meisner technique and the related production of *Clybourne Park*. At this point, we started to do runs of the show, and I quickly realized that being still and focused was exhausting to maintain. I did find myself relying on the concepts and principles that I learned in movement classes that were taught by Lecturer Tom Truss

⁷ In this summer production, I played a blind musician who is the star of his own bildungsroman. I myself have terrible eyesight, and wore no corrective lenses in the play. I also never looked at any of my scene partners directly. I used this as given circumstances in this particular play, and was able to viscerally feel actions played upon me by my fellow actors. I was also able to focus on listening and responding in the most visceral way possible.

(yoga and Alexander⁸ work) and Lecturer Andrea Beckham (Pilates and Feldenkrais⁹ evolved movement). I felt the training I received in their classes supported me in every performance. I felt myself utilizing gaze facilitation¹⁰ when moving, and felt the need to press my feet into the floor for needed support. I felt the “Alexander Circles”¹¹ helping me find length and support while standing and not moving. I also felt the support from my personal meditative practices in order to maintain the focus needed to fully put my focus on my others, breathe and allow myself to be affected by my partner.

During these runs, I became aware that I was compensating for Robert. I had been directed to bring gravity to some of the tougher moments in *The Edge of Peace*, and felt the responsibility to bring that color. Robert had the tendency to be jovial in his choices, joking during some moments of gravity, and knowing that “contrast makes meaning,”¹² I felt the need to be as honest as I could. I thought that the two energies would complement each other in a way, and my adjustments were accepted.

⁸ Alexander Technique is a method of releasing unnecessary tension in the body.

⁹ Feldenkrais is a somatic body re-education system.

¹⁰ Gaze facilitation is a principal from Feldenkrais, which allows the body’s movements to be initiated by the movement of the eyes.

¹¹ Alexander Circles are imaginary circles that circle the head, chest, trunk, and pelvis, and help to guide a person into proper alignment.

¹² A concept introduced to me by Professor Abraham

Chapter 5: Voice in performance

During the run of the show in Texas, I found myself becoming a little trapped by the restrictive nature of the role of Voice. I became frustrated, and eventually very tired. In one of Lecturer Sally Allen's lecture classes, she asked me "When was the last time you had a really good time acting?" and my answer was Professor Abraham's comedy class. In that class, I really felt that I had the space to be myself, and was able to create whatever I wanted to create. I felt a sense of freedom that was in some ways really absent from my process during *The Edge of Peace*. I never knew what I was going to do in that class, but I could intuitively feel what I should or could do next. I never doubted myself in that class, and there were no rules. In most of the beginning stages of *The Edge of Peace*, I was dealing with many rules, most of which I created in order to figure out what this role was. Once I gave myself the permission to do the play *as if* it was a comedy, I felt much freer and had more fun. I think that this is the way that I need to approach all of my work.

Throughout the run of *The Edge of Peace*, I felt run down and tired. I honestly did not expect this show to take so much out of me. Initially, I chalked up my exhaustion to the demands school, teaching, the semester, etc. But when the Austin run ended, I felt suddenly refreshed and revitalized. What I realized was that the show's stillness and complete concentration forced me to be completely present onstage, and that kind of work is exhausting. I was reminded of my friend, the actor Baron Kelly, who defined acting as "the negotiation of the exchange." In scenes where two people talk back and forth, energy is exchanged. We can see this in scene work, and often refer to the space

between the actors as “charged.” We can feel and almost see an exchange. This exchange builds as a scene goes on, forcing an emotional response from the participants. Because I was not exchanging energy with the other actors in *The Edge of Peace*, I was exhausted. I was only on output. Once I understood this, I had to take care of myself in Seattle.

In Seattle, I upped my vitamin intake and started to focus strongly on hot yoga classes. I believe that my participation in these classes energized me and helped me get through the show. On the days that I could not take a hot yoga class, I would do a brief Pilates warm-up in my hotel room. I learned this in my first year of graduate school. Playing Voice in *The Edge of Peace* was yeoman’s work, but I was proud of what I did in the show. All of the work that I had done on this role was, for the most part, invisible. The sound designer of the show, Chris R. Walker, came up to me and said that he really admired my work, because I “disappeared” onstage, and “that is a very difficult thing to do.” I guess this was the greatest compliment of my work, because the character of Voice is supposed to be “heard and not seen.” Many sign interpreters also commented on my work, and were surprised that I was not fluent in sign. Unfortunately, when you are in a show with a cast of characters as interesting as the ones in *Ware*, a deaf actor, a child actor, and an imaginary dog, Voice will recede into the background if the actor playing the role is doing his job correctly. The positive applications that I can take to my future projects are as follows: In the words of Simon Callow, I can now play with both hands of the piano. I learned that I have whatever skills are necessary in order to work on any role in any play. This role was such a unique and specialized role, that it really required that I

accept the fact I didn't know how to do it, and start working from the most basic level in order to craft the role. Without this experience, it would be easy to perhaps take for granted the most basic way to craft a role.

Chapter 6: The Way from Here to There

I know that I did not have this ability during my first year of graduate school. One of my first performances on campus was a reading of *The Happy Ones*, by Julie Marie Myatt. Even though it was only a reading, I felt as if it was my debut in Austin. I remember wanting to emotionalize the text, and could not translate any of the direction that I was being given. Luckily, at the eleventh hour, I was saved by an in-class exercise in Professor Douglas' class. He presented the concept of activities, and I realized that in the script, my character was always focused on a task or activity (in order to push his emotional devastation away). Once I realized this, and implemented it into rehearsal, I was able to connect with the text in a way I never would have before that class. When I started rehearsals for *Clybourne Park*, the play that served as the culmination of my first year of training, I was greatly aided by the character object exercises/yin yang exercises¹³ that we created in Lucien Douglas' class. Doing these exercises helped me understand how to create, before I had the language to describe it, point of view. Doing the character object exercise in the role of Karl Lindner, and walking in with a black eye, to a completely surprised scene partner was thrilling, and scary, and helped me understand risk-taking in a way that I never understood before. Working on the role of Karl Lindner allowed me to see the world through his twisted point of view, and helped me see that every character must believe that they are trying to change the world or their acting partner for the better. Karl Lindner thought that he was saving the neighborhood through his actions. Because Karl thought that he was doing the right thing, I had inadvertently

¹³ Character object/yin yang exercises: This exercise was adapted by Lucien Douglas from Uta Hagen's character object exercises, and Sanford Meisner's yin/yang exercises.

stumbled upon the concept of playing positive actions in order to change one's onstage partner.

This concept was crystallized for me upon rehearsal work during *The Cherry Orchard*. I distinctly remember when the concepts of point of view, playing the problem, and covering energy were introduced. I became so inspired and understood dramatic literature so much better than I ever did before. Directly after this process, I read the plays that I was going to perform at The Winnepesaukee Playhouse in New Hampshire (*Epic Proportions*, *The Mousetrap*, and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*) the summer after my second year in graduate school, and saw character motivations in ways that I had not previously seen. At the time, I did not know which character I was going to play in *The Mousetrap*, but looking at the characters of Giles, Christopher Wren, and Trotter, I understood *why* they were performing all of their actions. I finally understood why they were speaking the words they were speaking. This newfound knowledge was tested (in a great way) during the UTNT production of *Bacha Bazi*. So much of the excitement of working on a new play is receiving new pages and watching the play develop before one's eyes. However, *Bacha Bazi* was especially thrilling because we received new pages every day. The script was not finalized until a week before the opening. The character's point of view kept changing, and the goals that the character wanted in each scene would change as well. Had I not known what I was looking for, or how to receive text, I never would have been able "keep up" with *Bacha Bazi*. Boyet in *Love's Labour's Lost* was another difficult character, one that was written as a lascivious old man; however, I was asked to take the role in a different direction. Interestingly enough, I was

not able to find the “fun of this character” until I started improvising a few of the character’s lines within the Nine Worthies Section. The language of the piece was also very challenging, and without the text skill that I was able to learn in both Professor Fran Dorn and Professor Barney Hammond’s classes, I would not have been able to play this role. In addition to all of these plays, I was also lucky enough to participate in many readings, professional development workshops, and new works of University of Texas MFA playwrights. These experiences, perhaps more than any others, have tested my craft, emotional intelligence, and willingness to allow my inner life to be stimulated by text. I have been very lucky to participate in so many amazing projects.

Looking back at my time at UT, I can see a huge shift in the way that I work, and in the ways that I have grown. There is not a single class that I can name that does not have an effect on the way in which I craft roles. Without these roles, and the classes that I attended, I would not have been able to craft Voice. But beyond any roles that were performed or classes that were attended, I think that the most beneficial aspect of my education was the time that I was granted in Austin. In New York, I moved a great number of times, and was always on the road, living out of suitcases and duffle bags. I was always on the run. Directly before I came to UT, I had spent the summer in Italy, acting in Florence and teaching in Pistoia. I hadn’t even seen the UT campus or the school before I arrived before orientation. What I quickly realized was that all of my running around the country, was not a race for work, but rather a race against myself. Before being forced to stop and examine my acting process (and life), I had been battling self-doubt and inadequacy issues. Constant traveling and work allowed me to hit the

snooze button on the ticking clock of personal issues. Being at UT for this period has forced me to do a lot of personal examination and start to examine a lot of those issues. During a rehearsal for a show, a director pulled me aside and spoke to me about one of the major issues in my work. He and I spoke candidly, and he stated that I always accepted a loss in a scene, or was consistently playing the problem. Guest speaker David Rotenberg also saw this in my work, and said that it was a “broken note on the piano” and that I “couldn’t play it anymore.” I have always viewed myself as an underdog, and that mentality had been with me for so long, that I accepted as my total and complete reality. This director also told me that I wasn’t playing my “my full self.” After being cast in some roles that I did not want to play, and realizing that I was halfway through my MFA program, and couldn’t run from these roles or from my degree, I started to examine some of my behavior and the ways that I process information. A year a half later, I have some answers, and some solutions, and am still working my way out of this underdog mentality.

In *Being an Actor*, Callow writes,

In my heart, I [see] myself as a potential great actor... and [want] to take the necessary steps to become one. I perhaps need to explain that this romantic idea has nothing to do with a quest for fame or power, nor [does] it really have to do with wanting to join the establishment of famous and distinguished actors... My ambition is on the contrary, inspired by a distinctly Wagnerian idea of theatre as a cleansing, healing, revitalizing place, and a steel desire to push myself to the very limits of my possibilities.” (Callow 239)

I used this quote in my personal statement in my application for UT. I felt that it encapsulated my desire to be a theatre artist. It also alluded to what I hoped to accomplish in school. I have always, and continue to see the theatre as a cleansing, healing, and revitalizing place. Throughout my time here, I have been able to push myself to the very

limits of my possibilities, often in ways that I never imagined possible. I came to school looking to solidify my technique, and I have done that. I have grown, as Callow puts it as “actor as juggler, as a magician, but also as a weaver of spells and a raiser of spirits; the actor as druid, dealing in images and archetypes; the actor as imitator, stealer of faces.” (59) Equally as important, however, is that I have grown as “[my]self, member of the human race, fellow sufferer, man in the street. “(59) I feel well suited and ready for any acting challenge that comes. I am ready to embrace my future with open arms, and am excited about all of the possibilities that my education now affords me. I cannot thank my professors, my directors, my colleagues, and my students enough for the education that I have received.

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