Concept to Rendering to Shop to Stage: A Process in Costumes

Molly A. Morgan

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Concept to Rendering to Shop to Stage: A Process in Costumes

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad, who are the biggest dreamers I know. Thank you for teaching me to do the same. I love you more than anything in the world.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first thank my mentor Kristin L. Hall for all of her guidance over the last three years. You are a brilliant professional, a captivating teacher and a one of the most kind-hearted people I know. I want to be everything you are.

Thank you, Kelly Renko-Clarkson and Valerie Pruett, for showing me how to be the best and for expecting nothing less of me. Thank you for making the shop a place I looked forward to coming to.

Kennedy-Reid Roberts is my favorite costume designer. You are the sister I needed, the classmate I wanted, and the friend everybody deserves. I don’t know a better person. Thank you.

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Thank you to everyone at Dorset Theatre Festival for giving me my first chance in professional theatre and teaching me what I couldn’t learn in a classroom.

Finally, thank you to every director, designer, undergraduate shop assistant, and run crew member I worked with during my time at the University of South Carolina. You all have made my time here some of the best years of my life.
The costume design and technology program at the University of South Carolina demands that students learn each facet of the profession extensively. The highlights and most growth-inducing experiences for me were the opportunities to design costumes for four main stage productions. I gained an understanding of costume-based research, watercolor and digital rendering, building ideas with a director, working out a cohesive look with other designers, and communicating about garment construction with a costume shop. I also built up my costume construction skills and learned to flat pattern and drape. With opportunities to work professionally, I honed my shop management and interpersonal skills. My thesis provides a closer look at the processes behind each of my four fully realized designs and my development as a technician and theatre professional.
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INTRODUCTION

*How did you end up in costumes?* It’s a question I’ve answered many times, both in the casual setting of new friends around a dinner table and the formal setting of a job interview. Each time I answer it, I am filled with renewed wonder of how I got here.

Growing up, I wanted to be an actor. I was always thrilled to be cast in school plays and I thrived in the excitement of rehearsals and performances. When I was looking at universities, I knew I wanted to be at a school with a BFA in acting. I was accepted into the program at Western Carolina University, but halfway into my first semester, something felt off. I became disenchanted with memorizing lines and trying to force myself into a character’s psyche. However, I had found my way into the costume shop and was falling in love with the dual nature of the work—how it was both tactile and tangible, but also an important, thoughtful, artistic part of a production. As silly as it sounds, I had never really considered that costuming was a job to be had in theatre. Or at least a job that I would be interested in. I quickly became the student employee who worked the most hours and took on the projects that were the most challenging.

Really, it shouldn’t surprise anyone that I feel so at home in costume shops. I grew up in a shop where creativity and manual labor collided. My dad and his mother opened a signage, screen printing and embroidery shop when I was two years old. The work environment is not unlike that of a costume shop. People come in with ideas, and
my dad and his employees turn their ideas into realities. It’s always a process-oriented project. Many times, it starts with a graphic design on a computer, then it may become a burned screen, which is then used to create a print on a t-shirt. The materials and the clients may be different, but the project-based nature of the work is very similar. My dad once told me that he loves the process of a project--seeing it through step after step, knowing that there is a beginning, middle and end. I feel entirely the same way.

When I was nearing the end of my time at Western Carolina, I sat down with my costume professor, Susan Brown-Strauss, and we talked through what the best next step for me would be. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to be a designer or to be on the construction side of things. For my senior thesis, I designed a production of *Intimate Apparel*. I really enjoyed the research and collaborating with the director and being the one who made the artistic choices. As stated, I also very much enjoyed the tactile work within the costume shop. The only thing I knew for certain was that I eventually wanted to teach on a university level. Susan suggested that I look into graduate programs that offered a dual focus in design and technology. Even though I had spent the last five years in college earning degrees in theatre and communications, I decided that this was the best route to achieve my ultimate goal of teaching, and to determine whether I wanted to a designer or technician.

The program at the University of South Carolina was enticing to me because it offered a well-rounded experience in both the design and technology realm. I was excited to work as a graduate assistant in the costume shop as well as have the opportunity to design a show or two in my first year, which is not an opportunity found
in most programs. During my time in graduate school, I was able to design four productions: *The Crucible*, *A Piece of My Heart*, *Shakespeare in Love*, and *The Curious Incident of The Dog in the Night-Time*. At the same time, I was working on every other production in a technical capacity. I’ve heard it said that three years of graduate school is the equivalent of working for ten years in your chosen field. Now as I am very nearly to the other side, I whole-heartedly agree with that statement. I discovered what it truly looks like and means to work collaboratively on a theatre production, I came to my big career decision to pursue costume technology, and simply put, I grew up in my three years at the University of South Carolina.
CHAPTER 1: The Crucible

The first production that I was given to design at the University of South Carolina was The Crucible. Though it is a classic American play, I had never had an experience with it. I had never seen it performed or even read it. The Crucible, written in the 1950s by Arthur Miller as a response to McCarthyism and the Red Scare, presents a fictionalized account of the Salem witch trials. Though it is fictional, the surrounding circumstances were very true and real. The village of Salem, Massachusetts is fraught with terror when local teenage girls begin to accuse townspeople of performing witchcraft, which is forbidden according to their strict Puritanical religion. The accusations spiral so far out of control that higher government officials are called in to conduct court hearings and ultimately sentence the accused.

Upon first reading The Crucible, some themes that stuck out to me were deception, ignorance, and injustice. I knew right away that I wanted the core group of girls (Abigail, Mary, Mercy, Betty and Susanna) to have an air like the stereotypical “mean girls” one might find in a high school today. Upon first meeting with the director, Professor Robert Richmond, he expressed a desire to have the design present an ambiguous time period, though it is traditionally designed within the scope of the seventeenth century. He asked me to watch The Handmaid’s Tale TV series on Hulu, as the world in which the show took place was something he hoped to emulate in our
production. We discussed modern religious groups which live in semi-seclusion under a strict set of rules, such as the Amish, Fundamental Mormons and Mennonites.

Figure 1.1 Research boards for the men and older women of Salem

In beginning my research for the townspeople of Salem, I looked at photos of modern Amish settlements as well as renderings of traditional European folk dress. I also looked to M. Night Shyamalan’s film The Village, as the film tells the story of a society living in seclusion with no communication to the modern world. That world was sustained on agricultural efforts, much like the people of Salem. I watched Handmaid’s Tale and noticed that the handmaid characters were all in variations of a long, modest red dress. Of course, this group in the show most resonated with the young unmarried girls of The Crucible to me, so I started thinking about having all the girls in a uniform
Something about Salem which had always stuck out to me was that the girls all worked for and lived with families, seemingly until they were married. Also, in watching *Handmaid’s Tale*, I immediately related the characters of the “Marthas” with what Tituba’s role in the Parris household was like. I thought the drab colored cross-back aprons and shift dresses of the *Handmaid’s Tale* Marthas were a perfect way to communicate a worker woman in a Puritanical society. I was inspired by *Handmaid’s Tale* to have every female in a little white bonnet cap. I imagined that each Salem female would wear a white cap as a way to show that a head covering was required by their religion.

Figure 1.2 Research board for Danforth and Hathorne

In thinking about Danforth and Hathorne, government officials and outsiders who travel to Salem to make judgements, a movie called *The Adjustment Bureau* came
to mind. *The Adjustment Bureau* is about a group of men who are in charge of every person’s life paths. Their job is to make sure that everyone stays on a predestined path, and when a person strays from that, they ominously appear in dark suits, overcoats and fedoras and make sure the person is “adjusted” back onto their life track. I wanted another element to add to the Danforth/Hathorne look, and decided that mirrored sunglasses would be interesting and contribute something to the character, as though there was a wall between them and the people of Salem, an inability to fully understand what was truly going on behind the accusations. The sunglasses would also help pull them forward in time and give them a lofty presence among the plainly dressed people.

Upon coming to Robert for our second meeting, I showed him the Amish research images and he was interested in the idea of the young girls being in a uniform look, or variations of a uniform look. He asked for a more specific sketch of what I had in mind. He also told me that he was planning a prologue sequence in which the audience would see the girls engaging in dancing and “witchcraft.” I had the idea that the girls could be in different states of undress, but all could have a tutu made from muslin strips and hemp, with the thought that they were sneaking what materials they could from their families’ barns. I also wanted to incorporate the detail of plaid shirts into some of the skirts, as if the girls had taken men’s shirts as a part of the ritual in order to show that Abigail’s objective was to make John Proctor love her.

After discussing Reverend Parris and Hale, Robert mentioned that perhaps a logo could be incorporated into their looks, and I loved that idea. I thought it could help make their religion seem extremely organized and official. I thought even carrying into
Ezekiel Cheever’s and Marshal Herrick’s costumes could help show that the religion and government of Salem coincided.

**Figure 1.3 Research board for the young women of Salem**

I took some time to sketch three different sort of “uniforms” for the young girls based strongly in images of modern Amish girls, but in truth, none of them felt right to me. I began to doubt that a uniform was the right way to go, and fortunately Robert felt the same way. We agreed that the uniforms felt too archaic, as well as hindering the varying personalities of the girls to shine through. I was a little stuck with the girls at this point. I wasn’t sure where to go from there, when my mentor Kristy Hall suggested that maybe I look into high fashion. This felt extremely counter-intuitive to the agricultural vibe we were trying so hard to achieve, but it turned out to be exactly the direction I needed to go. I found a plethora of images depicting farm-inspired high fashion, and it was truly a break-through in my process. These designer fashions used simple materials
and muted colors, but the silhouettes hinted a period that’s not yet been. I pinpointed each of girls’ personalities in at least one image. I had also brought Ann Putnam, Elizabeth Proctor and Rebecca Nurse into the agricultural high fashion realm with research images. This milestone lifted me into the actual sketching process.

Figure 1.4 Renderings of Susanna Walcott, Betty Parris, Abigail Williams, Mary Warren, and Mercy Lewis

In thinking about each of the characters of the young girls, there were details that were important to me to communicate in their dress. For example, Susanna Walcott works for the town doctor, so I imagined that her employer would have a little more money to spare to put Susanna in deep, rich colors, along with a warm, well-made wool cardigan sweater. For Abigail, I chose a gauzy navy blue jersey with a button neckline and a hemline right below her knees to show that she’s chosen the sexiest option available to her. In just the right light, I wanted her dress to be sheer. A button
front on her dress would also work nicely to allow her to show more of her chest as she pleased. I chose the color blue for her because I wanted John Proctor in a blue plaid shirt, so this would help tie her to him. For Betty Parris, I bought an actual used Mennonite girl's dress. It was navy blue and extremely conservative; I wanted to show that she was still very much a child. This was a dress that her father Reverend Parris would have picked for her. The design for Mercy Lewis’ dress was a very slim, straight sheath jumper dress over a white collarless button up. I saw her as the worldliest and style conscious of the girls, and the clean edges of the dress also communicated a sense of severity to me. For Mary Warren, I envisioned her clothing as being old and plain, as well as a little too big for her, as she works for the frugal Proctors. I put her in a long black jumper dress over a white button up; this was a great effect as the actress was the shortest of the girls and in the longest hemline. She looked perfectly pitiful and unaware.
In designing Reverend Parris and Hale, I wanted there a cohesion that said “clergy,” but differences which separated the men’s lifestyles. I chose to have them both in all black, and they both donned the cross logo I designed in gold thread on the left chest of their respective cape and jacket. With Reverend Parris being the head of the church of Salem, and a man who thinks rather highly of himself, I wanted to give him a regal air. I thought a large, stuffy white collar would communicate a sense of self-importance, and a short black cape rather than a sport coat would add another layer of pretension. Meanwhile, for Reverend Hale, I decided on a black shirt with a simple, nondescript clerical white band collar. He wore a plain black sport jacket to show a slight youthfulness and a practicality, as he is known as a travelling minister.
I chose to have blue as the main color for John and Elizabeth Proctor, as they are the protagonists, and to help represent a sense of loyalty to their convictions. I wanted to have a leather vest on John to show a little bit of wildness, and he was in black Carhartt work pants and boots. Elizabeth’s blue shirt was layered with a white thermal shirt and a gray skirt because I wanted a scrappy, hence humble feel to her outfit. Thomas and Ann Putnam, as a couple driven by their greed, were in mostly green. Ann’s dress was made from an emerald micro suede, and she wore heeled boots to further a sense of wealth. Thomas wore a green shirt under a luxe brown suede vest and a gray corduroy sport jacket to show that he does not do too much manual labor. Francis and Rebecca Nurse, as the patriarch and matriarch of Salem, were also in blue and purples. I chose suspenders over a plaid shirt for Francis to help with an elderly quality, and
Rebecca wore a purple knit dress over a black turtleneck and long skirt. I wanted to give her a hint of the scrappiness/humbleness that Elizabeth had, but in a richer framing. I put Giles Corey in corduroy pants and a wool sport jacket over a plaid shirt. I wanted to show him as a man with more money, but also a little eccentric.

Figure 1.7 Renderings of Herrick, Ezekiel Cheever, Danforth, and Hathorne

It was important to me to attempt to set apart Cheever and Herrick in their dress, though they were members of the Salem community. I designed them to have the cross logo on their pieces to tie the religion to the government. Their logos were in black or silver, though, to differentiate them from clergy. For Cheever, I chose a long duster coat inspired by sheriffs of the old American west; this helped give him a sense of menacing authority. I put Herrick in a black suede vest and a military-inspired jacket. They both wore tall boots with their pants tucked in to further a sense of authority and law.
Figure 1.8 Production photo featuring Rebecca Nurse, Ann Putnam, Reverend Parris, Thomas Putnam, Betty Parris, and John Proctor; USC 2018

Danforth and Hathorne were the only characters who basically stayed the same from the beginning of design process. They wore decidedly modern black suits, watches, and mirrored sunglasses. They also had black fedora hats and overcoats.
One challenge I faced in the post-design phase was determining which of the characters needed coats, and navigating if they would take them off onstage, where they would place them, etc. Robert wanted to keep the idea that it was very cold in Salem at the forefront of things, so it was important that characters had appropriate outerwear. The set, designed by Randy Young, was on the minimalist side, and did not allow much furniture, hence not many places to place coats when and if characters needed to remove them onstage. I attended rehearsals when the whole show was being run, and that was extremely helpful as I began to put together entrances and exits.
As our costume shop moved into the production phase, we were just a little under-staffed, and I had to make decisions about which of my designs would actually be made, and which could be purchased. I decided I wanted to Ann Putnam’s, Abigail’s and Mercy’s dresses made, because I had such specific visions for these looks that I knew wouldn’t have otherwise been achieved. We also made all of the caps for the women and Parris’ collar. Everything else was purchased or pulled from our stock.
I was very excited to find that we had the perfect duster coat already in stock for Cheever, and it fit the actor very well. It was a brown color on the slightly orange side, and when we saw it in dress rehearsal, it stood out from the palette of the rest of the show. Under the lights, it was very warm and very orange, a far cry from the cool and muted tones I had chosen for everyone else. After a discussion with Kristy, we thought an option would be to try dyeing it, thought we were not entirely sure how the stiff fabric would react with dye. We tried a dark brown, and thankfully, it took the coat just far enough to make it fit into the palette of the rest of the world of Salem.

Another challenge we faced was the that which the caps posed. I sent in the caps for the women to begin working with them at the same time that we brought in the shoes. I left them with the instruction that if their character was in the presence of a
man who was not their father or husband, they should wear the cap. As the show was being produced in a round space, Robert was immediately concerned that it was too difficult to see the faces of the women with the sides of the caps so close to their faces. He also expressed a concern that they were too fussy, and that they were pulling the show back in time to the seventeenth century. I had been attached to the idea of the caps from the beginning and I did not want to give them up. I thought that they made a strong statement about the simultaneously religious and patriarchal nature of the community of Salem. I took one of the caps back to the shop, where my professors and I played with different ways of folding the band to sit further back on the actresses’ heads. I figured if we took them apart and refolded the band to be slimmer, and added a tie that would be knotted behind the ears and under a bun, it would sit exactly on the head to eliminate any chance of the silhouette of their faces being obstructed. I invited Robert to the shop to see the changes we had made, and he appreciated the accommodations, but again expressed a concern that they were too reminiscent of the 1690s. I brought up The Handmaid’s Tale, which had been such a big source of inspiration to him. The show, set in a near future, has women in caps very similar to what I had designed. This reminder seemed to put his mind at ease and put him back on board with the caps.
At the end of everything, I was very pleased with the result of our efforts. It was clear that our characters were a part of an agricultural-based, highly religious community, and with the shapes and color palette, the time period was extremely ambiguous. I think that the storytelling was very effective through this minimalist, no-place-no-time lens. It helped bring a sense of realness and urgency to the story as themes of false accusations and wrongly placed power shone.
CHAPTER 2: A Piece of My Heart

For my second design at the University of South Carolina, I was assigned with a production of Shirley Lauro’s *A Piece of My Heart*. Written in 1992, the play tells the emotional stories of six different American women who served as nurses during the Vietnam War. The play functions as the women recount their respective experiences, and they fall into different parts to help tell each other’s stories. The script also calls for one “American Man,” who plays the role of any man that is presented, but six men were cast for our production to represent these different parts. As the “American Man” is various soldiers for the entire first act, this directorial decision worked as the men filled the space and helped set the scene of Vietnam. Senior Instructor David Britt directed the production, and he encouraged me to embrace that the women, as the audience sees them, are in a state of remembering. The play is about this traumatic event of war that ties them all together, even though they weren’t necessarily there at the same time or serving in the same specific hospital.

Reading the play and getting a sense for each character’s background and personality, I knew right away that I wanted the costumes for act one to reflect each woman’s best version of herself before she went to Vietnam. Each woman has such an excited energy about going to Vietnam; she has glamorous ideas of what the work is going to be like. I think because they become so disillusioned during their time serving, they look back on life before Vietnam through a romanticized lens. What a universal
truth as well—don’t we all look back on times before any type of innocence is lost with exaggerated nostalgia? Because the play is set circa late 1960s-early 1970s, I also wanted to capture the different facets of typical American life. I looked at figures of pop culture that the characters might relate to or try to emulate; I also looked at archival department store catalogues to research what an average American young woman might actually be wearing.

Figure 2.1 Production photo featuring (left to right) Steele, Whitney, Sissy, Martha, and Leeann; USC 2018

The women of the cast had two major looks: Act I and Act II. As the audience is introduced to them in Act I, they are all in outfits that show off their pre-war personality and/or occupation. During Act I, the women land in Vietnam for the first time, and four of them begin their job as nurses. I had these four women (Leeann, Whitney, Sissy and Martha) put on a camouflage jacket over their Act I looks to establish the shift in setting. I considered that the women would have actually worn a light blue nurse’s dress, but
none of them leave the stage to allow for a change during Act I. I also thought this was a strong choice because leaving the women in the looks that reflected who they were before coming to Vietnam gave them a certain vulnerability. I spoke with the local Army Navy store in Columbia and they helped me gather the Vietnam War era camouflage jackets. I had the costume shop sew red cross patches onto the sleeves to mark them as nurses. Neither MaryJo or Steele put on a camouflage jacket because MaryJo was sent to Vietnam as entertainment and Steele was an Army intelligence officer. The set, by undergraduate design student Curtis Smoak was very minimal and painted black, so the only visual cues given to the audience to signify the setting change were those provided by the camouflage jacket addition and the shift in lighting, by graduate lighting design student Allison Newcombe.

Figure 2.2 Production photo featuring Martha, Leeann, and Sissy, with MaryJo in the background; USC 2018
While Act I has the women remembering and recounting their time in Vietnam, Act II shows what their lives are like after returning home. All of them suffer from PTSD and cope with it in different ways. I planned for all of them to maintain some element from their Act I costume, whether in color or cut or style, to reflect that the women are still who they are, however war-torn. In general, the Act II costumes were a sadder version of what they wore in Act I.

Figure 2.3 Research and rendering of Maryjo

Maryjo fronts an all-girl band and is going to Vietnam to entertain American soldiers. Because of her sugary Texan drawl accompanied by guitar strumming, my mind immediately went to a young Dolly Parton. The half-up beehive was a hairstyle common to many a female vocalist of the 1960s, but Dolly’s hair was in a league of its own. I loved the almost caricature proportion of hair piled on her head in photos from her early days in music. I also researched singers who actually toured in Vietnam for the
purpose of entertaining troops. One starlet who spent a significant amount of time doing so was Nancy Sinatra. Nancy wore go-go boots and some version of a mini dress, always. One of my favorite photos I found shows Nancy on a stage in front of hundreds of American soldiers in their jungle green, and she’s wearing a striped mini dress and go-go boots. The photo is black and white, but I like to imagine that she would have owned some kind of red, white and blue outfit to show her patriotic spirit while performing. For Maryjo, I designed a little stars-and-stripes dress paired with white knee-high boots. I also wanted her in a Dolly-inspired half-up beehive, and of course, cat eye liner.

Figure 2.4 Production photos featuring Maryjo, Act I vs. Act II; USC 2018

By Act II, Maryjo returns home a victim of rape and her bright, carefree disposition has completely dissipated. Her agent refuses to pay what is due her, and she struggles financially as much as she does emotionally. She seeks out male attention and
I imagine that her clothing would show her lack in money and her desire to be desired. I decided on tight bell bottom jeans and a black tank top with a rose applique. The beehive was combed out and her hair was parted in the center.

Figure 2.5 Research and rendering of Leeann

Leeann is a nursing student promised good money to pay for her last year of school in return for some time serving as a military nurse. She is self-proclaimed hippie, Nixon-hater and a war protestor. She is told over and over that she does not have to go to Vietnam, that people must volunteer for Vietnam, and hopes to work in Hawaii. When beginning research for Leeann, I was drawn to old photos of Joan Baez, who was one of the founding fathers of the “hippie music” movement. She would have been an artist that Leann undoubtedly played on her record player. I designed Leeann with a very Joan Baez striped boatneck shirt tucked into bell bottom jeans with leather huaraches sandals. I also had our actress part her hair down the middle. Once we got
into dress rehearsal, it came to my attention that the striped shirt with the jeans I had picked out was not particularly flattering on our actress, and something about the material of the shirt read too modern under the lighting design. I ended up picking a subtly tie-dyed purple bell sleeve peasant top from our stock for her to wear, but ultimately, I think it was a stronger choice. It read more anti-war than the stripes, even though I had avoided tie-dye intentionally in an attempt not to stereotype Leeann into a caricature hippie. The tie-dye was subtle enough that it was not an issue for me.

Figure 2.6 Production photo featuring Leeann in act II; USC 2018

In Act II, upon returning to the states, Leeann works in an amputee ward and goes back to protesting the war. Because I feel that even today she would be one of those leftover hippies still in beads and flowy dresses, I put her in another peasant blouse, this one looking a little more worn. I also put her in ripped jeans to reflect the anger that she felt toward the war, now that she’s had a personal brush with it.
Whitney is a junior league-er, raised in a home where her mother takes her coffee in a cup and saucer. Her plan to become a boarding school teacher changes when she hears that she could be stationed as an army nurse in the sophisticated city of Saigon, where the cosmopolitans speak French. She is the Mad Men television series’ Betty Draper, sans the ad executive husband. I immediately saw little a matching jacket and skirt set for her in a pastel color. I pulled research for her mostly from late 1960s Sears catalogues. We had a great authentic vintage light pink wool skirt suit in stock, with a standing collar and quarter-length sleeves. It went perfectly with Whitney’s line, “high, prim, proper collars and sleeves right down to my elbows.” I also put Whitney in a pearl necklace, stockings, white kitten heels and had her hair styled to flip out at the ends.
For Act II, Whitney has become a social worker with a drinking problem in her post-Vietnam life. To echo back to who she used to be, I wanted her in another skirt suit. I chose a late 1970s light tan blazer and skirt set. The color was absolutely pale and sad and reflected a sense of fading in her spirit. The skirt was a bit longer than the pink one to age her a bit more, and she wore sensible navy colored heels.
Sissy is all-American girl next door from Erie, Pennsylvania. She is from a conservative family and has taken her time to grow up, “playing with dolls ‘til I was thirteen years old.” She talks about speaking with her school counselor to decide her career path, and I wanted to show her youth and a sense of naivety in her look. In my research I looked at mid-century school girl fashion. I found a great spread from *Seventeen* magazine circa 1968, which featured a dozen girls in plaid jumpers and skirts. For her I designed a plaid skirt, red turtleneck sweater, navy tights and heeled Mary Janes. However, in our stock I found a vintage wool plaid jumper dress with a mod-inspired straight-line silhouette, dropped waist and pleating. I paired it with a white turtleneck sweater, navy tights and a wide red headband. For act II, Sissy has become a wife and mother, so I chose a mid-calf wool plaid skirt in a muted blue as her remnant piece and a beige cardigan sweater.
Martha has dreamed of being a nurse since she was a little girl and she comes from military parents. She has to assert over and over again that she is ready for Vietnam and that she can handle it. I wanted her to have a decisiveness which set her apart. I decided that even though three of the other women were also nurses, Martha should be the only one in nurse whites. Unlike the other women, the idea of going to Vietnam to serve was a childhood dream come true. I think she sees the best version of herself in a nurse’s uniform. So, for Act I, she wore a clean white nurse’s dress, stockings and bright white shoes.
By Act II, Martha is teaching young nurses. I changed her into a 1970s nurse’s white scrub top and flared white pants. This helped show the passage of time, I think, that Martha was still in nursing, but that the changing times made way for her to wear pants in her profession.
As one of the eldest of the women, Steele had a backstory that she had spent time teaching music, auditioned for the Army band and didn’t make the cut, edited an Army newspaper and finally worked as a Prisoner of War Interrogator and was in Strategic Intelligence. Steele is the only African American woman in the play, and for her research I pulled a few images of television’s *Julia*. I think Julia is someone that Steele would have found a connection with. Because so much of her life was tied up in being a part of the Army, I put her in Army green. She wore the uniform of women who had actually served in Vietnam, in jungle green pants and matching button up shirt with an Army patch. As she stayed in the Army after returning from Vietnam, I had her stay in uniform; to me, it’s what she would have been most comfortable in regardless of her circumstances.
Because the American Man plays different soldiers for all of Act I, I put the six actors playing those various roles in the same Army green t-shirt, fatigue pants and combat boots. Seeing all these figures in the uniform really helped put the audience in a specific place. As some of the characters the men play are stronger than others, I had accessories they could add to help those characters shine more. For example, the character of Hank is a soldier with hippie tendencies and Leeann falls in love with him. I pulled a peace sign necklace which the actor slipped on when he went into playing Hank.
For Act II, I did not have these actors do a complete costume change, even though they played all civilian roles in this half of the play. My thought was that the women would see a soldier in every man she looked at after returning home. Therefore, they wore either a sport coat or a more casual jacket over their fatigues. Casual jackets in leather and denim made more sense when they were portraying a group of war protesters, but the sport coats worked better when they were portraying a father or businessman.
At the end when all of the men and women unite at the memorial wall, I had them in the casual jackets. There was also an actor used in this scene who was not in the rest of the play. He portrayed a veteran who claims to recognize Leeann from his time at a hospital in Vietnam. The director wanted this man to be unrecognizable to the audience. I put him in a sweatshirt, plain brown zip jacket, jeans and a Vietnam veteran baseball cap. Because he was really the only character who could represent America 1982 in his costume, his jeans were loose, and his sweatshirt was a teal color very much of the decade. I also shopped for a period correct baseball cap.

*A Piece of My Heart* was a great challenge for me because I got to costume these very specific personalities which came from all different places in America, but all in the same era. Admittedly, it is my favorite time period in terms of fashion, so it was fun for me to dive into the research and embrace the thought behind each look. I think that my
idea for each woman to the best version of herself in Act I, and then a faded, grown up version in Act II was well represented.
CHAPTER 3: *Shakespeare in Love*

Designing *Shakespeare in Love* by Lee Hall was one of the biggest challenges I encountered during my time as an MFA candidate. Along with its large cast, the play demands a very specific time and place be represented. Being placed in late 16th century London, the world of *Shakespeare in Love* is quite removed, to say the least, from 21st century Columbia, South Carolina. The play gives a fictionalized account of how William Shakespeare wrote one of his own plays, *Romeo and Juliet*. As “Will” is under pressure from his producer to write a new play, he meets and falls in love with the untouchable upper-class Lady Viola DeLesseps. He spots Viola mouthing along to the performance of one of his plays. Meanwhile, Viola dreams of becoming an actor, an aspiration which is all but impossible due to her gender and social class. She disguises herself and auditions for Will’s next play in progress, which is inspired by her. Will discovers she is both actor and muse and falls in love with her all the more. As they scramble to keep their secrets, antagonist Lord Wessex looms, threatening marriage to Viola and a voyage to a life in the New World. The play ends with Viola performing as Juliet and Will as Romeo in the premier of *Romeo and Juliet* before Queen Elizabeth. They share their final moments together in character, and choice-less Viola is wed to Lord Wessex and whisked away on a ship shortly after.

Upon first reading the script, I knew that this show was meant to be spectacle of costumes; this is a show where an audience wants to be swept away with opulent
costume that they don’t normally get to see. I dove into research of the traditional dress and was first determined to sort out how I would find and assign these foreign Elizabethan styles to the personalities within the production in a way that helped the story along. Upon my first meeting with our director, guest artist Andrew Schwartz, he presented me with the single thought that he wanted to bring modern elements into our production. He wanted the show to be decidedly Elizabethan era, but with a modern aesthetic. Through our first discussion, we came to the conclusion that the costume design at its core, should bring attention to the separation that existed between Will Shakespeare and Viola De Lesseps, highlighting their forbidden love.

Figure 3.1 Research board for Will and the lower-class theatre group

I was struck with how two groups of people seemed to exist within the story: the “theatre crowd” and the “court crowd.” Those without money and those with too much. Those who conform and those who don’t. I began to think about what this looked like in
2018, what the nonconformists are wearing these days, my mind went to boys in skinny jeans and skater shoes. I especially liked images I found of “moto jeans,” which is a relatively new style of denim with symmetrical patches of ridges over the thighs, knees, and/or shins. There is something about them which echoes back to old world workmanship, a certain roughness or utilitarian-ness. I decided right away that my cool theatre boys should be in this, especially Marlowe, Will and Ned Alleyn. I was hooked on the idea of seeing these ultra-hip jeans with a beat-up leather doublet. I also decided early on that I wanted some of the guys in skate shoes. I found that an all-black high top Van echoed the shape of short leather boot, but still held a distinct modern quality.

Along with the modern “skater boy,” I was inspired by images of artists like Bob Dylan and others of the underground 1960s New York scene. Andrew also responded to this thought, as he saw Will and Marlowe as a type of “bad boys.”

Figure 3.2 Renderings of Ned and Sam
I decided to put my theatre crowd in mostly blacks and dark grays with an occasional pop of color. For instance, Sam’s doublet was cloth and while mostly black, the peplum includes yellow, as he should appear softer because he is the theatre crowd’s resident young lady player. Ned wore a red leather doublet to reflect his bold sense of self. I wanted Marlowe to appear in the most modern-leaning dress as one thing that Andrew wanted to spotlight was Marlowe’s way of always being one step ahead of Will. Marlowe was another real writer of the time, who was both a friend and a little bit of a mentor to Will. Marlowe wore Vans, black skinny jeans and a leather jacket with brocade cuffs and shoulders. I also had the actor wear his hair shaved all around except the top of his head.

Figure 3.3 Renderings of Marlowe and Will
Will was in leather boots, skinny jeans and an Elizabethan black leather sleeved doublet, which hung open for the whole show. I originally planned for him to wear a black t-shirt under the doublet, but in tech rehearsals it seemed to close him off, and it also read a little too modern. I was advised to put him in a white poet shirt, but I felt very strongly against this because it contradicted our core thought to have Will in dark colors as the non-conformist bad boy. I also did not think a poet shirt would work because the sleeves of his doublet was cut in sections and held together with buckles, so any kind of bulky sleeve would stick through the gaps unattractively. After a little internet digging, I found a modern slim cut black poet shirt. The sleeves were close fitting to accommodate the doublet sleeves, but the neck opening was lace-able and would allow for more of the actor’s neck and chest to show, opening him up to be lit better.

Figure 3.4 Renderings of Henslowe and Burbage
Within the ragamuffin theatre crowd along with the young and hungry young men was also a couple of older men—Henslowe and Burbage. Henslowe is the owner and manager of the Rose Theatre where Will and the other actors perform. Burbage is a mature and respected actor in the community. The challenge with these characters was showing that there was an age difference, as all of the actors in our production were undergraduate students in their late teens and early twenties. I decided to have these men dress more of the time with less of the modern twist I had given to the other guys.

Figure 3.5 Production photo featuring Henslowe and Will; USC 2018
I saw Henslowe as a sharp, wiry and eccentric gentleman who both cares about making art and keeping his creditors at bay. The actor cast is a tall and slight young man, and I wanted to emphasize his natural thinness. He wore a textured cream shirt with billowing sleeves under a short-sleeved close-fitting leather tunic with rough lacing and buckles. He wore black jeans and tall brown leather boots. He also wore a ruff which we distressed to show that he wanted to put forth class and dignity, though he didn’t necessarily have the wealth to back it up. Burbage, a well-known actor, is supremely confident and has much experience in his field. I chose a more traditional Elizabethan silhouette for him to put him outside of Will’s green and struggling friends, but I kept the color muted and brown to show that he was not among the elite. He wore knee-length ballooning trunkhose with a codpiece and a matching jerkin. He also wore a hat with a feather.

Figure 3.6 Production photo featuring Fennyman and Will; USC 2018
A character that really exists between the theatre and court is Fennyman. However, I think if I were to choose one side for him to belong to visually, it would be the court. Fennyman is a producer, and funds Henslowe’s productions at the Rose. He is a wealthy character, and the play opens with him and his henchman threatening Henslowe over hot coals, and Henslowe promising that Will is going to write a hit play that will make him a lot of money. Fennyman is a demanding, gruff fellow, but is also the grandiose guy at the bar buying drinks for everyone. I wanted to put him in rich jewel tones, that perhaps conjured the tiniest subconscious thought that he was a little like Santa Claus. He wore gold slashed trunkhose, a ruffled white shirt, and a red velvet tunic vest with gold trimmings. He also wore brown suede boots to which I added spherical gold buttons, and a red velvet sugarloaf hat. The gold pieces on him I think especially helped tie him to the higher court class.

Figure 3.7 Research board for Queen Elizabeth and high society characters
For my conformist Queen Elizabeth-centric crowd, I aimed to keep up a theme of white and gold and opulence, which leaned a little harder into period correct dress. I was inspired by images of 2018’s Met Gala, with its theme of “heavenly bodies.” Queen Elizabeth appeared in a pure white look of the traditional Queen Elizabeth silhouette, though I added iridescent white make up around her eyes in a high modern fashion way to put her over the top and to give just a slight bridge between the two worlds of theatre and court.

Figure 3.8 Renderings of Queen Elizabeth and Wessex

Wessex wore a white and gold doublet/trunkhose suit with a one-shoulder cape to give him the strongest air of pretension. I also had him in white tights and velvet sequined shoes. With Wessex, it was especially important to me for him to be in a completely filigreed white and gold look because I wanted to play on the traditional notion that heroes should wear white and villains should wear black. In my design,
white represented wealth and privilege. White shows any dirt, and these characters in bright white could wear it without any risk of dirtying it because they lead lives of no manual labor. Wessex needed to represent everything that Will was not—pretension and entitlement, all glitter and a distinct lack of earnestness.

Figure 3.9 Production photo featuring Queen Elizabeth and Wessex; USC 2018

While the stark visual difference between Wessex’s and Will’s clothing worked very well for their fight scenes, white and gold being equal to privilege meant that it was also a staple in Viola’s wardrobe. It put a strong emphasis on the differences between her situation and Will’s in the scenes that they share.
Viola had a total of five looks: three dresses, the Thomas Kent look and a dressing gown. The first two dresses were day gowns, and the third was her wedding dress. The day gowns were gold, as I wanted to put a little separation between her and Wessex. Because of the timeline on which we produced this show, the costume shop was only able to make one of Viola’s dresses. I chose for her wedding dress to be the one that was made because it is the one she ended the show in, and she wore it to play Juliet in the play within the play. Obviously, this dress was white as it was for a bride, but it also worked to show that she was choosing to marry Wessex—he wore white and now she would too.
For her Thomas Kent look, she wore a blue doublet and trunkhose set with gold accents and white tights. Among the other actors in their edgy dark jeans and vans, this made her stand out as an outsider from a higher class to the world of the starving artists. To take care of her hair for these scenes, I chose for her to tuck it into a hat. This worked best for the choreography when Will discovered she was not Thomas Kent, but Viola. My biggest obstacle during tech week was figuring out Thomas Kent’s mustache. I bought a simple fake mustache and planned for her to apply it with toupee tape because I was advised that it would stick well but would also peel off easily. There are a few moments in the show when the actress must transform very quickly. A big lesson I learned is that something that will require as much business as a mustache that’s on and off through a show should go into rehearsal within the first couple of weeks. We discovered during tech that our actress’ sweat prevented the mustache from staying in
place, and when it came time to peel it off, it was very painful for her, and it left her upper lip visibly red. I brainstormed about other options, and I came up with a black cream crayon. She would draw it on and use strategically hidden make up wipes to take it off when she needed to. This solution worked perfectly. After talking her through it, the actress and I also found that she could keep a makeup wipe in the “breast binding” which she wore under all of her looks and that way, it was always within reach for her to remove the mustache.

Figure 3.12 Production photo featuring Henslowe, Viola as Thomas Kent, Ned, Kate, and ensemble members; USC 2018

The binding is arguably the most iconic piece of costume in the play, as one of the most beloved scenes from the movie is when Will discovers that Thomas Kent is Viola. He takes the end of the binding and spins her free from it. Of course, to avoid nudity on stage, the binding had to be well thought-out and planned. After discussing
options with our Costume Shop Manager, Kelly Renko-Clarkson, we decided the best solution was to build a zippered corset, cover it in strips of muslin that were sewn down, and then attach a strip of muslin that could then be wound around the actor’s body and tucked into itself. This way, when she was spun free, there would be a sure stopping point.

Perhaps the most climactic scene of Shakespeare in Love is the play within the play. Alongside the compelling romance between Will and Viola is his race to finish Romeo and Juliet in time for its premier performance at the Rose. In an already superfluous production, my challenge here was to add another layer of showy-ness to help convey the spirit of the play within the play. Assuming that Fennyman has not given the group a generous costume budget, I decided to make this scene more about
adding pieces than complete costume changes for the actors. I also decided that these pieces should be bright and almost caricature of the period. A large plot point of this scene revolves around Sam not being able to play Juliet anymore because his voice has dropped. I put him in a burgundy velvet gown with bright and bold embroidery around the hem and puffed princess sleeves. I also conferred with Senior Instructor Valerie Pruett, wig and makeup designer, about a fussy wig that he could wear for this scene to add some comedy. We chose a large, fake-looking wig of ringlet curls. The actor who played Juliet’s nurse had also played Robert De Lesseps and I had him grow facial hair. He wore a large white headpiece and an orange plaid skirt as the nurse, and his facial hair also helped add comedy to the scene. Everyone else wore bright, cheesy doublets and capes, except for Will, who had stepped in to fill in for Romeo, the part that Viola as Thomas Kent had been cast to play. Because Viola sneaks away from her wedding to the theatre and ends up taking over Juliet for Sam in her beautiful white gown, I wanted to make sure that Will was on the same level as her visually. I wanted them to both be beautiful as they played the star-crossed lovers whose situation so closely mirrored their own. Will wore a black satin jacket with inset purple velvet on the sleeves and minor gold accents. With Viola in bright white and Will in a luxe black, it brought a heightened sense of collision between their two worlds and highlighted the tragedy of the end of their romance together.
Finding this world between an Elizabethan and modern aesthetic was definitely a test of my research and analytical abilities. Thanks to direction from Andrew Schwartz that was pointed, and also left me room for my own artistic discoveries and ideas, his concept of the cohabitation of the frivolous court and the grungy theatre brought to life a compelling and timeless love story.
CHAPTER 4: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

I was thrilled to be chosen as the costume designer for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* because I had never before designed a show set completely in modern day. Based on a book of the same name, the play presents the account of Christopher Boone, a teenage boy with autism who sets out on a mission to solve the mystery of who killed his neighbor’s dog. In his sleuthing for the killer, he finds out that his mother is not dead like his father had told him, leading him to brave public transportation on his own in order to find her. *Curious Incident* explores themes of ability, reality and the different ways that love can look. I decided to digitally render the designs using Photoshop, rather than using pencil and watercolor paint, as I had been working with Photoshop in my design classes. Because modern fashion is the period of dress with which I am the most familiar, I was faced with a new challenge I had not yet encountered in my three previous designs. It demanded that I really think outside of the box to create an interesting design. I had many initial ideas for this show that did not manifest, and I think this show more than any of the others taught me to listen closely to notes and to edit myself.

Speaking for the first time with director Professor Robert Richmond, we agreed that the costumes of the play should be heavily based in reality, but in a heightened sense. The story is narrated by Christopher, whose autism leads him to be often over-stimulated by his surroundings. Robert had an idea that there should be moments
within the play that really riff on Christopher’s imagination and feelings, and that provide a spectacle for the audience to enjoy. He told me that he planned to hire a choreographer, and that while he wasn’t really looking at creating dance numbers, movement would be an important component to our production. We talked loosely about what that could mean for costumes, and lights in costumes were a thought to which we kept returning. With this in mind, I read the script again, especially looking for moments that were emotional triggers for Christopher. I found the two people that elicited the biggest responses in Christopher were his mother and father. They were always part of the moments that took Christopher out of reality and deep into his mind.

One of my first ideas was to install lights into the collar of Ed’s (Christopher’s father) shirt. Ed gets angry at several points in the story, and he also lies to Christopher and then reveals the truth. I thought it might be interesting to see a red glow on his face from the inside of his collar. My thought was that it could go from faint to bright and vice versa as his anger built and dissipated, or as he was lying. Judy, Christopher’s mother, exists purely in his memory and imagination for the first half of the play. Christopher thinks of her only in a positive light and has very happy memories of her. My idea for her was to have her in a light colored sweater that glowed yellow during his memories.

Another moment that I saw as very impactful and revealing about Christopher’s psyche is when he talks about pretending to be an astronaut. I though this could be a really great opportunity to play with lights in his costume. The set design by Professor Jim Hunter had a distinctive galactic theme with planets hanging from the ceiling and a
lovely deep blue paint over the floor. I thought it could be compelling to have
Christopher turn his jacket inside out to reveal a white NASA astronaut’s jacket with a
constellation pattern in white lights on it. I also wanted to find an astronaut’s helmet for
him to put on during this moment.

My third sort of big idea was to somehow highlight the people that Christopher
saw as “strangers.” Christopher was very distinctive about the way he classified
people—either they were someone he knew, or they were a stranger. Especially in
crowded scenes like when Christopher is navigating the various train stations, he is
surrounded by strangers. Going back to the book, I thought about the sheet of paper
that Christopher’s teacher, Siobhan gives him to help him discern emotions by the look
on people’s faces. It includes simple drawings of a smiling face, frowning face, etc. In the
book, Christopher carries this paper around to help know how the people around him
are feeling. I thought it might be an interesting call back to the book to have the
“strangers” in our production have masks with these different emotive faces, and
maybe have them on sticks because some of the strangers speak and they could move
them away from their faces for their dialogue. Another idea I had for the strangers was
that they could all wear Groucho Marx glasses with the plastic nose and mustaches. I
had reservations about that idea, however, because to me, it could go comedic in a way
that we didn’t want.
I came to Robert with these four ideas for how to magnify the whimsical side of our production, and the one that really stuck was Christopher’s NASA jacket. He imagined some really stylized choreography for this moment when Christopher is talking about going to outer space, which also involved members of the ensemble. We discussed having lights on ensemble members in this moment, because it was so otherworldly. Robert feared that the masks and the glasses for the strangers would be confusing and involve too much business for the actors, and so I let go of those ideas and turned my focus toward designing a light-up element for the ensemble to slip easily in and out of. I found a shop on Etsy that creates rave wear that is truly spectacular, and so I showed Robert images of sheer capes that resembled wings with lights woven through them, tutus with lights around them, and a dress formed by circles in varying sizes that lit up. He was very drawn to the dress option, and I suggested that we create a
smock that both the men and women could slip on and off with the same circular light technology. He gave me the green light on that idea (pun intended) and then my mentor, Professor Kristy Hall, and I began researching how we could build it. We figured out that the circles were round mirrors with a strip of LED lights facing the inside so that the lights were multiplied. We drafted a pattern for a smock and wired up circles all round it. After sitting in a run of the show and talking it over with Robert, we determined that the best point for these to be used would be when Christopher is talking about his love for outer space. The ensemble emerged from the four various voms around the theatre in the “orb smocks” and performed choreography in the smocks around Christopher, who was in his lit helmet and jacket.

Figure 4.2 Renderings of Christopher

Designing Christopher’s look seemed like a simple task, but there was much more to it than meets the eye. I looked at lots of images of teenage boys on websites for
schools with autism specific programs. It was of utmost importance that I get his look right because he never leaves the stage and so his look must make sense for all of the situations in which he finds himself. At the time of designing this show, my parents were hosting an exchange student from China who was autistic. His name is Thomas, and he was a great resource as I chose Christopher’s clothing. People with autism usually have skin sensitivities, and once they find an item of clothing in which they are comfortable, and causes them no discomfort or distraction, they wear that item over and over. Christopher makes it known that his favorite color is red, and I knew early on that I wanted him to have a soft red jacket. I thought of this piece as something that he would wear constantly and find security in. I chose a hunter green polo shirt to go under it, and loose-fitting jeans. I also chose a red athletic shoe. Christopher is not someone who is overly concerned with his style, but thinks of the comfort and functionality of all of his clothing.

Figure 4.3 Production photo featuring Christopher and ensemble members; USC 2019
Christopher wears an orange rain jacket while on his adventure through the train system to get to his mother’s home in London. Watching a run, I saw that Robert had made this segment of the play very stylized as well, and a big moment of heightened reality for Christopher as his senses were bombarded with over-stimulation. I had the idea that lights in the orange jacket could add to the spectacle, and so we installed strips of LED lights around the edges of the jacket on the inside so that they glowed through.

Figure 4.4 Production photo featuring Christopher, Siobhan, and ensemble members; USC 2019

One particular challenge in designing Christopher was that the actor portraying him was 30 years old. Christopher is 15 years old, and we had to make the actor look that young. During one of his fittings, Valerie Pruitt, hair and makeup designer, had him sit down and we played with styling his hair different ways. We settled on pushing his hair down into bangs. It created a very no-fuss, low maintenance look that was just right for the character. We also instructed the actor on darkening his eyebrows, adding pink
color to his cheeks, and placing concealer under his eyes to help him look as youthful as possible.

![Figure 4.5 Rendering of Siobhan](image)

Siobhan is Christopher’s teacher, and she appears in much of the play as she is reading what Christopher has written. She is someone whose opinion Christopher values very much, and someone that he can trust. As an autistic person who does not easily make conversation, Siobhan is a safe place for Christopher. I wanted to make her look as inviting and sweet as possible. I was inspired by the character of Ms. Edwards in the movie *Bridge to Terabithia* when designing her. Ms. Edwards is the teacher that all the kids adore, and she has a really fun and interesting sense of style. I decided that Siobhan should have a similarly fun wardrobe. As someone who works with differently
abled children, I think she is someone who radiates with patience and joy. I chose bright patterned pants and a purple blazer for her. She also wore bright green framed glasses.

Figure 4.6 Rendering of Ed

For Christopher’s father, Ed, whose occupation was owning a small plumbing business, I chose grey work pants, a plaid long sleeve shirt, and a fleece vest with his business logo. He has a man who works for him named Rhodri, who I put in coveralls. My idea was that Ed owns the business and tries to look professional but also must dress for practicality, while Rhodri is doing most of the dirty work. I also wanted to highlight Ed’s plainness and down-to-earth-ness when standing next to the man his wife left him for.
Judy, Christopher’s mother, is a wide-open door. I recognized there were many routes I could take with her, but I knew for sure that I wanted her to have a transformation between the acts. For act one, as she lived in Christopher’s memory, she first appeared in a blued striped swim top and denim shorts because Christopher describes a memory in which she wears this. When we see her again, I decided on a sweet and flowy red floral dress. This was the best version of her that Christopher was remembering, and so I chose his favorite color and a modest cut on the dress to emphasize that she was a loving mother. For Act II, I was thinking about how Judy, in her mind, has gotten away from a situation that felt like a prison to her. She felt trapped and unhappy, and so now that she has a new life, my idea was that she’s taken on a new style that really contrasted how we had seen her in Christopher’s memory. I saw her as
having a rebellious, sophisticated rock and roll side that has emerged. I chose heeled black booties, black jeans, a rust top and a velvet kimono. She also wore chunky metal jewelry and a leather jacket.

Figure 4.8 Production photo featuring Roger, Judy, and Policeman; USC 2019

In the same way that Judy of act II was fashion forward and stylish, I wanted Roger Shears to be on a similar level. Roger has left his wife (whom we know as Mrs. Shears) for Judy, and they have moved to London. Roger holds a job in finance, so I chose navy pants, spiffy cognac oxford shoes, a button up, and a wool coat in a modern cut. Everything was a slim fit to help him look all the more smart and handsome. My goal was for him to look a bit more worldly and exciting next to Ed.
For our production, a man was cast as Mrs. Alexander, though we did not change the gender of the character. I presented a few images of elderly women in an English garden club to Robert. I thought a garden club sounded exactly like the kind of thing that Mrs. Alexander would be part of, and I was especially drawn to an image of a woman in a broad hat and funk floral dress. Luckily, Robert felt that this image was right for Mrs. Alexander as well. We agreed that a bohemian and quirky look would suit Mrs. Alexander nicely in an effort to capitalize on that element of amplified reality that we had talked about. I chose a colorful and filigreed top, wide legged teal yoga pants, and tie-dyed crocs.
It was important to us that the remaining ensemble characters also filled out Christopher’s world in an exaggerated way. We had left behind my idea about smiley face masks and Groucho Marx glasses and I spent time watching rehearsal and analyzing bits of their dialogue to design unique and unusual looks for them. They rotate through such small tidbits of parts, and I wanted them each to be impactful, interesting and stimulate an audience reaction. The first opportunity I had to really choose what a character would be was the scene early in the play where Christopher knocks on his neighbors’ doors to try to get information on Wellington the dog’s murder. For this scene, I incorporated a drag queen in her red silk robe, wig cap, and a half-done face of makeup, a stoner girl in a Baja hoodie, and a leather jacket-clad bully.
The next time when it was critical that the ensemble each have a distinctive look was the long sequence when Christopher was navigating the trains and train stations. He has run-ins with all sorts of personalities, and all of the actors had at least one quick change during this sequence. The script describes a pair of “drunks” coming from a sporting event, so I outfit them in a hoodie and jersey from our director’s favorite UK football team, Manchester United. The script also included a “punk girl,” from whom I chose a Union Jack miniskirt, leopard fur jacket, bright pink wig, and combat boots. A more ambiguous character was a “man with socks.” I thought about what kind of man might wear tall socks that Christopher would notice, and I decided to make him a tennis player. He wore tall white socks with red and blue rings, small white shorts and red sweatbands. There were also some various policemen, security guards and underground information people whom I outfitted in the appropriate attire after a bit of research on
what people in those British professions actually wear. There were a couple of times in the script when the ensemble needs to fade into the background a little more, such as when Christopher is in the park with Mrs. Alexander and she tells him that his mother had become romantically involved with Mr. Shears. I had muted cold weather coats and hats for each of the ensemble in these instances. A challenge that came with all these actors changing so often, and being in our arena-style space with multiple voms was coordinating with our dressers about where costume pieces should be preset and where they should go to help the actors with quick changes. We recruited extra dressers for the show because this was such a big element, and this was definitely the part of tech that required the most brain power from our costume team.

Figure 4.12 Production photo featuring Ed, Christopher, and Judy; USC 2019

Designing *Curious Incident* was easily the most rewarding project I had worked on so far in my graduate career because it was such a demanding and detail-oriented
show. It gave me the opportunity to really pump my artistic muscles as I brainstormed about how to create an amplified reality around Christopher. This show more than any of the others showed me what it means to be part of a big production vision and to collaborate.
CHAPTER 5: Professional Development

Draping

Upon completion of my first year as a costume design and technology MFA, I had come to the realization and decision that I wanted to pursue the technology side of the profession, specifically patterning and draping. I only took a flat patterning class that first year, so I wasn’t draping yet, but I really enjoyed the methodical process of seeing a rendering through to actualization.

Figure 5.1 Photos of dresses flat patterned for Mariah (Twelfth Night) and Elinor (Sense and Sensibility)
During that first year as a graduate assistant in the costume shop, I flat patterned two looks. The first was Maria’s act two dress in *Twelfth Night* (designed by Professor Kristy Leigh Hall), and the second was Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility* (designed by guest artist Mariah Hale). I enjoyed the troubleshooting and even the challenge of changes by the designer in a fitting. For example, Maria’s rendering had her in a dress with a cowl-neck bodice. Upon the first fitting, Kristy decided that a different neckline would be more suitable. She asked that I change it to a bodice with a wide waistband in a diamond shape in the front and a V-shape neckline. I re-drafted the bodice and we had a second mockup fitting.

The challenge for me while making Elinor’s look was that it was two pieces: a chemise and a spencer jacket. The chemise featured a ruched bustline, and making that piece of the pattern I learned that the ruching must exist in the center of the piece; the ruching did not look right going around the corners into the shoulder strap. The spencer jacket had to be fully lined, as the sleeves featured a split-open detail in line with styles of the period.

Flat patterning both the Maria dress and the Elinor look were my first real forays into building costumes from scratch. As I learned when I began draping, flat patterning is very time consuming and math-heavy, but I am glad that I learned it first because it taught me to recognize when something is off in a pattern and what pieces should look like on the flat. The skills that go with flat patterning from scratch help immensely when taking a pattern from an existing garment or altering a commercial pattern. Also, there
are instances when flat patterning is preferred to draping, such as when making sleeves or collars and figuring out mathematical pleats.

In the fall of my second year, I took a course on draping which totally changed the way I approached building garments. The big disadvantage to flat patterning is that one must manipulate the paper the way they think will yield the most desirable result, and then trace it to fabric and see what it actually looks like. With draping, one can manipulate the fabric directly on a form, and when the most optimal shapes are achieved, the markings on the fabric are transferred to paper and are immediately ready to be made into a mockup or final garment.

![Figure 5.2 Photos of coat draped for Kira (Platonov): Mockup, first fitting, and final garment](image)

The first garment I draped for a show was a long Edwardian duster coat for the character of Kira in the University of South Carolina’s production of Platonov (designed
by professor Kristy Leigh Hall). While it was a fairly straightforward silhouette, it was floor-length with no waist seam, and all of the bust and waist shaping occurred within two pairs of fish-eye darts. Kristy wanted a lot of fullness in the back, so I added a wide kick pleat to the center back seam. This was my first time building a garment with a lapel and collar, which was a big learning experience as well. Because the actress had to change quickly into it, I put in a long separating zipper at the front with several snaps to keep the audience from seeing the zipper. We then added decorative buttons up the entire outside.

Figure 5.3 Photos of gown for Marie Antionette (The Revolutionists): mockup and first fitting experimenting with “deflating” effect

Next I was tasked with draping Marie Antoinette’s gown for The Revolutionists, designed by graduate design student Kennedy-Reid Roberts. Hearing that I would be the draper for this look, I was initially very nervous because the shape was very
unconventional, and I was unsure about how I was going to achieve the look that Kennedy wanted. This costume would become the piece in my portfolio that I referred to in fittings when asked about challenging builds because it required a lot of thought and problem-solving. I began by setting up my dress form with a corset and a set of panniers attached at the waist, which gave the form that recognizable exaggerated hip silhouette. Since the actor was going to be wearing these undergarments which altered her natural shape quite drastically, it was important that I drape over them so the final costume fit properly. I ended up doing a series of artful pleats on both the underskirt and overdress at the waist seam so that the garments lay over the panniers.

Figure 5.4 Production photo from *The Revolutionists* featuring Marie Antoinette; USC 2019

Kennedy had an idea that Marie Antoinette began the play “puffed up” and “deflated” as the play progressed. She wanted to incorporate ribbons into this, so that
as Marie pulled a ribbon out of her skirt, her look became less fussy. Kennedy and I talked over exactly what this should look like, and what the functionality needed to be. We settled on having four bows at the waist seam which bustled up the dress. I had sets of buttonholes at the waist and strategically placed around the skirt of the overdress to hold it up. All the actor had to do was pull on side of the ribbon and it slipped through the buttonholes, allowing the dress to have that “deflating” effect. My challenges with this costume didn’t end there, however. After a couple of weeks of rehearsal, we learned that Marie had a teacup prop for which she needed a pocket to stow away. In rehearsal, the actor had been storing it in one of the panniers, which have slits on the tops of them. Had I known going into the drape that this was a necessity, I perhaps would have put side seams into the skirt that fell above the slits in the panniers. However, the overdress had already been constructed in the chosen fabric with only a center back seam. I carefully cut slits into the dress above the slits in the panniers and built in welt-style pockets that fit the teacup. This costume in particular was so rewarding for me because I had been so nervous going into it and it was a success. I was able to come up with a good solution for the designer’s desire for it to have functioning removeable ribbons around it, and I was able to troubleshoot the need for pockets.
Figure 5.5 Photos of costumes draped for various characters in *Much Ago About Nothing* (designer Professor Kristy Leigh Hall)

Going into my third year, we had recruited two more costume design and technology MFA students, and so we had more working hands in the shop to take on more builds for the upcoming shows. I was fairly accustomed to flat patterninig/draping, cutting and stitching garments on my own with a little assistance from whichever undergraduate work study student that happened to be in the shop at the time. However, the plan for the first show of the 2019-2020 season, *Much Ado About Nothing*, was for me to drape five looks, and have the two new students act as my first hands. This meant that once I had draped garments and transferred my drapes to pattern paper, I would hand off the patterns to one of the two, and they would build the mockups and then the actual costumes. Through this experience, I really learned how to communicate how things I patterned should be put together. I had never really had to
blindly hand off a pattern for someone else to build, so it took me a little time to realize how much explanation I had to give for each pattern that I handed off. I learned that it was vital to have a copy of the rendering nearby for a first hand to see what the final garment should look like, and to talk through how each piece fits together. I learned how important it was to place notches where pieces should match up, and to always mark the grainline. I think this experience was especially vital as I transitioned into the professional world where, as a draper, I will continue to work with first hands and stitchers for the rest of my career.
Dorset Theatre Festival

After my first year at USC, I knew I wanted a job for the summer where I could get professional theatre experience. I had never worked in a theatre company outside of a university. I submitted materials to several summer stock companies, and I was offered the job of costume shop manager at Dorset Theatre Festival in Dorset, Vermont. I had applied for the assistant costume shop manager position, but after interviewing with Will Rucker, the Producing Director, he felt that I was well-suited for the management position. The festival is an equity company and produces four straight plays each summer. Their mission is to foster playwrights and produce premiers, as well as revive classics. I had a great and fulfilling time in my first summer there, and I opted to go back for a second season the following summer.

In my first summer, I worked with four costume designers who were all based out of New York, including Jess Goldstein who had designed Jersey Boys for Broadway. That season, I learned so much about managing a shop. I learned how to keep a budget, how to communicate with stage management on Actor’s Equity matters, how to delegate tasks to shop assistants, how to collaborate with other departments, how to provide a valuable experience to an apprentice, and plenty more. However, I think one of the bigger lessons I learned revolved around managing a designer’s expectations. The third show of our season was Pride and Prejudice, designed by Haydee Antuñano. The show did not open until the first weekend in August, and we had two shows to get
through before then, but we started conversations around my second or third week in Dorset. The first two shows were modern-dress, and I (correctly) did not anticipate either requiring builds. I agreed to seven built garments, and three built bonnets initially, thinking that seven weeks was plenty of time to make it happen. However, I discovered that even though the other shows were modern dress, they required much of my attention, and also *Pride and Prejudice* hadn’t been completely cast yet, meaning that we couldn’t have actor measurements to begin building yet. My assistant shop manager was able to begin building the bonnets and had completed them before rehearsals began. We were also able to have mockups complete for the things we agreed to build, but once they were fitted on actors, that only left us a little over two weeks to complete the costumes in the show fabric. Once we hit that point in the timeline, we were also scrambling to source rentals and discovering that smaller builds needed to be done along with some major alterations. Because this was only after my first year of grad school, I was still flat patterning and which took a good bit of time. Thankfully, Haydee’s vision for the actual garment designs were fairly straightforward and did not require any tedious details. I patterned dresses for Lizzy, Mrs. Bennet, and Charlotte Lucas.

At Dorset, one costume apprentice is hired per summer and they are required to run wardrobe on all of the shows as well as work in the costume shop. I required my apprentice to work 15 hours per week in the shop because she spent about 20-25 hours per week running shows, and I didn’t want her to work more than 40 hours in a week. She had been much more excited about her time working on garments in the shop, and
we discussed the possibility of her taking on one of the builds on her own. I felt that she was skilled enough and ready to take on one of the simpler dress designs with my guidance. I mentored her through the flat patterning process, fitting the dress, and making final adjustments. She worked very diligently on it and it was a huge help to me. She was very proud of the final result and it was important for me to see that to know that people need projects they can take ownership of—it makes them more passionate and careful with the work. My assistant and I worked between 70 and 80 hours per week the next two weeks before tech and finished everything by the skin of our teeth for opening night. From that experience, I learned with a shop that size working on a timeline like that, it is much more reasonable to set up an expectation of about three or four complete builds.

We also experienced some budget issues on that show, and that was largely due to the shoes the designer initially picked. She wanted all of the actors to be in the same black flat shoe. I ordered them and sent them into rehearsal, but then was alerted by stage management that they were too slippery. We sent them out to be rubbered, but they still were not working for the actors, who had some big choreographed moments. During tech, we wound up buying sneakers for everyone. The original shoes couldn’t be returned because they were rubbered, and we had added straps to help them stay on. Another really debilitating expense was shipping on the costumes we were renting from various vendors around the country. Although this was a trying show to pull off, I am so proud that we made it happen, and I wouldn’t trade the experience for anything because I learned so many big lessons that have been paying off ever since.
Year Three: Teaching and Goodspeed Musicals

For my third and final year at USC, I had the option to use the entire year as an internship, and immediately go off to work, or to come back to school for a bit and then find work. One of the big reasons I decided to come to grad school was so that I would have my MFA if and when I someday decided to teach. Kristy and I discussed a plan for me to teach the undergraduate costume design course in the fall of 2019. I created a course schedule and list of assignments and developed my own syllabus. The class is project and discussion-based, so I planned for drawing and painting demonstrations. The class revolved around three major rendering projects: a modern Shakespeare, a period piece, and a final free choice set of renderings where the only parameter was that it be based on a children’s story. The period project I assigned was a design for Noel Coward’s Private Lives or Blithe Spirit. I chose this project so that students would have an opportunity to learn how to conduct period research with the intent of costuming. On the day that the Noel Coward project was assigned, I presented a PowerPoint and lecture on fashion of the 1930s.

Throughout the fall semester, I applied for spring internships and jobs that could fulfill the internship requirement. I had several interviews that led to a few rejections and a few offers. One application that I felt especially strong about was a draping position at Goodspeed Musicals in East Haddam, Connecticut. I was thrilled to be selected for an interview and subsequently offered the position. At the time of writing
this, I have completed four weeks of work. The costume shop consists of seven full-time employees, including a shop manager, a design assistant, a draper (me), two first hands and two stitchers. Ideally, there are two drapers, but we are still searching for the second. This season, which runs from April through October, includes three fully produced musicals which have a run of about 10 weeks each. We have begun working on *South Pacific* in the costume shop under the design of Amy Clark, a Broadway and regional theatre costume designer. So far, there are plans to build three garments, which all will be looks for the leading lady, Nellie. I am draping all three of these costumes. I have draped and patterned two of the three so far and have passed them off to the first hands for mockups to be built. One interesting scenario I am facing which I have not before faced is that the designer has rendered an evening gown with two bodice options. She and the director are in talks about which is most appropriate for the character, and she asked me to build mockups for both options so they can see what they look like on the actress. We mocked up one skirt since that is the same on both options, and the plan is to change out the bodice using safety pins during the fitting.

I feel so blessed to have gotten a draping job with a LORT A theatre company directly following graduate school. My big career goal since my first year has been to become a draper, and I am in awe that it has already happened for me. I am working with designers who have multiple Broadway credits in a well-stocked and supportive shop. I am thrilled to be where I am and am excited for what the future holds.
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