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Costume Design: More Than Imagination

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COSTUME DESIGN: MORE THAN IMAGINATION

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Ashland University, 2011

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DEDICATION

To my parents and professors, for helping me on my way.
ABSTRACT

Through an analysis of my Costume Design process for *Present Laughter* by Noel Coward (2012), *King Lear* by William Shakespeare (2013) and *Arcadia* by Tom Stoppard (2014), presented at the University of South Carolina, I hope to relay the experience I gained as an artist and student. By examining my journey from an undergraduate design student, to graduate design student, and finally as an intern with William Ivey Long, I will analyze my work as a Costume Designer.
The theatre is a necessary part of my world that has allowed me to discover my creative point of view. The stage exists as an empty space ready to be filled with whatever the imagination wants. From the humble resources of a community theatre to the million-dollar budget of the Broadway stage, the costume designer has the opportunity to bring a new world to life. This theatre lives selflessly to serve as our means of expression. It provides the opportunity to push you as an artist and technician. The theatre is in itself a “wild thing,” always needing to be tamed from a large, overwhelming idea into a smaller, more manageable thought that can be conveyed to an audience. Putting a “wild” imagination in front of an empty stage is a dangerous thing. You are a “wild thing,” imagining a forest where your room once was. You sail through oceans for months, hoping to find that one thing you are searching for. It isn’t until you arrive at the mystery location that you realize just how “wild” things are about to get. The effective costume designer stands up to these challenges and tames them, gaining creative control over their ideas. You become King of the once “wild” ideas, and can’t imagine sailing back into that empty room. To take the imagination, a large mass of images, emotions, and scattered thoughts, and tame it to form logical and detailed shapes is a most difficult thing. There is nothing quite as expressive as a young mind hungry to explore; however, the beauty of it only shines when focused.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the fall semester of my junior year at Ashland University was nearing completion, I began to organize my classes for the following year. At the time, I was an education major who was already well into student teaching and lesson planning. It was turning out to be a grating career path that I once thought would offer an outlet of creativity through educating high school students on literature, theatre history, and art. I was growing frustrated with the rigidity of the curriculum and the lack of freedom I was given in shaping my lesson plans and class discussions. I knew I had to take things in a different direction, but was worried that I was too deep within the structure of my degree program to reverse course.

I had always been a creative person who stayed in the living room making crafts while the neighborhood children were outside playing. I have dropped a hot iron onto my mothers carpet while experimenting with iron-on shirt transfers. This need for a creative outlet led me to the theatre in middle school, where I began as a scenic painter. Even at a young age I had strong opinions on the artistic direction our version of The Wizard of Oz was heading. Why are we using black paint? This doesn’t belong in our world. As I went from middle school to high school, I began acting and gaining more confidence as a performer. Although I still continued producing art, I noticed I had let it go in favor of the praise and popularity that comes with being the lead in a high school play. When applying for college, I knew that acting wasn’t the stable career that my family and I
were willing to devote tuition money to, so I decided that teaching would be the perfect career that would encompass everything I enjoyed. I would teach students theatre and produce high school shows, all while utilizing my creativity and expressive nature within the classroom.

As I studied at Ashland University, I was often left dissatisfied with the structure of the Ohio Department of Education. There was no room for creativity or, it seemed, enthusiasm. My only outlet was my chosen minor, Theatre. I continued acting in shows and taking theatre classes, but also found a new passion by accident.

At the beginning of the school year the theatre department was gathered for a meeting and we were encouraged to meet the new faculty members. One was Angelina Herin, the newly hired Costume Design professor. My friend urged me to meet her and ask if there was an opening in her shop. Being able to make some extra money was a great idea, even if I had minimal skills and no understanding of what goes on within the walls of a costume shop. Angelina hired me without question and I began working in whatever capacity she needed.

Over the years, I learned that I really enjoyed the energy and excitement of the costume shop. Beautifully painted renderings lined the walls. Hats were being built by hand in the corner while a dress was being draped near the door. It was amazing to see this woman balance entire productions with ease. When I became frustrated with my future on that fall-semester-day, Angelina sat me down and assured me that we would figure things out. I had, up until that moment, considered my job in the costume shop an easy source of income. I had never seen it as a possible career choice, but Angelina helped me see that it could be.
That morning, I looked at my courses for the following semester. An important education class conflicted with a theatre class that I had been anxious to take. While sitting in English class, I began to have a small panic attack. I was having one of those moments where you question your entire future and what had led you to this point. I left class early and went to the head of my department. Within a few hours of my mild breakdown, I had eliminated the Education portion from my major, declared a major in both English and Theatre, had my father drive several hours to my school to meet with me and Angelina (he could hear the panic in my voice and knew he had to be there), and restructured my goals to include the possibility of graduate school to receive my MFA in Costume Design.

In my final two years at Ashland University, I was given the opportunity to design shows, assist Angelina on her productions, and progress in my learning of costume technology. I took every opportunity I could to add to my portfolio, working internships from Ohio to Wisconsin. As graduation approached, I attended URTAs in New York City, which requires you to set up your best work and be interviewed by some of the top graduate programs in the country. In the end, I was accepted to The University of South Carolina where I was given the opportunity to develop even further as a designer and technician. The following analysis highlights my three main-stage productions completed in graduate school and my internship semester that followed.
CHAPTER 2

PRESENT LAUGHTER

Present Laughter was performed in USC’s Longstreet Theatre February 17-25, 2012. The production team included Rob Clare (Director), Xuemei Cao (Scenic Design), Brad Cozby (Lighting Design), Walter Clissen (Sound Design), Valerie Pruett (Wig and Make-Up Design), and Sean Smith (Costume Design).

During my three years at The University of South Carolina, I was given the opportunity to work with a guest director for each production I designed. This provided a chance to see how working professionals outside of a school setting worked and communicated. I was really going to be tested on my first graduate production, having never worked with anyone that wasn’t a professor who was already familiar with me. I was still struggling with my “process” as a designer. I knew I was still unclear in my communicative skills and lacked the rendering talent that was needed to convey a message to the technical staff. However, I was excited to begin this journey and was eager to put all my energy behind it.

The world of Present Laughter, carefully crafted by playwright Noel Coward, is a lush production set in a late 1940s London flat. It follows the musings of famed stage actor Garry Essendine and his devoted colleagues who weave their way in and out of his complicated life. Having recently split from his wife, Liz, Garry finds himself entangled in various romances, most inappropriately with his best friend’s wife, Joanna. It seems as if Garry cannot balance the chaos of these various women alone, but, luckily, he has the
aide of several employees to help him along the way. As his devoted house servants Fred, the valet, Miss Erikson, the cleaning lady, and Monica, the secretary, soon find out, Garry has bitten off more than he can chew. With Liz returning home from a short trip only to find the young Daphne hiding in the bedroom, a struggle for power ensues. The play details a few weeks leading up to a very important departure for Garry, causing even more commotion within his life.

When I learned that I was going to be on the design team for this production I was very excited. Not only because the play is set in one of the most interesting periods of fashion, the 1940s, but also because I was going to have the opportunity to work with New York City-based director Rob Clare. Known for his intriguing take on classical theater, I was anxious to see what his vision would be and if I would be able to enhance it with my designs. The process of designing a show that I had since been accustomed to was in an educational setting; however, working with Clare quickly brought me out of the classroom and into the real world of a traveling designer.

With previous shows that I had designed I was usually afforded several meetings with the director before anything substantial was accomplished. It often begins with the initial readings of the script and relaying my initial thoughts with the directors and the other members of the production team. For this show, however, Rob would not be joining us immediately and instead we were given only a few days in New York City to present him with our vision of *Present Laughter*. The way in which I used to work, developed in undergrad, always began with a thorough reading of the script followed by “inspiration boards” that aimed to fully capture a character on a single page. This blending of color, texture, and images is used to show a director how I am seeing each specific character, on
a broad scale. I immediately began putting together my boards for our brief meeting in New York. For future productions, these research boards may eventually be eliminated from my process as a costume designer, being replaced with substantial historic research and clear costume renderings.

![Figure 2.1 Character Research Boards for *Present Laughter*](image)

In the days previous to my meeting with Clare, he had made the decision to transpose the setting of the play from London to New York. He gave me the freedom to decide which year specifically to drop the eccentric characters, and I decided on 1948. This year uniquely blended many of the most prominent fashion trends of that decade. It is the mixture of style and silhouette present in 1948 that truly gave me creative freedom because, I believe, each woman that enters Garry’s world encompassed one of those styles. As I brought this information to our New York meeting, an energetic meeting that made me feel as if I were actually a working designer, I was delighted to find that Rob was on the same page as me. Save a few characters, what I had researched was, as he
would say, “spot on.” From that point, I could now begin the process of adding more
detail and humanity to these characters. This meeting taught me the importance of
research and presentation. When given only a few days to meet in person with the
director before beginning rehearsals, it is vital that you come with as much information as
possible. Do not come with firm ideas; rather, come with many different, fluid thoughts
that you can present to the director.

In terms of the evolution of clothing, the 1940s is a particularly interesting and
dynamic period. Because of the continuation of WWII from the late 1930s, clothing was
rationed in a way that changed the silhouette for men and women enormously. Things
were required to be made out of a smaller amount of fabric, thus giving it a minimalistic
style. It also reflected the military clothing of the times, changing the silhouette of
women from feminine to masculine. Following the end of the war in 1945, many people
began to revert back to the previous fashions that were made using a larger amount of
fabric, giving it a more voluminous look. Others, however, had already adopted this new,
minimalist style and it remained in their wardrobe throughout most of the 1940s. Then, in
1947, Christian Dior introduced what is known as the “New Look.” A complete overhaul
of the female style, this “new look” incorporated an excessive amount of fabric (or at
least more than the war-time women were used to), full skirts, and a shapely upper body.
This style was introduced in Europe; however, American women adopted it into their
wardrobes more quickly. Those in Europe were still feeling the burden of war and didn’t
have the financial means to reimagine their clothing at this time. Because of this, the style
of the late 40s was able to take shape as an evolution from Dior’s newly created woman.
This period of time presented a shaped bust to accentuate the female form while
remaining true to the fuller skirts and softer lines. With such a rich decade of fashion to pull inspiration from, I was able to assign each woman in Present Laughter her own style and silhouette. Fortunately, the director was very open to allowing each character to be “their best self” and beautiful rather than being a slave to one specific year. This allowed me to pull the best fashions from the years surrounding 1948 in order to created a charming and dynamic world. The costume renderings I presented to the director highlighted the various silhouettes I was hoping to utilize within the production.

Figure 2.2 Costume Renderings for Present Laughter (Liz, Miss Erikson, Joanna)
2.1 THE CHARACTERS

Each woman that interacts with Garry in Present Laughter is strongly independent. Because of this, I was able to blend specific periods of fashion to visually portray their internal motivations while also keeping them visually separate from each other. The men, although a minimal change in male fashion occurred during this time, also provided the opportunity to visually capture their true character.

Garry Essendine, the playboy. Although a celebrity, Garry does not wish to portray himself as a star in a way that others might. He is simple and elegant, but not as flashy as Fred. When lounging at home he wears a simple button up and tie, wrapped in a dressing gown. This represented him as a man who desires normalcy, although surrounded by chaos that he causes. When dressed for the evening he chooses a classic black tux and bowtie instead of something that might make him stand out in a crowd.
wanted to maintain the thought that he is the anchor of the play, a grounded man, and not someone that is unattainable and flashy.

Daphne Stillington, the young ingénue who is infatuated with the “star” Garry. Originally envisioned as silly and dim, the director and I finally pushed her towards a sexual, young woman. I strayed slightly into the future and utilized an early 1950s silhouette with an accentuated bust and tighter waist, which allowed her to become more than just an innocent girl in Garry’s world. She is a threat, often on the same level that both Joanna and Liz are, something the director had been pushing for quite a while but I had not realized initially. The difference between her rocket-slim dress and the dress she wears when with Lady Saltburn (a more conservative look with a fuller skirt) captures the essence of the 1950s woman and their ability to transform from sexy to the “perfect” housewife. However, the soft colors of her clothing highlights her overall innocence.
Miss Erikson, Garry’s foreign-born and eccentric housekeeper. I was able to have some fun with Miss Erikson since she did not fit into the typical American standard of the time. Since she is an immigrant, I was able to blend American style with a more eccentric look that someone who comes from an unnamed European country could acquire. Through watching her character develop, I knew that she would be, out of all the other women, the one who would wear pants. A masculine silhouette with pants and a vest, offset with more feminine scarves and jewelry, really allowed this non-conventional character to find her footing. The bold patterns and heavy texture incorporated into her button-up shirts and jackets helped the audience recognize that she was unique to this world.
Fred, Garry’s man-servant. I aimed to capture the balance between Fred’s private life and public persona. When working in Garry’s house, he alternates between variations of the same uniform. This allows the audience to recognize that his main duty is to blend in with the surroundings; yet, when he is leaving for a night out, he transforms into a debonair man of society. His crisp, white tux set him apart from Garry’s more conservative style.

Monica Reed, Garry’s hardened secretary. She is a respectable, independent female who balances the antics of Garry and is the type of conservative woman who would dress towards the military style of the early 40s. Her well-tailored, military-inspired skirts and jackets give her the dignity that a woman in her position would require. I decided to leave her color palette in the masculine hunter greens and greys while also giving pops of femininity with colorful accessories to maintain the idea that
she is still a vibrant woman beneath her wool ensemble. Her character is tight and composed and this is reflected in the tightly-tailored suiting; however, her pink jewelry and beautifully curled hair allows the audience to recognize her on the same level as the other women in Garry’s life.

Figure 2.7 Amanda Forstrom (right) as Monica Reed (Production Photo)

Liz Essendine, Garry’s world-traveling wife. The beauty of Liz is that she has seen the world and really fought hard to incorporate her findings into her own life. She is the type of woman that would not be shocked by the “New Look” that arrived in 1940s Paris. In fact, she would be the type of woman who would fly there just to experience it in person and quickly snatch up a few dresses. It is because of this that I incorporated the very specific silhouette of the “New Look” into many of her garments. While remaining
in cool colors, this flair separates her from the stoicism of Monica and the sexuality of Daphne. This allowed the audience to see her as a stable yet progressive woman. Her clothing had unique patterns and vibrancy, as she is the most important woman in Garry’s life.

Figure 2.8 Catherine Friesen (center) as Liz Essendine (Production Photo)

Roland Maule, the oddity. In order to capture the strangeness that the character of Roland brings to the play, I tried to bring in colors and textures that were not seen in any other costume. His orange tones, stripes, and knitted garments tell the audience that he does not belong in Garry’s world. He is more suited for the artistic community down the street. I intentionally made Roland’s clothing reflect the colors of the previous scene, which was a visual reminder that he is an outsider. He is messy and seems a bit lower class than the other men that enter Garry’s home.
Henry Lyppiatt and Morris Dixon, the businessmen. I had trouble trying to give these two men their own separate personalities. While one deals more with the money and the other with the arts, I still don’t believe I achieved enough of a contrast to really show how these two personalities differ. Their final looks were, however, clean and professional. Although there was a battle over facial hair, the final product on Morris was just enough to push him into a more suave persona. Henry’s cooler colored suits and pinstripes were a small attempt at making him more “business-like” and conservative, while Morris’ richer suits seemed more daring.
Joanna Lyppiatt, the goddess. When looking at movie stars of the late 1940s and 1950s it became apparent that this idealized woman should be reflected in the look of Joanna. With draped dresses and plunging necklines, Joanna embodied the sexual ideal that Garry craved. She draws him in with her animal print and dazzles him with her sparkling silver dress. This bold woman, who isn’t afraid to capture a man with her looks, was beautifully captured in her daring costumes. She was set apart from the other ladies because of her sequined gowns and silky textures, allowing the audience to recognize that she was trouble for Garry.
Lady Saltburn, the older generation. Lady Saltburn went through several transformations before finally becoming a glossy version of “old money.” It was thought that she could possibly be the most conservative of characters, but instead I chose to give her the same sparkle and youthful energy that Daphne had while still allowing those to see how rich she was. Her furs and jewelry distinguished her from everyone else in the cast during her short scene. When placed in a sea of blue, her silver suit sparkled like a diamond.
2.2 THE DESIGN

With each production, it is necessary for the designer to understand the progression of character. You should be able to create a visual story that shows the audience where a character is beginning and where they are ending, both physically and emotionally. At times it is difficult to keep your thoughts on the character in line with how the actor is portraying it; however, this is part of the balancing act that comes with being a designer. It was my intention to visually portray specific character growth and dominance through the costumes and color palette within each scene. I saw each scene as its own world that had a unique color palate and energy. I used the play’s four cleanly divided scenes to create a conceptual visualization of power.

Act one: In the opening scene of the show, I wanted to visually portray the idea that these characters were waking up and entering Garry’s life in a positive, glowing way.
The production begins cheerfully and energetic, before any of the conflict occurs. The colors I chose were mainly greens and yellows, representing the beginning of a fresh day. As Garry enters wearing a bright yellow outfit the audience is shown that he is the center of their world, and all their actions revolve around him.

Act two, scene one: A beautiful scene with only a few characters, I saw this as my opportunity to create a crisp picture. With the surrounding set being a light gray, I wanted each character to seem as if they were a part of the living room. Joanna in a shining silver made it seem as if she felt right at home in this monochromatic environment, while both Garry and Fred wore formal blacks and whites. They each looked elegant and rich.

Act two, scene two: As the conflict begins to heat up, each woman and their future with Garry is left to question. I went from a grounded, earthy palate in the first act to a lighter blending of blues. This was intended to symbolize the fluidity and fragility of these relationships.

Act three: In the final scene, things get very complicated and the colors of the scene reflect that. As Garry is preparing to leave for Africa each woman enters the scene alluding to “travel” in their costume, while also staying true to her own individual color story. Joanna arrives in a bright orange dress with animal print accessories, Daphne in a soft yellow (mirroring Garry’s initial outfit) with Asian accessories, and Liz in a dark, subtly tribal-printed dress. Although enormously different, these women all blended together in a strange and pleasing way.
2.3 THE PRODUCTION

Overall, the process was smooth, but it did not go without its rough moments. The stress of having only a few days in New York to meet with the director and purchase fabric for dresses that hadn’t been designed yet was a bit of a challenge. However, we were able to find some unique fabrics that were incorporated into the productions. When returning to Columbia, the search for fabric had become more difficult. I wasn’t familiar with the process of swatching and presenting fabrics at the time. I was barely aware of the vastness of fabric options that were in the world. I was going into it blindly and I relied greatly on my mentor Lisa Martin-Stuart. Often our design choices would form organically within the fabric store and we would make large purchases based on what we believed the director would want. After a few missteps, we were able to get on the same page as Clare and a beautiful production was created.
Another challenge that resulted from my inexperience was the amount of work that went into each character. The detail involved in developing each costume was so monumental and unfamiliar to me that I often found myself floundering on decisions. I wasn’t prepared for the amount of thought that went into each costume decision. I needed to provide answers regarding undergarments, shoes, jewelry, hats, and everything else that comprised a costume design. From the initial renderings to the pieces list, I now realize that I am the only one who really knows what I am thinking in my head and its through these things that the rest of the team can understand the show fully. I also realize that I was too eager in my attempts to create a conceptual costume design, whereas just focusing on beautiful costumes would have sufficed. I didn’t need the underlying color story woven into each character’s development to create a cohesive piece. At the time of the production I didn’t realized how lucky I was to be working on a show with enough time and money to be able to build a majority of the costume pieces. Because I was still a novice, I didn’t fully embrace the fact that I could create any dress I want and I see now that I may have settled on a few designs simply because I didn’t know what the range of possibilities was. If I were to design this show again, knowing now what I know about draping, I believe I could think of some very beautiful designs.

As I look back on this process I recognize that I did not have the necessary confidence that is needed to be a successful designer. I remember being unsure and quiet around the director. Some of my ideas were stifled by more outspoken members of the production team and I wish I could have been more solid in my decisions. This is part of growing as a designer, and with each production I have gotten more confident in my thoughts and presentation. Looking at the process of Present Laughter, with the
exception of a few small things, the ideas and choices that I had made for our first meeting with the director ultimately remained for the final show. Much of my research for each character fell right in line with the ultimate product; yet, there was still an enormous growth from my initial research, which translated into a fulfilling experience. It was a challenging and educational design experience and it was exactly what I needed during my first year of Graduate School. I appreciate the experiences that I gained from working with a guest-director who demanded perfection, a group of actors that were at times difficult, and a production team that often wavered. It is through those experiences that I was able to be a more capable and competent designer during my next design opportunity.
CHAPTER 3

King Lear

King Lear was performed in USC’s Drayton Hall Theatre April 19-27, 2013. The production team included Christian Hadji-Culea (Director), Nic Ularu and William Love (Scenic Design), Todd Wren (Lighting Design), Danielle Wilson (Sound Design), Valerie Pruett (Wig and Make-Up Design), and Sean Smith (Costume Design).

During the summer of 2012, I was an intern at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts. During this time I was able to observe professional costume designers and technicians work on thoughtful and dynamic productions. I learned an enormous amount about professionalism and creativity, which I hoped to bring to my second year of graduate school and my next main-stage costume design, King Lear.

The story of King Lear, one of William Shakespeare’s rich tragedies, published in the early 1600’s, tells the story of a man and his daughters who struggle with the privilege of power and the emotions that come from a change in circumstance. This emotional shifting is reflected both in a familial sense and on a more power-filled, business-oriented level. As King Lear, the ruler of a large area of land, transitions into retirement, he chooses to divide his power between his three daughters. The daughters seem to love Lear and he requires each to profess their love in front of the entire kingdom. If this act of “love” is deemed appropriate enough, he transfers a portion of his kingdom to them. Both Goneril, the oldest, and Regan, the middle child, proclaim their deep affection for him (although it is mostly superficial and rehearsed); however,
Cordelia, his youngest, who actually has the most regard for her father, states that she loves him as a daughter should love a father. No more, no less. She adds no outrageous language to her speech. Rather, she states very plainly and honestly that she loves him very much. Lear does not appreciate the lack of pomp that comes with her speech and banishes her from the kingdom forever, leaving Goneril and Regan with half the domain each. From there, Lear finds himself without power and all that he used to base his identity on. As he travels between daughters, he finds that now that they have power they don’t feel the need to treat him with respect or love. The only daughter who will accept him is the banished Cordelia. After he wanders through the wilderness, slowly becoming mad and revealing the core of his human emotion, he finds Cordelia and they die in each other’s arms.

The play also introduces several subplots that weave their way into the life of Lear and his story. Both Goneril and Regan have husbands and as each couple gains more power their visions of reality become upset. The siblings Edgar and Edmund also fight for the affections of their father, Gloucester, who eventually ends up being overpowered by Lear’s now-vicious eldest daughters. In the end, only Goneril’s husband, Albany, the kindest son of Gloucester, Edgar, and Lear’s faithful confidant, Kent, remain. As Lear and his daughter’s die, these three men take up the kingdom to begin a gentler rule.

*King Lear* is a Shakespearean play that can very easily be transferred into any time period a director chooses. It does a wonderful job capturing family dynamics and very real personal relationships that make it relevant for a modern audience.

3.1 THE BEGINNING

In order to begin the process of designing an enormous show like *King Lear*, the
most important thing I need is a concept, or, an artistic direction that the play will go. Once that is known I can begin exploring the play and making artistic decisions regarding the costume design. *King Lear* was my second main stage design at USC and, like my previous production *Present Laughter*, I was given the opportunity to work with a guest director. I love being able to mount a production with someone from somewhere unexpected, with his or her own unique views and methods. The University initially hired director Beatrice Rancea from Romania, who had given the vague idea that we should set our production in a 1980’s Dynasty-era world. I adored the idea of shifting the powerful men and women in the play to the high-drama luxury of a 1980s rich, family dynasty. Knowing that this was most likely the direction our production team would be heading, I began researching and compiling designs. After a few weeks without having communication with the director we were told that she would not be joining us and a new director would have to be hired. Issues with communication and travel forced us to rehire after the design process had already begun, which is never good for the artistic integrity of the production. Many of us on the production team already had many ideas forming in our mind of what the show would look like, based off of the initial directors thoughts. With a new director in place, our thoughts would have to be reevaluated based on the new direction of the piece. The replacement director, Christian Hadji-Culea, is also a Romanian director who has worked mostly outside of the United States. The challenge of working with a director from Eastern Europe was unique. This brought many changes to my idea of what theatre was and should be, since I was faced with a director who did not share my historical and aesthetic context of American Theatre.

Hadji-Culea was hired under the directive that he keep the original vision of
“modernizing” the production, a concept which I had already begun designing. However, I soon learned that the play would now be set in a contemporary “city environment” of 2013 rather than the high fashion world of the 1980s. This rendered my initial research unusable; however, much of the character analysis would be easily transferred.

The early meetings between the director and I were conducted through email, with many images being sent that hoped to capture his vision of a modernized and business-oriented *King Lear*. He hoped to personify the King Lear that would be the CEO of a large corporation, merging together the environment of a conference room and golf course. This would eventually lead to the characters falling prey to the city streets and dangers associated with that. Because of the distance and language barrier, I worked closely with the scenic designer, Nic Ularu, who knew the director from previous collaborations. I would channel my ideas through him and he would lead me down a path in which he thought the production would go. I then sent these initial images to the director in hopes that we would be on a similar path with our intentions for the show. The images I sent to him included collages for each character that attempted to capture the overall aesthetic of each individual over the course of the play. Since it was being set in a contemporary time period, it was my hope that we would be able to purchase many of the costumes.

With the finalized concept of a “modern, business-world,” I compiled my thoughts visually and began discussing costume design options with both the scenic designer and director.

Although I couldn’t use much of the research that I had found for the original 1980s *King Lear*, time was not wasted in terms of character development. Many of the
visual elements I wanted to achieve were easily transferable into our new, modern setting. For example, when working on Goneril and Regan, I had hoped to capture the calm power they have in the first scene of the play and allow them to transform into more dominant forces as the production advances.

When creating my new design, I retained much of the masculinity in the sisters’ clothing while altering the costume to fit a modern time period. Each design I created highlighted a visual power that also embraced sexuality and femininity. These thoughts, with accompanying images, were presented to the director via email and approved. I was now becoming comfortable with the abrupt change in concept because I had found ways in which I could alter the clothing while still retaining the visual intentions associated with the characters. I compiled new research boards to share with the director.

Figure 3.1 Research Boards for Act I, scene I (left) and the Sisters (Right)
After having many meetings with the design team, I felt comfortable sharing my ideas with the director. Usually, it is much more beneficial to have full production meetings where we discuss as a group what we hope to accomplish; however, with this play the set design was finalized before I had begun my designs. Knowing what the set will look like is a crucial element in my process. I need to know that what I am designing will be cohesive in the “world” we are creating. The entirety of the play was to be set in an office boardroom, a golf course, and an expansive city street. The industrial, city environment informed many of my costume design choices. With this modern world being created, I knew how I could influence the audience’s perception through heavy use of color and texture through men’s suits and ladies gowns.

As I sent my ideas to Hadji-Culea, the responses received from him had vague suggestions and few modifications so I had assumed I was headed in the right direction.
In my emails with Hadji-Culea, I stressed that I hoped to accomplish the following:

King Lear: His devolution from powerful businessman to a poor, elderly man was to be visualized in his shift from wearing three-piece suits to only his undergarments.

Act one, scene one would be set in a Country Club. I had envisioned all the additional characters in stark white in contrast to Lear and his daughters. Since it was a masculine world, I had hoped that even the daughters would be wearing suits. With everyone mostly in whites I wanted the more powerful characters to bring in grey and an additional color. This allowed for a strong contrast when a free-spirited Cordelia is seen.

As we visited the daughters throughout the play: Because the sisters were to start the play very masculine and business-like, they gradually begin to become more sexualized and passionate. Each time we see them they appear more rich and opulent to show how much they have taken advantage of their new situation. Cordelia, however, would remain simple and soft to serve as an anchor in this opulent world.

The brothers Edgar and Edmund: They very much represent good versus evil. They are complete opposites of each other in terms of class, attitude, and appearance. Edgar is the young, fresh, perfect son. He is the warmest, kindest looking person in the play and his clothes reflect that. Edmund is very aggressive and stands out from his family. He is harsh and full of tattoos and slick and oily. He is manipulative and dark.

The Fool: Since much of the play was to be set in an office environment and we were hoping for some semblance of reality, I rationalized that the Fool’s character would fit nicely in the role of a janitor. It highlighted an important economic divide.

I was very interested in using color and texture to distinguish the different characters and relationships in the play. With such a complicated text and many different
characters and storylines, it is vital that the clothes assist the audience in telling the story.

Since many weeks had now passed between the initial director and the hiring of a new one, the amount of time we had to mount this enormous production was growing smaller each day. With very little time to purchase the clothing, I began shopping. The director was to arrive in Columbia within the week and I wanted many of the items in hand in order to do a costume walk-through with him. I bought many lovely gowns, pulled suits for women and men, and dove deeper into the crispness of the opening scene.

Ultimately, during the director’s initial walk through of the costumes, much of what I had purchased was rejected and I was urged to go in a different direction. I would now have to design *King Lear* for a third time; however, this time the director would be present and the communication between us would be much more efficient and productive. But, as much of the character development had already sunk into my subconscious, it would not be nearly as difficult as starting from scratch. It is always difficult to create a costume design when you don’t have direct communication with the director. Much of the time, the most efficient way to know what a director is thinking is to present them with many different clothing options and ideas. From there, they are able to choose what they like and dislike, and you can continue on from there. Once Hadji-Culea had arrived in Columbia, the process became more precise and efficient. I was then able to present costume renderings to him and move ahead on my designs.
Figure 3.3 Costume Renderings for *King Lear* (Lear and The Fool)

Figure 3.4 Costume Renderings for *King Lear* (Regan, Cordelia, Goneril)
3.2 THE DESIGN

Now that we had a director that I could talk to in person my ability to realize his vision was greatly improved. I was able to show him different pieces of clothing and fabric, which allowed him to lead me in the direction he envisioned, even if he wasn’t able to verbalize it. After many days of shopping and pulling I finally began to grasp the world of *King Lear* that Hadji-Culea wanted to create. It was a stern, stark, masculine world. It was without frill or warmth. The human roles and their appearances were stereotypical (which I say without judgment). On the whole, it was less American in its aesthetic and more Eastern European.

Now that I had a clearer vision in my mind about where to take this production, I could abandon my previous thoughts of glamorous, bejeweled sisters and the textured nuances that existed between the different men of the production. It was now to be very
“suit and tie.” The color palette that I had initially aimed for was becoming more muted and the textures less glossy and more naturalistic.

It took many meetings with the director and a lot of concessions to achieve the final product. This is what sometimes happens when creating theatre. It is good to have different visions but it is even better to merge those ideas together to create something unique. It is important to recognize that although a costume may have to change, there is a way to maintain original ideas and concepts that work within the world the director has created. I still felt freedom within my restrictions and ended up with many final designs that encompassed ideas that I had held onto since beginning the process of *King Lear* that I enjoyed.

*King Lear*: His devolution from powerful businessman to homeless was the most effective costume in the production. He is central to the play so it is necessary that you capture his demise visually. I faced very few obstacles when creating his various looks and was pleased with the final product. He begins the play in the richest looking suit, very fitting for a powerful CEO. His suit was substantial and bold, which stood out nicely when placed in the boardroom next to his associates.
As he transitions to the following scene he adopts a casual yet still expensive look. The characters surrounding him were a hurdle, however, as I was urged to have them evoke a time period that is not modern. This was one of the many instances in which the director wanted me to include elements that fought with our overall desire for a “modern” production. However, as a whole, the traveling ensemble looked beautiful together. The earthy textures helped the audience recognize that Lear was no longer safe in his boardroom. He was now on a journey to his daughters, into the messy streets.
Lear spends a majority of the play unkempt as he descends into madness, which is then seen in contrast to his final look, which is clean and crisp. When roaming the streets, Lear becomes muddy and loses all clothing that tied him to his previous life. He is visually haggard and distressed. After finding Cordelia, he puts on crisp, white clothing. This allowed for the audience to recognize the serenity Lear feels when reconciling with Cordelia. He has found himself and his sanity. In the end, surrounding him in the final scene are Kent, Edgar, and Albany, who have now become the most powerful leaders of the “kingdom.” Their costumes reflect back to the powerful, suited look of Lear in the opening scene and help the audience recognize that these three men are now in power.
Figure 3.8 King Lear and Edgar (Production Photo)

Figure 3.9 King Lear and Cordelia (Production Photo)
Goneril and Regan: I struggled most with shifting the sisters from elegant beauties to something more muted. Once I finally accepted the director’s vision of Goneril and Regan, I was able to create a cohesive design that visually captured the evolution from dutiful daughter to evil woman. I attempted to show the evolution of Regan from the opening, where she attempts to control her desire for power, to the end, where she has allowed herself to be taken over by her animalistic needs. In the same vein, Regan has her own transformation from a more delicate daughter to one who has embraced the darker side.

Figure 3.10 Leeanna Rubin as Goneril (Production Photo)
Figure 3.11 Goneril and Edmund (Production Photo)

Figure 3.12 Melissa Reed as Regan (right) (Production Photo)
Cordelia: Her character is in very little of the play. However, she serves a larger purpose and I wanted to highlight the fact that she is the only hope in Lear’s life. She is the happiness that he disposes of in the first scene that then returns in the end to bring Lear back to life (as they die together). She’s very interesting and a huge contrast to her sisters. It was difficult to put her costume together. The director was very specific in that he wanted the opening scene to be a wedding party for Cordelia, and he insisted that she be in a wedding dress. The idea that someone would wear a wedding dress to a party is strange, but it is something that had to make sense since the director wanted it. In order to make sense of her dress, I had Goneril and Regan in equally elegant gowns. This provided an environment of normalcy for Cordelia’s full, white dress since her two sisters were wearing something similar.

When Cordelia is banished, she spends her time away on the streets. When she returns, she is broken down but powerful. She has shed her wedding dress and no longer appears
to be under the emotional control of her family. She becomes a warrior. I kept her color palette white to bring focus to her importance, while also incorporating various textures including leather and fur. This allowed her to be visually soft, yet powerful.

Figure 3.14 Laurie Roberts as Cordelia (Production Photo)

Edgar and Edmund: My original hope for Edgar and Edmund was to capture the contrast of the “good son” and the “bad son.” In order to do this, I had intended to use opposing textures and colors in their clothing that would help the audience recognize their differences. The final costumes had many of these elements; however, it didn’t go as far as I would have liked. With Edgar, the good son, I was instructed to have him blend in with the other businessmen in the opening scene. He wore a suit and tie, although I did get a suit that had a more youthful line and lighter fabric. In the end, though, he blended in with his surroundings and did not stand out as an important character. There was no point in which I could add additional elements because his following look is a nearly
naked version of himself. Edmund, the bad son, still had darker elements and leather texture in his costumes. Because of the aesthetic differences between me and the director, the final costume for Edmund became very stereotypically “bad boy” and didn’t have any of the unique elements that I had hoped for. The contrast between the brothers ended up being very white vs. black, good vs. evil. This did serve the production well, however.

Figure 3.15 Edgar and Edmund (Production Photo)

The Fool: The importance of the fool in King Lear cannot be understated. In the beginning, I grappled with how to transfer this unique character into a modern setting. I had hoped that the director would go with the idea of him being a janitor in the building that King Lear works. This would show a definite division of their economic status while keeping the Fool in a modern context. This idea did not fit into the concept that the director had or the world we were creating. It was eventually decided that the Fool was to be a Charlie Chaplin sort of storyteller who spoke in song. Also, when Lear descended into madness there would be four Fools total. This blurred the line between reality and
Lear’s altered imagination. The black and white costume that the formalized Chaplin wore worked well in the environment. The Fool was the one character who did not change clothing. As he remained in his suit throughout the entirety of Lear’s journey, those around him transformed into an altered version of themselves. The Fool remained true to his purpose and devotion to Lear, while visually remaining in his unique clothing.

Figure 3.16 Kate Dzvonik as the Fool

3.3 THE PRODUCTION

There were many costumes in the final production that I was happy with. Alternately, there were a few costume designs in King Lear that I felt were rushed due to miscommunication. In developing my thoughts on theatre and its purpose in the world, I find that the most necessary step in a production is asking “what is the purpose” of this particular piece. There must be a specific purpose and intention behind the reason we are creating a show. It has to have intent, a vision, a direction, or else there is no basis on
which to create. This has been the largest struggle in my development as a costume
designer. I have been on production teams where there is no initial meeting with a
director and no discussions on the finished product (i.e., what we want to leave audiences
thinking, what we want to say as theatre artists). Without this gathering of the production
team, and relying only on production meetings to solve logistical issues rather than
having artistic discussions, each member of the team is forced to have private discussions
with the director. As a costume designer, who knows what is discussed between the
director and the lighting designer? The set designer? The actors? There is no unifying
thought that binds each individual element together.

With a critical eye on the production it is easy to find flaws. Audiences, however,
may not find issue with as many things as I do. But it’s necessary for me to strive for the
best artistic product possible. Not just the best costume design, but the best full product. I
always try to recognize that although there may be problems leading up to opening, the
final product is the responsibility of the costume designer. Although there are suggestions
from the director, other designers, and even actors, the costume designer must maintain
control over the final product. You have to persevere and produce something cohesive,
no matter what is happening outside of the costume shop. If there is something that does
not work, you must make it work. If there is an element added that doesn’t fit within the
world you are attempting to create, you must do something about it. It is my
responsibility to work out these issues in the best way possible, which always allows me
to have artistic appreciation for the final product. It is my work that I am presenting and I
must stand behind it.

The largest issue that this production faced was the miscommunication at the
beginning of the design process. When Hadji-Culea was asked to take over as the
director, it was suggested that he keep the production modern. To ask a director to make a
small allowance, in this case not giving him the freedom of setting or time period, is an
unwise choice that may cause headaches in the future. The director will always find ways
to achieve his initial vision. In this case, it was his insistence on including classical
elements into the production to tie it more closely to the time period in which the show
was written (which I believe is the time period he would have set it in, if given the
choice). This created a visual inconsistency that was difficult to remedy in the short
period of time that we had left before opening. I struggled to create a wholly cohesive
design and simply accepted that some odd elements were to be implemented.

Overall, though, I am happy with the final designs. I am proud of the subtle
beauty that came from the unique production process of *King Lear*. Having now worked
with two very different directors, I found myself ready to tackle my final graduate school
production.
CHAPTER 4

ARCADIA

Arcadia was performed in USC’s Drayton Hall Theatre September 27-October 5, 2013. The production team included Louis Butelli (Director), Xuemei Cao (Scenic Design), Eric Morris (Lighting Design), Baxter Engle (Sound Design), Valerie Pruett (Wig and Make-Up Design), and Sean Smith (Costume Design).

During the summer of 2013, I worked at a children’s theatre in Chicago. During my time there as costume designer, I gained confidence and independence as an artist. I brought much of this new energy back to South Carolina, ready to complete my final year. For my final production in graduate school, I was assigned Arcadia by Tom Stoppard. Just like my previous productions at The University of South Carolina, I was fortunate enough to be working with a guest director. Louis Butelli, an actor/director from New York, entered the production process early and energized. His passion for the project allowed for the smoothest and most comfortable design experience I have had in many years.

The timeline for the production worked exactly as it should, with the director arriving with enough time for productive meetings and collaboration. Because of both time restraints and available workers in the costume studio, it was decided that most of the show would be pulled from stock. I saw this as a great opportunity since I had already experienced a “build” show, a “purchased” show. Each of the three options allows for
different types of challenges and freedoms, but I know how necessary it is to be comfortable with whichever you are faced with.

Most of the time, I forget that you are able to utilize all three options within one production to create the best show possible. I’ll admit, in the initial stages of design, I tried very hard to only pull things from stock. This led to me pulling some very unfortunate dresses and trying to make them work within my production. I was making excuses for dresses that weren’t made as well as they could have been or that would look less than glamorous in my “Arcadian” world. However, I did find some wonderful pieces of menswear and a few beautiful dresses that fit nicely into the world I was creating. This left only a few holes to fill, which was accomplished through purchasing and building. I find that, at times, I go into a costume design without a clear vision of a character. I allow what I am presented with to dictate how the character will look. I need to be more confident in envisioning a character, drawing a rendering that resembles my vision, and building or purchasing a costume that realizes that design.

The concept of our Arcadia was simple and direct. It would be a faithful version of what Tom Stoppard had written. The words in the play spoke strongly enough that the director didn’t feel as if we needed to add unnecessary elements. The entirety of the show takes place within one room between two different time periods. The set design was a large room with a single table in the center that remained stationary throughout the entirety of the show. As the scenes moved between time periods, elements from the previous scene would remain in the room (books, papers, etc); however, the furniture would not be changed.
The difficulty with a sedentary set for *Arcadia* is that the individual groups represented (1800’s and Modern) need to be cohesive within itself; however, you want the time periods to stand apart from each other. For my concept, after reading the script and analyzing the very different ways in which the two time periods are represented, I decided that those in the past would invoke a warmth and those in the present would be cooler. This would be represented through the color of the clothing and its texture. The script also emphasized this contrast through the way of speaking and actors’ movements. The director seemed committed to these separate worlds and I felt free to pull, purchase, and begin building.

After exhausting my resources in stock and deciding which costumes we would be purchasing and building, I presented the director with my renderings and began the process of putting together the show.

![Figure 4.1 Renderings for Arcadia (Septimus, Lady Croom, Thomasina, Chater)](image)
Figure 4.2 Renderings for Arcadia (Hannah, Chloe, Gus)

4.1 THE DESIGN

The scenes taking place in the “past” occur between 1809 and 1812 in England, with each scene depicting a different day. This allowed us to change the costumes of each character, save those who could remain in a “uniform” costume. Menswear of the period was very simple in that you know every man needed a coat, waistcoat, breeches, cravat, and boots. The fun comes from mixing different textures and colors between those elements. The women shared a very similar silhouette, which incorporated a high waist and voluminous skirt. Between building individual costumes and pulling a majority of menswear from stock, I think I was able to achieve a cohesive environment.

Thomasina Coverly: The young and curious Thomasina challenges the adults around her with her unique views on the world. She attempts to discover new ideas and ways of thinking that cause discomfort to some of the more sedentary characters within her life. To others, including Septimus, she ignites a curiosity and passion that force a change in attitude. She is the child of the household, which allowed me to explore her
evolution from a young girl to a young woman. Since we begin the play in 1809 and move to 1812, I was able to take specific changes that clothing had gone through during that period of time in order to highlight the growth of Thomasina. She begins very youthful and soft, with exposed arms, delicately patterned dresses, and a bow in her hair. By the end of the show we see her covered and poised with her hair high and tight, which reflected an influence from Lady Croom. Her dresses become darker to reflect the passion she is feeling for Septimus.

Figure 4.3 Melissa Reed as Thomasina Coverly (Production Photo)
Septiums Hodge: The tutor of Thomasina, Septimus is romantic and thoughtful. He is very much a caregiver to Thomasina in the beginning of the play as he attempts to teach her about the classics of the world. She challenges his methods and forces him to see things differently. As Thomasina grows, the love that Septimus has for her grows. He dresses very humbly in the beginning of the play. The colors are slightly muted and not flashy. Initially, he is more interested in his studies than showing off his looks. However, as he begins to fall more in love with Thomasina I made his clothing more passionate and romantic. This included richer colors and more luxurious textures in the jacket and cravat.
Lady Croom: The regal quality that we see in the Lady of the House is maintained throughout the entirety of the play. She is lush and stately and that is reflected in the indulgent clothing that she wears. I had at first attempted to pull dresses from stock that I believed could be shoehorned into the characters’ story. However, nothing seemed heightened enough for her. I was lucky to be able to build much of her wardrobe and it’s because of this freedom that she really seems to glow on stage. I wanted her to be a youthful version of what Lady Croom could be, with other productions perhaps going in an older direction. She is vibrant and holds onto the current clothing trends. She wears striking colors and patterns. During the final scene, when standing with Thomasina, Lady Croom is more exposed and youthful in order to highlight how much Thomasina has grown. There is a shift in maturity between the two women and it is seen within their clothing.
Figure 4.6 Lady Croom (Kate Dzvonik) enchants Septimus (Production Photo)

Figure 4.7 Lady Croom and Noakes (Production Photo)
My intention with Chater, Noakes, and Brice was to create a cohesive group of men that emphasized how much of an outsider Septium's was. Their cooler tones stood in contrast to the warmth radiating off of the romantic Hodge.

Ezra Chater: The neurotic foil to Septiums Hodge, Chater is an unsuccessful intellect and stands in the shadow of Hodge’s success. He is constantly fluttering around stage attempting to challenge Hodge and his position. Visually, he is a cool contrast to Septimus’ warmer appearance. His coat remained buttoned throughout, emphasizing his rigidness, and his cravat and lace undershirt incorporated an eccentric flair.

Figure 4.8 Josiah Laubenstein as Ezra Chater (Production Photo)

Richard Noakes: The gardener at the Coverly household, Noakes spends most of his time outdoors thinking of ways to reinvent the grounds. I hoped to give him a rugged appearance yet still allow him to fit in with the opulence that surrounded him. At first glance with his long coat and hat you could tell that he was a laborer; however, he was still dressed precisely. The necessary elements including his muddied boots and hat
remind the audience that beyond the walls of the sedentary room there is a vast area of land surrounding the house. This hat also mirrors the hat that is worn by Hannah in her initial scene.

![Figure 4.9 Liam MacDougall as Richard Noakes (Production Photo)](image)

Captain Brice: The brother of Lady Croom, Captain Brice is a ship captain that spends much of his time in the Croom household. He is close with Chater and they seem to create a team against Septimus. His uniformed look remains the same throughout the production and provides a balance to the overall look of the “past” scenes. He wears a crisp blue that blends well with the surrounding set, allowing him to look “at home” in his sisters home, and contrasts the warm reds, yellows, and oranges that many of the other characters are wearing.
Jellaby: The butler in the Croom household, Jellaby lives to spread gossip. There are many ways to interpret a butler in the early 1800s but I chose to go with a sharp, crisp version. He wears slick blacks and silvers and looks like the type of servant an indulgent Lady would have. He is proud of his appearance and takes time to get his hair coiffed perfectly and shine his shoes each morning. Jellaby has a sharp disdain for Septimus and they stand in visual contrast to each other. The solid black costume also anchors the overall warmth of the scene and works well with the dark blues and reds that other characters introduce.
The timeline for those in the modern time period (2013 England) is the span of a single day. The characters remain in the same costume throughout until the final party scene where some change into clothing reminiscent of the 1800s. This allowed for a unique blending of the past and present as the characters of both time periods intertwined.

Hannah Jarvis: The core of the modern plotline, Hannah is an academic who has come to the Coverly household to research the elusive hermit of Sidley Park. She is calculated and unromantic, a strong contrast to Septimus (her 19th century counterpart). She focuses only on her work and doesn’t allow the lives of those around her to interfere with her directive. She tries very hard not to become consumed with the surrounding drama and I tried to capture this seclusion in her clothing. She is stark and strong. It isn’t until later in the play when she becomes more comfortable with those around her that she begins shedding her many layers of clothing. She enters the play from the expansive
outdoors with dirty boots and a large hat, much like Noakes. This is a small attempt to effortlessly link the time periods.

Figure 4.12 Leanna Ruben as Hannah Jarvis

Bernard Nightingale: A ridiculous, Chater-like character that attempts to come out on top, Bernard spends the play attempting to prove a proof-less point. He is expressive and overly dramatic and his clothes highlight that. Each piece is bold while still working within the surroundings. From his large bowtie to his dotted button up, Bernard brings warmth to the modern scenes. He begins the show confident and put-together; however, as his theory falls apart so does his clothing.
Valentine Coverly: Brother of Chole, Valentine is a bright, young student who recognizes the genius of Thomasina and her work. He slaves over his computer and works himself frantic, unlike the ease with which Thomasina was able to work. He is calculated and sharp. I attempted to visually pair him with his sister, Chloe, while highlighting their strongest characteristics. Valentine shines as the intellect, not stuffy or too proper. I attempted to infuse a youthful quality into his clothing while still maintaining the fact that he is very focused and not at all an exhibitionist like Bernard.
When Valentine and Chloe play dress-up in Regency clothing, they choose items that still fall within the color scheme of the “modern” world. Both wear cool purples and blues, which gave them a similar silhouette to those in the 1800s; yet, the colors allow them to remain separated from the “past”.

Figure 4.14 Cory Lipman as Valentine Coverly (Production Photo)

Figure 4.15 Valentine in Regency Clothing (Production Photo)
Chloe Coverly: Sister of Valentine, Chloe is a unique character in Arcadia. She seems enlightened and bright; however, she pushes her sexuality in ways that no other character does. I see her as the modern iteration of Thomasina, both in terms of passion and insight. This was a good opportunity to highlight the differences in femininity between 1812 and 2013. Adult Thomasina stands fully covered while Chloe wears a tight, short dress to show off her most desirable features.

Figure 4.16 Laurie Roberts as Chloe Coverly (Production Photo)

Figure 4.17 Chloe in Regency Clothing (Production Photo)
Augustus/Gus: The most unique character in Arcadia is Augustus/Gus Coverly. In our production the director had modern-day Gus begin each scene by placing necessary elements onto the set. This showed the beginnings of how both time periods were connected, no matter how separated we thought they were. Eventually, Gus, in his jeans and t-shirt, emerge in full Empire clothing as Augustus. This blurs the line between the separate worlds and gives us the final scene. Since Gus/Augustus is such a unique character I wanted him to wear something that stood out when placed in both the 1800s and 2000s. He shines in white breeches and bright coat. He toes the line between warm and cool in an unexpected yellow.

Figure 4.18 Jason Fernandes as Gus Coverly (Production Photo)
4.2 THE PRODUCTION

The concept of warmth vs. coolness worked wonderfully as the entire production seemed to highlight the differences. The script that Stoppard wrote definitely invokes different emotions as you travel between the 19th century and present day. When those in the 1800s are speaking to each other there is a romantic quality to it. They seem to craft their sentences with more care, much like the writers of the time would do. Stoppard must have channeled that time period when putting together the prose-like rapport between the characters. As he moves through the script into the modern scenes you can sense a more aggressive way of speaking. The arguments are sharper and less romantic. Even the knowledge they are sharing with the audience seems more analytical and curt. This verbal separation was emphasized through the lighting, costumes, and acting style.

Overall, the concept we aimed for was achieved. I believe the audience was shown the differences between the warm, romantic past and the cold, analytical present. By the end of the show, though, they began to blend and create a balanced environment that allowed us to believe in a world that held equal parts idealism and skepticism, romance and rejection. We begin the play with each of the time periods very separate from each other. Warm versus Cold. As the play progresses, small pieces from each “world” begin to interject themselves into their counterpart. The hats worn by Hannah and Noaks, the books left on the central table, and finally Gus/Augustus breaking the wall and allowing the scenes to interweave. The way in which we handled the separation breaking through to an intertwined world was something I think Stoppard would have enjoyed.

Overall, this was one of the easiest shows I have worked on. I say that in the sense that the production team worked well together and there weren’t too many surprises along the
way. The trust that the director had in me was appreciated and I think it led to a creative conclusion. I used my resources to create a cohesive production. It was a welcome relief to have my final show in graduate school be such a collaborative, passionate project.
CHAPTER 5

INTERNSHIP

With my three main-stage costume designs complete, I was ready to begin my final semester of graduate school. Although I had worked in many theatres with many designers, I had still never taken my experience into the world of freelance design. Everything I had done since beginning this career had been under the structure of an educational setting. I have been in school consistently since deciding to be a designer, and I had never been able to use my experiences in the outside world of theatre.

Following my work on Arcadia, I was to begin an internship with William Ivey Long in New York City. A six-time Tony Award winner, Long is one of the most successful and creative American costume designers of our time. The opportunity to work with him on a new musical is one that I couldn’t pass up; although, I really had no understanding of what the job would entail. I knew only that I would be working with him and his team for four months on the new Broadway show Bullets Over Broadway, written by Woody Allen. Since beginning my work as a costume designer, I have spent many years trying to grasp what is the best process to use while designing. I had assisted a few designers in the past; however, this would be the first time I would see a production mounted on a large scale with an even larger budget. I was anxious to witness how a Broadway team put together show and if I could adapt their methods into my own process. When arriving at William Ivey Long’s studio in January, I knew that I was going to have to work hard and adapt quickly to an entirely new world. I was interning with a
team comprised of two costume associates and two costume shoppers, both jobs that I hadn’t known existed. Together, we would work to create Long’s vision for the costume design.

Over the course of the first three months, I worked twelve-hour days six days a week. It was a difficult schedule, made even harder because we were experiencing a very harsh winter. The majority of my work involved being outside, traveling from the studio to costume shops to fabric stores. It was interesting to see how we all worked together toward a singular goal. Long’s studio produces many projects at once, so the workspace was always buzzing with design teams frantic to put together a show.

There were many things that I had to learn and did my best to keep up. In graduate school, I was taught how to be a designer. I was not taught how to assist a designer. It is an entirely different set of skills that require an intense amount of focus that I rarely used to have. Instead of painting costume renderings I was balancing petty cash and shopping for understudy garments. One member of the team was in charge of shoes, beginning to end. From the design to the purchasing to the fit, she held all the knowledge of the shoes within the show. A member of the team focused on undergarments, while another was in charge of fabric. Since I was the intern, I was able to experience every aspect of the design. I took on many of the tasks that the shoppers did which included swatching fabric samples, purchasing fabric and garments, and organizing actor fittings. I would also do the pick ups and deliveries to costume shops which allowed me to see the work behind the scenes. One of my favorite parts of the job has been seeing meeting different craftspeople from around the city. As a costume
designer, you have the opportunity to work with milliners, stitchers, dye artists, and so many more skilled people that help to contribute to your show.

It is true what they say about internships. They are difficult and thankless, but you gain an enormous amount of knowledge simply by observing. One feels an awful lot of emotions when huffing through Times Square with giant bags of costumes loaded onto their back. However, it is all worth it when you get to see a Tony Award-winning costume designer shuffle through fabric swatches until he finds the perfect one. I have seen the delicate conversations that occur between designer and actor when discussing the cut of a garment and the way it hangs on the body. I have completely set up a fitting room ten minutes before the designer arrives only to return within the hour to tear it all down. Each week has brought a new set of challenges and it wasn’t anything I could have prepared for. Graduate school could never teach you what you should do at a run-through that is being attended by the producers. Working out of the studio, then the rehearsal hall, then moving into a Broadway theatre (in which you will only be given a small corner under the stage to store your costumes) each brings a different way of working. I have made a few mistakes along the way, many due to my ignorance of how things usually operate. However, there have been many great moments along the way. This internship experience has taught me everything that graduate school may have left out. I can walk confidently into a fabric store and ask them to order me something. I am able to comfortable talk with actors about their needs and relay that to the design team. There are many things that you will only learn by experiencing them for yourself. In school I would spend all day at a store trying to find the perfect tie for a character. But in this world, you need to be able to get on the subway and take it to Macy’s, purchase the perfect color tie...
and get it back into the theatre in time for the beginning of the show. There is no time to stall or question yourself; you just have to do it.

I’m constantly surprised at how remarkable the process of a Broadway show is, and yet how completely unremarkable it can be. The production team goes through the same struggles that I have experienced in my time at the University of South Carolina. There is miscommunication and ideas change. I have seen entire costumes cut and scrutinized. Yes, with so much money behind the production the pressure can be intense. It is, in the end, though, theatre. We are all creating towards the same goal and trying to do our best along the way. I am currently in my final weeks of internship, and the show will soon open. It is exciting to know that I had a hand in creating a Broadway musical, something that many designers only dream to one day achieve. I recognize how lucky I am to have gotten this far and am excited with how much further I have to go.

When I first began designing costumes for theatre, my knowledge of the costume design world was so small that I simply didn’t understand the amount of thought that needed to go into the process. With each show I have worked on, my confidence and ability has grown. I am able to look back on my work with Present Laughter, King Lear, and Arcadia and recognize my faults and successes. As I am finishing my internship I see that I don’t have all the answers. I am a young designer who is still trying to find his creative voice. Being able to observe and learn from professionals has allowed me to see what is possible in this career, and I hope to one day be on the same level as them. I am excited to continue working and growing as a designer, assistant, and technician in order to reach my potential as a theatre artist.
REFERENCES

