

Spring 2022

“Zoom Degrees”: A Reflection on Education and Experience During the COVID-19 Pandemic of the 2020s

Campbell Childers

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd>



Part of the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Childers, C.(2022). *“Zoom Degrees”: A Reflection on Education and Experience During the COVID-19 Pandemic of the 2020s*. (Master's thesis). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/6655>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

“Zoom Degrees”: A Reflection on Education and Experience During the
Covid-19 Pandemic of the 2020s

by
Campbell Childers

Bachelor of Arts
Murray State University, 2017

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in

Theater

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2022

Accepted by:

Kristy Hall, Director of Thesis

Amy Lehman, Reader

Valerie M. Pruitt, Reader

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

Acknowledgements

The people who helped me complete not only this thesis, but the last three years, are too numerous to name in their entirety. However, I would be remiss to not acknowledge those closest and most positively impactful on my graduate school journey. Firstly, Kyla and Heather, who were right there with me as fellow costume MFA candidates during the height of the pandemic, figuring it out together. Heather, for truly being the best teammate and mutual support system I could have asked for, in school and in our lives after. Secondly, the faculty who guided and supported me, especially when things got particularly rough and chaotic for all of us, Amy, Lisa, Valerie, and Andy. Thirdly, the students, both undergraduates and high schoolers, who I had the joy of working with and mentoring, most notably Mason, Michael, Ally, and Ellie. Fourth, the companies who hired me during my internship year, for taking a chance and giving me the invaluable opportunity to gain experience from not only my coworkers, but from the companies values and actions overall, American Players Theatre, Kentucky Opera, and Assumption High School. And finally, the mentors I was so fortunate enough to meet and learn from, Kelly and Kathie.

Abstract

This thesis is a self-reflection on time in the three-year Master of Fine Arts in Theater program at the University of South Carolina, during the 2020 rise of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the years after. It is a chronologically structured examination of two years of academic experiences, both prior to and during the pandemic, and one year of professional application experience post-pandemic. The academics cover course experiences to production assignments and design opportunities, going into detail on the student's process and thoughts at the time. The reflections on professional experience discuss the student's future goals and how they have evolved since starting their program of study. Covering not only the educational experience but time in the post-pandemic professional world, it discusses the impact of both on the student's views on the industry, academia, and their own place within both.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract.....	iii
List of Figures	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 : Foundational Techniques and the Readjustment to an Academic Lifestyle	6
Professional to Educational Theatre – Much Ado About Nothing – First Hand	9
Change and Actor Variation – Eurydice – Draper.....	13
Chapter 2 : Designing Amadeus and the Early Covid-19 Pandemic	17
Collaboration without Passion	18
Covid Cancelations and Uncertainty.....	22
Chapter 3 : Film, Outdoors, and Masked: Pandemic Performances	24
Health and Safety on Campus	26
Innovation without Information – She Kills Monster and The Complete Works of William Shakespeare - Draper	29
Chapter 4 : Experimenting with Artistic Mediums.....	34
Creating a Process	39
Chapter 5 : The Importance of Communication in Collaboration	43

Crossing Wires and Stepping on Toes.....	47
Hierarchy in Collaboration	49
Chapter 6 : You On the Moors Now and Team Relationships	53
Blending History with Character	55
Lessons in Team Building and Management	61
Chapter 7 : Workplace Culture in a “Post-Covid” World.....	71
American Players Theatre	71
Kentucky Opera	79
Chapter 8 : Mentoring High Schoolers and Reflecting on Goals	84
Future Career Goals	87
References	91

List of Figures

FIGURE 1.1: VARIOUS DYING AND DISTRESSING PROJECTS	7
FIGURE 1.2: HERO'S BLOUSE FOR <i>MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING</i>	12
FIGURE 1.3: LITTLE STONE DRAPES AND RENDERING	14
FIGURE 1.4: EURYDICE'S WEDDING DRESS FINAL RENDERING AND DRAPE	15
FIGURE 1.5: EURYDICE PRODUCTION PHOTOS	16
FIGURE 2.1 SALIERI AND MOZART RENDERINGS, DONE IN COLLABORATION, AND FITTING PHOTOS	19
FIGURE 2.2: CONSTANZE RENDERING AND DRAPE	20
FIGURE 2.3: <i>AMADEUS</i> RENDERINGS AND FITTING PHOTOS	21
FIGURE 3.1: ME IN A FITTING DURING THE SPRING SEMESTER, GLOVES AND GOGGLES REQUIRED	27
FIGURE 3.2: FARRAH THE FAIRY RENDERING AND FINISHED BUILD.....	30
FIGURE 3.3: KALIOPE RENDERING AND FINISHED BUILD	31
FIGURE 3.4: JESSE RENDERING AND FITTING PHOTOS	32
FIGURE 3.5: <i>COMPLETE WORKS</i> PRODUCTION PHOTOS.....	33
FIGURE 4.1: <i>IN THE RED AND BROWN WATER</i> RENDERINGS IN WATERCOLOR AND GRAPHITE, FALL 2019	34
FIGURE 4.2: <i>IN THE RED AND BROWN WATER</i> RENDERINGS CONT.	35

FIGURE 4.3: RENDERINGS FOR INTIMATE APPAREL BY LYNN NOTTAGE IN WATERCOLOR PENCILS.....	36
FIGURE 4.4: COPY WORK OF BERTHE MORISOT'S THE PSYCHE MIRROR IN CHALK PASTELS.....	37
FIGURE 4.5: VARIOUS PIECES DONE IN CHARCOAL AND CHALK	37
FIGURE 4.6: VARIOUS DIGITAL ART PIECES, COMPLETED AND INCOMPLETE.....	38
FIGURE 4.7: DIGITAL PORTRAITS DONE IN 5-COLOR PALETTES, PLUS WHITE AND BLACK.....	39
FIGURE 4.8: MOOD BOARDS FOR THE FOUR PROTAGONISTS OF MY COLLABORATE NARRATIVE PROJECT.....	41
FIGURE 4.9: CHARCOAL PORTRAITS OF THE SAME PROTAGONISTS IN THE SAME CONFIGURATION	42
FIGURE 5.1: UNUSED DESIGN PIECES	44
FIGURE 5.2: STILLS FROM THE DANCE PIECE DESIGN	46
FIGURE 5.3: VARIOUS DRAPING ASSIGNMENTS.....	51
FIGURE 6.1: CATHY MOOD BOARD	56
FIGURE 6.2: HEATHCLIFF MOOD BOARD	57
FIGURE 6.3: LIZZY MOOD BOARD	58
FIGURE 6.4: JANE MOOD BOARD.....	59
FIGURE 6.5: JO MOOD BOARD	60
FIGURE 6.6: RENDERINGS FOR <i>You On The Moors Now</i>	62
FIGURE 6.7: RENDERINGS CONT.	63
FIGURE 6.8: EXAMPLES OF TRACKING PAPERWORK.....	64

FIGURE 6.9: TRACKING PAPERWORK AND NOTE TAKING FORMATS 65

FIGURE 6.10: NOTES AND TO DO LIST FORMATTING 66

FIGURE 6.11: PRODUCTION PHOTOS FOR *YOU ON THE MOORS NOW*..... 68

FIGURE 6.12: PRODUCTION PHOTOS CONT. 69

FIGURE 6.13: FINAL PRODUCTION PHOTOS FOR *MOORS* 70

FIGURE 7.1: THE "APT VALUES" AS SEEN IN BOTH THE EMPLOYEE
HANDBOOK AND ON THE WORKSITE..... 72

FIGURE 7.2: SUIT BUILT FOR APT'S *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW* 74

FIGURE 7.3: PRODUCTION PHOTOS FROM APT'S SEASON OPENER,
THE MOUNTAINTOP 75

FIGURE 7.4: DRAPE FOR "THE ONE FROM WITHIN" FROM *OEDIPUS* 76

FIGURE 7.5: PRODUCTION PHOTOS OF APT'S *OEDIPUS* 77

FIGURE 7.6: PRODUCTION PHOTOS OF APT'S *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW*..... 78

FIGURE 7.7: PRODUCTION PHOTOS OF APT'S PREMIER PRODUCTION OF
AN IMPROBABLE FICTION 79

FIGURE 7.8: EURYDICE'S WEDDING JUMPSUIT, DRAPED FOR
KENTUCKY OPERA'S *ORFEO*..... 81

FIGURE 8.1 LIGHTING RECREATION PROJECT 85

FIGURE 8.2: 18TH CENTURY UNDERPINNINGS FINAL..... 86

Introduction

I knew I wanted to obtain a Master of Fine Arts before I had finished my undergraduate degree, mainly because I was considering professorship as an eventual career choice. I also felt there were large gaps in my technical training as well as my rendering and drawing education that I wanted to learn. My undergraduate experience had been in a smaller institution with only one costume faculty member and while I had been able to forge a costume specific path in my general theatre arts degree, I felt like I wanted more from my formal education. However, I was incredibly burnt out and hurting from the social and interpersonal dynamics of my program and knew I needed recovery time before returning to academia. I also knew, and had been encouraged by my faculty mentor, to take time in the professional world to continue learning what I wanted to focus on more specifically in graduate school and potentially in my career.

Both at undergraduate graduation in the winter of 2017, and when I started my MFA the fall of 2019, I was primarily interested in professorship,

specifically in a smaller institution where I would be able to engage with both the design and technical costume and costume crafts areas. I also knew that I would like to work professionally as both a designer and a technician for some time before I sought academic employment. These goals were a large factor in my choice of institution, as I wanted to get my degree from a program with a dual design/technical degree, rather than one that focused on one over the other.

When I interviewed with the recruiter from the University of South Carolina I was assured that their program was such a degree, and that they had three faculty members who covered costume design, technology, crafts, and wigs, two of which were also shop staff alongside the graduate assistants and undergraduate workers and lab students. I was especially excited to learn there was someone experienced with wigs, as that was another area I had little experience with but had enjoyed the few times I had been able to.

I also was charmed by the head of the program, who was my recruiter and eventual official advisor. Everyone I had spoken to, both in my professional workplaces and my academic ones, told me that the most crucial factor in choosing my program was my advisor and the dynamic I had with them. I was already considering that on my list, given my issues within my undergraduate, and so when I found someone, I clicked with so well in the interview I took it as a good sign. I ended up feeling the same in our follow up interview, which lasted nearly an hour, and when I took a virtual and later in person tour of the school.

While she was not the only factor in my final choice, she was a major one, and my hopes for our relationship both during and after my time in the program were high.

I spoke privately with the two graduate students at the time, and both felt similarly about both the head of program and the program in general, saying incredibly positive things and describing exactly what I was wanting from my graduate experience. Both had chosen more to specialize, one in draping and one in design, but their emails described multiple opportunities in both areas, with plans for more in their specific area in the future. I was encouraged by the size of the program, there would be four of us for my first year, three for my second, and four again for my third and final year. This, coupled with the season size I was told, made me feel confident that I would have little issue achieving the promised three mainstage designs, and might even be able to design more depending on the lab opportunities. I was excited and confident about my choice of institution, and I couldn't wait to get started.

In the second semester of my first year, the Covid-19 Pandemic hit the United States, forcing much of life to an awkward and terrifying halt, and continued to affect my time at the University of South Carolina up until my writing of this thesis. Because of this, I experienced something far different from the package sold, in part due to the natural disaster outside of anyone's control

and partly due to institutional issues and changes that may have been fast-tracked due to the pandemic but would have existed regardless. Many of these issues were staffing changes, due to work culture as well as life plan choices, causing a disjointed education that never felt complete. Not to mention the greater academic culture's toxic workload expectations and issues with elitism that were only magnified by the pandemic's strain on the country overall. These impacts were managed by the individuals and institutions in a spectrum of success ratios, many of which I observed and experienced firsthand. The effects of the pandemic will extend long past these few years, and I believe they will foster change across many industries and parts of society, both out of necessity and due to pressures from people who have finally had the time to think about their lives and what they want from them.

Throughout this reflective thesis essay, I will be trying to discuss not only my individual degree and professional experiences, but also those of the people around me. I will also be discussing my thoughts on the future of the theatre industry, both professional and academic, and the long-term impacts the pandemic will have on both. Despite an untraditional educational experience, I did spend the majority of my third year working in the professional world for multiple companies, and so have seen the early impacts already in motion over these past months. I will be using those experiences as a jumping off point, as

well as counterexamples to my experience at the university in an educational capacity. The goal of this thesis is to show the education I received (and didn't receive) due to the pandemic and institutional actions, as well as the impact of the education on my professional life and goals, through lived examples.

Chapter 1 : Foundational Techniques and the Readjustment to an Academic Lifestyle

Due to a variety of factors, my year mate and myself had a somewhat different first semester than had originally been planned for us based on the typical schedule. This meant that instead of taking a course each in design, technology, and history/literature, in addition to a class in Photoshop, we ended up taking our scheduled design and patterning courses, in addition to a Crafts class focused in dying and distressing techniques, and a blended undergraduate/graduate class in scenic design.

If I had the chance to go back and change something about that first semester it would be waiting to take a Crafts class. The workload alone for a class in that field is typically double or even triple that of classes in draping, patterning, or design, often due to the trial-and-error nature of the area. This, coupled with the fact that the first semester of the program is the only one in which you take 12 standard credits, rather than the 9 standard and 3 practicum that we take in the following three semesters. I do not regret taking the class due to the knowledge gained, I just would have chosen to take it in a different

semester if I had been A) aware of the workload, and B) allowed to choose my own classes. I also think the class, like many in the program, would be better served with two semesters to cover the material rather than one. This was the beginning of my feeling like there wasn't enough time to do the program and feel like I would be able to get the education I truly wanted in just three years.



Figure 1.1: Various dyeing and distressing projects

In our third week most of the students in our dyeing and distressing class had each spent 30+ hours just in the dye room for the one week of homework and we were panicking. My year mate and I had talked together about our own expectations of the graduate school workload, both of us having worked full

time jobs for multiple years, in education and the arts. We had anticipated a busy workload but were both feeling like the expectation was that we were able to devote our every waking moment to working on homework or production work, something neither of us could do. We ended up going together to meet with our advisor to discuss how typical that week's workload would be, before we got too far into the program. This conversation was an enlightening one and shaped how I would view my experience and the things that I would end up taking away from the program at large, for better or worse. We were presented with the idea that some educators hold the teaching philosophy that graduate school's purpose is to break and burnout its students in the name of "preparation," as well as the alternative belief that graduate school should be about personal growth and development, regardless of how "hard" it is. It was also suggested that some professors would create assignments that were intentionally impossible, something that I still cannot comprehend being practical in any way. We also discussed future courses that we had planned on taking and how we might schedule our semesters differently than the current one to avoid a situation where the workload would be impossible for our abilities. One of the hardest choices I have made while seeking my MFA was removing Wig Styling from my course of study due to the 40+ hr./week homework load I was told it had. After nearly burning myself out at my undergraduate I was much more aware of my

mental and emotional health limits and knew that regardless of the skills I would learn, a class with that kind of workload would quite possibly cause me real harm. Despite that decision being made, I left the conversation feeling supported and heard, something that had been quite a foreign experience in an educational setting, and thus hopeful towards my time in the program.

Professional to Educational Theatre – Much Ado About Nothing – First Hand

The first show position assignment I received was to serve as one of two First Hands for our mainstage production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, specifically under the third year MFA at the time who was acting as the primary Draper. This was the first and last time during my tenure in the University of South Carolina costume shop that we had the ability to have dedicated First Hands, rather than the Draper acting as all team positions on their own builds which was the standard for the other productions I worked on. I entered the process feeling especially prepared to act as a First Hand, as that had been my most common technical position in my pre-graduate school professional life and I had come to enjoy that part of the process. I also was looking forward to the opportunity to observe the third-year student and start thinking about where I wanted to be when I reached her point.

Something that I had not considered, which also caused me some issue, was that I had been working in regional theatre shops, primarily with a Draper

who has been in the professional industry for 40+ years full-time. The “issue” with this was that I found myself having to retrain my expectations to match the quality of work capable by an educational shop and a student Draper. For example, some of the finishing techniques I was used to being standard simply couldn’t be done in the time allowed in an education build schedule. Similarly, the fabrics and structural materials available on hand or locally were less varied, either due to availability or budgetary restrictions.

I also realized that I had grown accustomed to receiving patterns that had clearly marked grainlines, seam allowances, matching notches, and construction notes or guidelines. This had been the standard practice and expectation in the LORT and non-union regional theatres I had been working in prior to starting my program and it was also what I was being taught to do in my patterning course that semester. Of course, students are less experienced and thus more prone to forgetful mistakes than a multi-decade professional, but even knowing that I had skewed my expectations too high. However, having the experience of having to ask far more questions than I was used to made me really consider

what I needed on a pattern piece and what I would be making sure to put on my own patterns when I was the Draper.¹

After a few of these conversations between myself and the third-year Draper, as well as conversations between myself and the other First Hand, I also learned that up until that semester this third year Draper had always built their own drapes (as mentioned previously) and therefore had never really had to consider what it would be like to hand off her patterns to someone who wasn't in her head with her. This experience had impacted *her* understanding of what a First Hand might expect, because she had never really had one, and therefore she was also learning from myself and my year mate due to all our questions and both of our professional experiences setting our expectations. Regardless of what any perceived "standard" of the industry might be, the reality is that everyone does the same process differently and thus the main goal should be the best method for efficient and effective communication and collaboration. Ultimately, the experience was an incredibly educational one for all three of us, something that I would consider a successful graduate school experience.

¹ In my thesis revision notes I was informed by the head of program that unmarked patterns are a Broadway industry standard. I hadn't been aware our shop was operating under those specific standards until receiving that note so my experience at the time was still accurate, as it impacted my ability to do my job most effectively,



Figure 1.2: Hero's blouse for *Much Ado About Nothing*

As a first hand I was able to build a couple of simpler pieces entirely, or almost entirely, on my own. Due to the time constraint imposed by the last-minute artistic changes and casting issues, as well as the academic structure of expecting the same amount of work as a full-time shop from part-time employees who are also students, we all felt rushed on our builds at many times. The relative simplicity of my builds allowed me to be a bit more relaxed than those on more time-intensive builds. The lopsided nature of our 1-4 shop supported show schedule meant that we also wanted to get as much of a head-start on the *Eurydice* build as possible. Another timeline factor that was stressful more for those who had been there prior, was the change in our tech schedule to

put costumes in on the first night of tech. This decision was made by the head of costume design and technology during the first production meeting for *Much Ado*, without consulting with the shop manager beforehand and caused some stress, as that meant losing Friday's workday and the Saturday all-call before tech that is typically required to produce a show on an educational production schedule.

Change and Actor Variation – Eurydice – Draper

Draping for *Eurydice* had its own challenges, primarily due to early casting changes, which required me to re-drape and re-pattern from the beginning two garments that I was more than halfway through patterning at the time of recast. I was also responsible for draping a miniature version of one of my builds for a puppet that the costume designer had added in collaboration with the director. The puppet was also recast, with the first one ordered being replaced with a more ventriloquist style alternative, thankfully before I had started that draping process. I was excited to make a second miniature version of something and ended up attached to the puppet we had named "Little Alan." The recasting of actors, while it caused some time-related stress, also meant I got to try multiple ways to pattern the same garments, since I had to do them twice. Ultimately, like many things in life, these changes had their pros and cons, and I

consider them a successful learning experience in the same way I do my first semester's show assignments.



Figure 1.3: Little Stone drapes and rendering

There were other changes that occurred more because of either lack of communication between the student designer and me, or design changes being made after construction process had already begun. There were many evolutions of both of my builds, with sleeves being added or changed multiple times, skirt fullness changing due to undergarments changing or being added, design elements that we simply ran out of time for or were deemed overdesigned in tech. These changes started to feel particularly Sisyphean the closer we got to the

tech and dress rehearsals, with one build having to be half deconstructed and reconstructed for three consecutive days of rehearsal.



Figure 1.4: Eurydice's wedding dress final rendering and drape

However, due to all these changes the renderings also went through a reediting process, meaning that the builds match the renderings much closer than I had expected amid it all. They are also some of my favorite looks aesthetically, that I was able to build in my time at the University of South Carolina. I also felt like I learned a great deal from both my mistakes, and other people's, during the process, in much the same way I felt about my *Much Ado About Nothing* experience. Especially as I went into my first design experience alongside my year mate and co-designer, I tried to pay attention to the different actions the student designer for Eurydice took and learn from all of them, whether positive or negative. For example, this production was where I really started to consider my personal ideology around collaboration between the

designers and technicians and pay attention to how those two groups interacted and worked together. I knew I would want to be a designer and technician who saw the other as an equal collaborator and expert, and that I would seek to be cognizant of the abilities of both spaces when making decisions.



Figure 1.5: Eurydice production photos

Chapter 2 : Designing Amadeus and the Early Covid-19 Pandemic

Shortly after starting the program, my year mate and I were told we would be co-costume designing for the spring production of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* and there would be a guest director working with us. We had already grown close (in part due to our many hours together in the dye room) and were excited to be designing together. We read the script and did some historical research before we knew who our director would be, and we continued to work through the design and rendering process as an equal team. It was a wonderful experience, working with her was without a doubt the best part of that specific production process and I'm not sure I would have been able to do it without her.

Despite feeling that way and having conversations with her that indicated her feeling the same, it seemed to surprise certain members of our portfolio reviews that we had not felt overshadowed or jealous of one another. I was asked if I spent the process comparing myself to her, framed as if that was a negative, and the honest answer was that any comparison I had done had been in a positive light, and that I enjoyed the way we balanced each other's strengths and

weaknesses. This answer seemed again to be surprising to certain faculty, as if they were unable to conceptualize a world where graduate students didn't feel obligated to compete with one another. We both discussed this after our review and found that she had experienced comparable questions and felt equally surprised and mildly insulted at the insinuation.

Collaboration without Passion

Despite the strong working relationship, I had with her, I struggled with the process in other areas. The script has only one speaking female part, that of Mozart's wife Constanze, and refers to the other female roles as "mute roles" which caused me discomfort from the beginning. I also found the deviations from the source history frustrating, far more so than I expected. The following is a passage from my portion of our theoretical concept paper, dealing with the complex "historical" nature of the script:

It seems odd to me that this story be told using real people who existed and were documented as inspiration for a play that could have been written by fictional people and perhaps still told the same story. I find myself feeling uncertain about this script since it does feel like something very easily proved melodramatic but also intended to be believable.

This quote summarizes well my feelings about the script, and production, of *Amadeus* to the time of writing. While I can respect the script's place in theatrical



Figure 2.1 Salieri and Mozart renderings, done in collaboration, and fitting photos

history, I generally find it odd to portray a fictionalized history when the reality was more interesting and less defaming to the figures portrayed. This was something I struggled with for the entirety of the production process, even at one point discussing leaving the team with my advisor, but I ultimately stayed until it was forced to cancel by the Covid-19 Pandemic

In staying, I tried to familiarize myself with the process of working on a show that I did not care for and in many ways directly disagreed with. The director was seemingly able to identify with Salieri as a figure who, when faced with a



Figure 2.2: Constanze rendering and drape

younger and clearly uncertain talent, decided to sabotage him to the point of death, and my advisor seemed to agree. This viewpoint felt so wrong in my mind that I struggled both to sympathize with the characters I needed to design and collaborate with my director who believed in his concept. Thankfully, I had my year mate who was more able to bridge that gap for me and help me work with her on the process. We both were able to connect with the director in the beginning through our shared interest in the character of Constanza and we hinged much of our design on her and a couple of other featured ensemble members.

The director initially believed the characters of the Venticelli were secretly working against Salieri in his retelling of the story, intending to use them to draw attention to the less savory aspects of the story such as its mistreatment of women and general cruelty. However, this concept was adapted the week prior to our spring break, when he spoke to us about the realization that they



Figure 2.3: *Amadeus* renderings and fitting photos

never actually turn on him, as he previously had thought. Before this happened, however, it gave me an entry point into the design world and helped me

overcome my lack of passion for the project, enough to work on it until it's eventual cancellation.

Covid Cancellations and Uncertainty

In March of 2020 I went home for spring break, not knowing I was leaving campus for the last time that semester. Our spring break got extended a week, and then we were online for three, and then we were declared online for the remainder of the semester and into the summer semester. In the midst of all that, *Amadeus* was cancelled, as were our summer job contracts and internships. Our classes moved online with varying levels of success, and I found myself talking a lot with my year mate about if I would return to campus in the fall, if nothing had changed. My draping class was replaced with rendering, while my history and literature classes scrambled to change the discussion-based structure into something we could do with little to no institutional support. I spent the summer bouncing between my South Carolina apartment and my parents' house as we isolated and seemed to wait for news every minute of the day.

News not just of my school and jobs, but of the world. The pandemic was like a horrible unifier that had us checking the numbers in multiple countries every day. Almost everyone I knew had someone they were worried about specifically and the universal uncertainty was suffocating. Alongside news coverage of bodies stacked in New York City, the world was also watching

multiple legal cases against cops who had murdered Black people in cities across the country, including my hometown of Louisville, KY. The state of everything made seeking a degree in costume design and technology seem so useless and laughable. I didn't feel confident in there being an industry to even graduate into, but I also didn't want to lose the one sure chance to continue developing my skills by dropping out. All over my social media I was seeing conversations about equal pay; workplace culture; systemic issues of racism, classism, and other bigotries; and pandemic response in the theatre industry. I felt like a wave of change might be coming and I didn't want to miss out.

Chapter 3 : Film, Outdoors, and Masked: Pandemic Performances

Along with spending time reflecting on the theater industry overall, as well as my place in it and what I wished to gain from my involvement in the arts, I also spent time considering my graduate degree and how it was to continue in the fall. The university spent much of the summer making decisions behind closed doors, communicating only what they could determine was unlikely to change. While this is understandable it did force students, staff, and faculty to either hold off on making plans and decisions until they had more information or make decisions based on only partial knowledge.

The plan eventually set in motion was one that utilized both in person and online teaching, in a variety of mixed ratios depending on the department and program in question. For example, both my partner and I are graduate assistants in programs within the College of Arts and Sciences, however their program was predominantly online, meaning that they never had to come to campus in person and were able to socially distance within their own apartment for the entirety of the semester. Meanwhile my program, which continued to produce shows and

includes technical classes that require specific equipment, was unable to be taught online in any accurate and extensive way. While we were technically given the option to work our assistantship hours from home the lack of mentorship present that would cause made this decision a difficult one to truly make. Like many choices I was given in this time of my education I felt like there was no choice really at all if I was to achieve anything close to the degree I had been sold a year prior.

Another source of frustration for me at this time was the fact that tenured faculty had a much higher chance of being able to work from home due to their positions in design, literature and directing which could be taught either partially or even completely online. Meanwhile, the non-tenured instructors, many of whom have the same MFA degree as their tenured counterparts, were needed by the nature of the program, to stay on campus in order to be present for their students. Not to mention to oversee the build processes for the productions we were still planning on doing over the course of the semester and year. When combined with the lack of support we felt came across as inconsiderate by those in charge of the planning for the season schedule. This meant that the lower paid staff of the theatre department were being more readily exposed to the COVID-19 pandemic than their higher paid counterparts,

this inequality became much clearer than it had been prior to the pandemic despite having existed long before the first case was found in the United States.

Health and Safety on Campus

I had a lot of concerns about going back to campus following the summers pandemic situation. I did not think it was safe to resume in person classes or work and felt like my concerns were not really being heard or understood by the institution. I considered trying to defer my enrollment until I felt that it was a safer time to return to in-person education. I even considered dropping the program entirely until I felt more confident in the future of the theater industry. The one thing that prevented me from following through on either of these courses of action was my financial dependence on the graduate assistantship stipend. While my advisor continued to attempt to convince me to not focus on the financial aspect of the decision I was not in a position where I could ignore the fact that, should I decide to not return to campus, I would have no source of income with which to support myself unless I chose to get an essential worker position. Something which would only endanger me further, thus rendering my decision ineffective. And so, I decided to return to campus despite my misgivings.



Figure 3.1: Me in a fitting during the spring semester, gloves and goggles required

Thankfully, our costume faculty had been planning for the worst and had come up with workplace and fitting protocols based on industry policies and the institutional requirements of the school. We were a masked and socially distanced workplace as much as we possibly could be. Our meals were eaten outside or in isolation in the main theatre, we were no longer in the shop unless we were working or in class, there were sanitation materials readily available and used multiple times a day. Our fitting protocols included gloves and full-face shields in addition to the face masks already worn. We also were required to

quarantine our garments for three days both before and after fittings, meaning we lost a whole week to work on something every time it was fit. This policy was our most evolving one, as by the end of the semester we were able to run some garments through the dryer on high heat to sanitize them before fittings, cutting down on our forced wait time. While we had a few exposures to Covid-19 within our group of workers and grad students, they were all from outside the school shop. Either a partner who worked with the public, or a student in another space were the cases exposed, but our exposure to each other was successfully kept to a minimum. By the end of the fall the three graduate students in our shop had begun to feel safe gathering as a group outside of class, and we remained without infection for the rest of the academic year.

Outside of the shop, however, I did feel exposed and uncertain of my safety. Moving my partner into their apartment in August I saw students at the complex pool all together and hosting parties. The bars I drove past on Friday evenings on my way home were already lined out the door before 6pm with very few masks in sight. My misgivings about returning proved at least somewhat based in truth when, on the first day of classes, I and our shop manager were exposed to a positive case of COVID-19, requiring us to quarantine for 14 days regardless of our testing status. We both worked from home as the first production we were responsible for would be beginning to film by the end of the

first month of classes. In response to our quarantine, the head of the program decided I would no longer be allowed to act as TA for the costume construction class as that was putting me at a higher risk of exposure due to the number of students in class. This was the first opportunity I lost in my second year of the program, but it would not be the last.

Innovation without Information – She Kills Monster and The Complete Works of William Shakespeare - Draper

Technically I had lost one of my mainstage designs before the semester had started. My original assignment had been the supported undergraduate lab show in the fall and a mainstage show in the spring. When the pandemic response of the country overall proved unsuccessful at mitigating the spread of the disease the season was adapted to reflect some of the safety concerns with in-person theatre. My new assignment was now a filmed dance collection in the fall and a spring production that it was hoped would be staged in-person. The fall show I had been assigned was one of the first things to go, due to the director's concerns about its ability to adapt for filmed or online distribution. While at the time I was frustrated with his unwillingness to attempt a different medium, after the experience of our first filmed production in the fall I felt a bit more confident that he had made the right decision.



Figure 3.2: Farrah the Fairy rendering and finished build

While everyone involved with *She Kills Monsters* was enthusiastic and optimistic about the outcome, their experience with filmed productions was somewhat lacking. Accustomed to theatre schedules and processes, the adjustment had a lot of bumps and snags along the way, many of which trickled down into the shops responsible for building the film. The initial attempts at scheduling also made it clear that many of them had no idea the timeline of the costume build process, something that was disappointing but not terribly shocking. For example, they had planned to film the fantasy elements first, but had not considered that those would be the built looks requiring the most time and therefore could simply not be ready to film that early in the semester. However, this probably meant that the special effects editor did not get the time they needed to feel confident in their work, because the timeline was so

condensed compared to a typical film schedule for something that intensive. While it was nice to be able to see some film work happening, the lack of experience in our faculty (and the lack of attention paid to those few who had experience) meant that as a student I felt let down by what had the potential to be a good learning experience. I also felt as though our requests (which soon turned into pleas) for overhire and help weren't being genuinely listened to. We heard many times some variation of "we're sympathetic to how difficult this is" until finally one day during shop conversation I said "sympathy doesn't sew costumes" which became the motto of the shop for the year.



Figure 3.3: Kaliaope rendering and finished build

Meanwhile, the experience with our production of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)* was a different assortment of problems. Because

this was a show that was being staged outdoors and with masks, it was almost completely different from the process for *She Kills Monsters*. We also had two casts, something that had been planned before the pandemic but ended up being beneficial when actors began to catch covid, although it also meant trying to fit double the fittings into our educational build schedule and so that (and the demands of the show laundry needs) meant that everything had to be washable or able to be disinfected quickly. While we might have racks of Shakespearean clothing, ready for use in just such a play, we were unable to use any of it because it was all dry-cleaned only or did not have conceivable doubles. This meant some of our drapers (including myself) were assigned the same look in two varied sizes and shapes for the two different actors.



Figure 3.4: Jesse rendering and fitting photos

I was able to build my look for both a masculine presenting figure, and a feminine presenting figure, which was a fun challenge that I enjoyed working on with the designer and my mentor. I again struggled with the timeline, feeling like I didn't have time to complete my builds as well as design my own show and attend and complete my classes besides. However, with support from my shop and a return to more regular therapy I was able to complete what are two of my proudest builds while in my grad program. The fabric choices were fun and because they were cottons it was easy to work with them. The student designer was lovely to work with, a strong leader, and an honestly phenomenal craftsperson and the stress of the timeline felt a lot less heavy with her at the helm.



Figure 3.5: *Complete Works* production photos

Chapter 4 : Experimenting with Artistic Mediums

When I started the program, I had mostly been using hard cake watercolors and graphite in my rendering, with some markers used mostly in skin tones and shading. That had been the method I was taught in undergraduate, and I enjoyed the buildable ability of the colors but wanted to



Figure 4.1: *In the Red and Brown Water* renderings in watercolor and graphite, Fall 2019

develop my skills even further, both with the same mediums and with new ones.

I especially had been interested in trying watercolor pencils after seeing renderings done in them that summer.

In the spring semester of my first year, I ordered a set and began to experiment with them in my class work. One of the strengths of the program was the inclusion of rendering or artistic exploration in most, if not all classes in the design track. Even our history class included rendering and so I used my pencils on those lower pressure projects.



Figure 4.2: *In the Red and Brown Water* renderings cont.

In my second year I took a figure drawing class where we used charcoal and white chalk exclusively and it was like something clicked in place and my drawing changed completely. Until that point every instructor I'd had focused

more on my line work or the weight of the lines. Light and shadow had come into the conversation more in the coloring stage, with the paints or pencils I used, than in the first stages of the process. This drawing instructor had us rendering light and shadow in shapes, rather than lines, and something about that terminology helped me to better understand the dimension and shape of what I was drawing.



Figure 4.3: Renderings for Intimate Apparel by Lynn Nottage in watercolor pencils

I was able to take my love of the charcoal and chalk into my costume design classes as well, another positive about the program being the occasional levels of freedom afforded to us in fulfilling out class requirements. I used the two mediums on a set of character portraits and then branched out into chalk

pastels for a piece of replication work. I ended up using that same method, plus acrylic, for my rendering process for *You On the Moors Now* and it remains my preferred traditional or hand-drawn method for rendering.



Figure 4.5: Various pieces done in charcoal and chalk



Figure 4.4: Copy work of Berthe Morisot's *The Psyche Mirror* in chalk pastels

Alternatively, I also began to work on digital rendering as well in my second year, using a tablet and pen and a variety of apps. I did some pieces in the same shape-driven format as my traditional drawing, but I also like the ability to get



Figure 4.6: Various digital art pieces, completed and incomplete

clean line art and color in digital work as well. Currently this is the medium I am using the most, although in the future I will continue to explore more mediums and probably adapt my rendering style somewhat for each project I work on.



Figure 4.7: Digital portraits done in 5-color palettes, plus white and black

Creating a Process

Along with trying different methods and materials, I was also encouraged to focus on creating a mental process for being able to create. Some classmates might meditate or have specific scents or environmental factors they used to get in the zone. The idea was to find something that helped get you in the focused headspace so you could get familiar with it and more easily find it when circumstances weren't ideal. It took me some experimenting, and I still don't fully have one figured out, but some of my process steps have become standard and I think I'm on the right track.

I learned I tend to spring from one creative outlet into another, so doing my rendering after a night of playing storytelling games was often more successful than attempting to switch from more academic tasks into the art brain. I also noticed a tendency to do better the closer I was to the deadline, often feeling unable to start a project too early or I would get bored and struggle. Working later in the day was also more successful, I often saved my rendering for the last task of the evening and would do it until I got tired and finished up. Another thing I almost always need is another form of stimulation, whether it be a movie or tv show, or music or conversation, I like something else going on while I draw.

The source of external stimulation I found myself gravitating towards most frequently, to the point that I made it an intentional part of the process, was music. Separate from my process I already listen to music to help emotionally and physically regulate myself, and with the stresses of graduate school and the pandemic requiring more of that I noticed it also helped create a good creative headspace. Sometimes I merely used my typical music, focusing more on creating the right mood overall than focusing on any specific focus. I would also create playlists for specific characters or groups of characters to listen to, other times I would get the sound designer's playlists to use while rendering. Even if I was using TV or film rather than music, I would usually pick something that had

helpful, both for my individual process and as communication tools with other members of my team.



Figure 4.9: Charcoal portraits of the same protagonists in the same configuration

Chapter 5 : The Importance of Communication in Collaboration

Communication was the most impactful factor of my graduate school experience, even before the pandemic made it even more of a priority in my life. I noticed where I was feeling communicated with and where I wasn't, and I watched how other people communicated with each other. Before the pandemic I was focusing on how design and technical roles communicated, as well as how tenured and non-tenured faculty communicated, in preparation for my initial goal of academic employment. I also focused on trying to communicate the way I would want to be communicated with and treat others as equals in collaboration and contribution. While in my program, I experienced a wide variety of communication styles and willingness to share information.

One place I experienced multiple points of that spectrum in one place was my fall of 2020 design assignment to the filmed dance performance. There were four choreographers, who each communicated in their own way. One knew he wouldn't need me because he was reusing costumes and told me immediately. Another knew she wanted to use my skills and was communicative and helped facilitate a design done in collaboration with not only her but also her students.

A third who didn't respond to my emails until a couple of days before she wanted to film, she had found something to order but it was out of stock, so I had to source those items and get them mailed to dancers immediately. And the fourth who responded the same time as the third but had a bit more time, however he also wanted two specific looks that required fittings and more time to put together. I devoted an entire week just to his project, using my bank hours from the filming schedule's overtime. I had two students neglect to pick up their costumes, which worried me and so I emailed them and my advisor and the choreographer, who I never heard back from.

When I sat down to watch the stream of the show I found out he hadn't used any of the costumes I had put together. While it hurt to have done the work and not seen the results used, it stung more that I hadn't been told beforehand



Figure 5.1: Unused design pieces

that my work wasn't what he wanted. I felt lost, especially given the number of pictures and meetings I had with him during the process. On the flip side, the more communicative choreographer who I worked with was happy with my work, and when they got the filming location and one of the pieces didn't work with the background, she let me know immediately what the change she approved was. Even though things had changed without my control in her piece as well, I didn't feel as blindsided because I received communication about it as soon as possible after the fact.

Working with her was an overall positive experience, her communication was good, and her students were easy to work with. She gave me a design board and the music for her piece in our first meeting, both things that helped me put together my own collage of images and colors. Her piece was filmed both in the students' homes and out in the local area, both on and off campus. She wanted to focus on the idea of individuality within the group, having noticed that the virtual instruction had led to some unique interpretations of the choreography due to glitchy connections or spatial limitations. Keeping that in mind, we decided to not only keep that individuality through unique looks for each dancer, we also opted to pull mostly from their own wardrobes to maintain the connection between the "rehearsal" footage and the "performance" looks. The few items we bought or pulled were based on conversations I had with each

dancer, where we looked through their wardrobes and discussed how dancing made them feel and how the isolation had affected their craft. Using movement of fabric, as well as the color palette from the choreographer, we created what was ultimately a fine collection of cohesive looks that pleased the choreographer.

While my experience with this one choreographer was overwhelmingly positive, the fact that the rest of the process was so negative made the overall



Figure 5.2: Stills from the dance piece design

experience lacking from my point of view. Having had one show cancelled mid-process, and a second cancelled outright without any attempt to keep it on the season, I felt let down by what was technically my first opened show. It also would be considered by the program my second mainstage design, as outlined in the degree breakdown I was given during recruitment. While I gained a line in my resume and experienced working with dance for the first time, I also felt like

the experience was more of a costume coordinator experience, than a design experience. The limitations of the medium, as well as the timeline I was forced into by the grueling schedule of *She Kills Monsters* and the delayed communication by dance, made the overall process a disheartening one that led to a product I still feel, at best, neutral about.

Crossing Wires and Stepping on Toes

I had my own issues with communication as well, often due to thinking information was public knowledge and not realizing someone didn't know something. These still caused issues for others and for myself and contributed to my personal goal to be as open and communicative as possible with all members of my team. The times this did happen I tried to clearly communicate any correct information needed, as soon as possible. For example, when our technical instructor left for a professional engagement position another instructor took over for the undergraduate construction class that I was a TA for at the time. During our first class the new instructor pulled me aside to seemingly scold me for thinking I could approve students' final project pieces, something I had never thought I could do, and hadn't been asked to do by students or the previous faculty. I explained all that and the professor accepted my promise that I would send any students who did try to ask me to approve to her instead.

Another time I misunderstood my role was while designing *You On the Moors Now*. I believed that my role as the costume designer was to have a plan for each of the looks in their show, and if it appeared there would be a need for an alternative plan it would be better to have that in mind earlier in the process. I like to be prepared and I don't like feeling a time crunch if I can help it so when I was discussing one of the builds with my yearmate, who was draping it, and she mentioned feeling stressed about building all her assigned looks, I decided to find a backup option for the least important of her builds just in case. I mentioned this to my advisor in our next meeting and it turned out to be the wrong thing, causing my advisor to again scold me for breaking an unknown rule. I was told it wasn't my responsibility which was fine, but it was the first time I had been given any sort of guidance as to what my responsibilities might be, despite having asked for a clear breakdown of the practicum assignment. The design assignments, while technically a class, do not have a traditional syllabus like other classes and so are more malleable in their execution. I again tried to explain that I was only doing what I thought I should be doing based on my experience as a designer and the information I had been given and the situation was resolved.

There were multiple times throughout my education where I asked for clarification regarding both the practicum hours and expectations, as well as those for the 16 assistantship hours and what they were considered. Each time I was seemingly heard in the moment but still didn't receive clarification verbally or in writing, something that frustrated both myself and my year-mate.

Considering my initially plan to become a professor in the future, I began to consider the ways in which I wanted to either emulate or deviate from my head of program's seemed educational philosophy. Interestingly, when I expressed similar needs for written expectations from supervisors at one of my internship companies I received it with enthusiasm, which in turn helped me perform better at my job for everyone.

Hierarchy in Collaboration

While in the program, I experienced and observed a lot of communication dynamics that were based in a perceived hierarchy, whether that hierarchy is valid or not. One example I have already given was the change in tech schedule for *Much Ado* by the head of costume design, without communicating with the shop manager and technical professor about it first. I also saw and experienced a lot of withholding information by tenured faculty until a point they deemed it was appropriate to share, even if that choice negative impacted the quality of work and work environment for the instructors and students. I find this behavior

to be paradoxical to the repeated mantra of “theatre is a collaborative art form” both institutions I have attended have pushed to students. I also experienced negative consequences multiple times that were brought on by a lack of information on my part, due to this type of information withholding.

I felt this hierarchy also in play during my dance experience, as I felt like some of the choreographers saw me as an assistant to my advisor, and not as the designer they had been given to work with. I believe this may have played into their lack of communication with me specifically, and the fact that one of them didn’t credit me and another credited me, and my advisor equally is further evidence of that fact. I think that my role was just not well-understood due to the breakdown in communication between the dance side of the department and the theatre side over the years and lack of understanding about what our graduate students are learning to do.

Outside the dance process, I also felt that there was a toxic hierarchy within the technical and design faculty that was unfortunately very clear to both the graduate and undergraduate students. My perception (which was shared by others) was that design faculty’s overall view was that technical positions were employees of designers, rather than the collaborators we were being told they were. This sentiment is not unique to our program, but to see it perpetuated and feel powerless to do anything from the people who are teaching you how to

navigate the professional world is disheartening. I particularly felt so given my experience in both areas and appreciation for the people I had met in technical positions. Both mentors I found after undergraduate and during graduate school were technicians, as well as wonderful educators, and I considered myself proud



Figure 5.3: Various draping assignments

to be one of them much of the time. One of the skills I had most wanted to learn during my time in the program was draping and patterning, and while I did learn a great deal, I also would have learned more if the overall work environment hadn't finally caused my faculty mentor to understandably leave in

the middle of my time there. Being educated in this environment, which was only heightened by the pandemic's effects on the university, directed my focus even more onto what I believed theater should be and what sort of places I could work long-term.

Chapter 6 : You On the Moors Now and Team Relationships

After nearly a year of pandemic-induced disappointment, my second-year design assignment was my light at the end of the tunnel. While I had initially been assigned two mid-size shows (planned prior to the Covid-19 outbreak) the pandemic did offer me the chance to design a single but large-scale show in the spring semester. That being our first indoors staged theatre production for the year, Jaclyn Backhaus's play *You On the Moors Now*. The script centers on the leading ladies of four pieces of classic literature: Lizzy Bennet, Jo March, Cathy Earnshaw, and Jane Eyre, as well as their respective leading men and an assortment of their supporting casts as they enter a literal battle of the sexes over rejected proposals. To my literature-loving, humanist self it was the best news I could have received, and it only got better when I learned I would be working with a guest director from Atlanta who was also in her mid-20s. The experience that followed, while far more stressful and draining than I ever could have imagined, was a highlight of my time on the University of South Carolina's campus, as well as being incredibly educational to experience.

This positivity of the experience ultimately came down to our director, who I found to be a wonderful collaborator and communicator, as well as a great source of information and learning. It was also my one and only time working on a staged theatrical production from start to finish in the design role, in my entire time in the program, so I am perhaps a bit biased towards it. I also enjoyed working with most of my fellow designers and technicians, some of whom were my fellow grads. I know at least one other graduate student had similarly positive experiences with the guest director and we both expressed interest in working with her again in the future, as well as each other.

In this director I had the rare blessing of a director who prioritizes costumes. She told me in an early meeting that had she not gone into directing she would have done costumes, I have always felt the reverse to be true for myself and we had extensive conversations about character and story as conveyed through the costume designs. I found her easy to talk to and enthusiastic about many of the same finds and design ideas I was, making me feel encouraged to share more confidently as the process went on. This also fostered the confidence to share my own gaps of knowledge and seek guidance from more informed sources. For example, one of our four leading ladies was a Black woman and while the director and I agreed on using wigs and hair pieces for her track, I was at a loss for where and what to buy and how best to shop for

those things. When I mentioned this in one of our chats on the way to our cars, the director immediately expressed a willingness to send me links and information based on her experience with a Black salon. Having such a positive response to my sharing my shortcomings was something that felt rarer, and I valued the opportunity to learn without feeling shamed.

We also had similar views on the femininity of the show, and how we wanted to stay away from a design that said dressing like a woman was weak or lesser than dressing like a man, However, we wanted to show a spectrum of gender expression within masculine and feminine, and we wanted to honor the battle of the sexes energy of the piece. We also wanted to show that while the girls thrived in their newfound independence, finding themselves in their new jobs and roles as well as their fashion sense, the boys were floundering. While the leading ladies took on pieces from their former partners, as well as the general fashion of their time, creating new looks that deviated the time periods while staying recognizable, the boys lost pieces and grew dirtier and colder as the play went on.

Blending History with Character

When dealing with a script such as *Moors*, which features famous (and infamous) characters from historical literature written by women, it is paramount to really nail down what makes a character recognizable. The director and I had

an early meeting that lasted over two hours, just to discuss the source literature and characters, as well as how historically inspired we wanted to be with our design concept. We ultimately settled on using my research-based decade choices for each novel's set of characters, allowing the variation of period to add to the surreal, dreamlike nature of the script. It also meant that I was able to group characters by their novel *and* period which almost felt like designing four little shows inside one big show. With four different silhouettes happening it would also be easier for the audience to follow who is connected to who, especially if they have not read all the source novels.

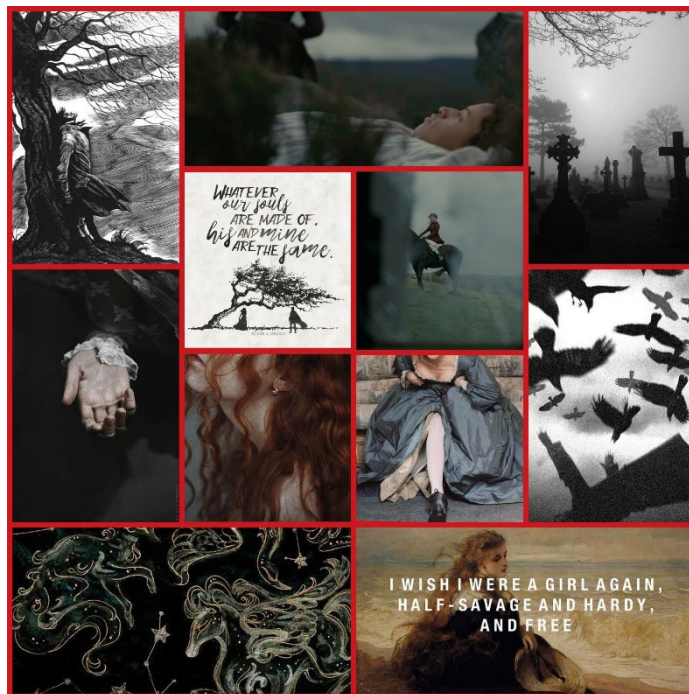


Figure 6.1: Cathy mood board

While *Wuthering Heights* takes place over multiple decades, we chose to utilize the roughly estimated timeframe of Cathy and Heathcliff's young adult years which placed them in the late 1700s. They are the fieriest pair, confessing their hatred more than their love. They also have a mentioned class difference, something that would be shown in their clothing quality and styles. Cathy is the flashy girl of the group, and her costumes will have flair and drama. Heathcliff meanwhile is also dramatic but in a more self-pitying and morose way, potentially lending itself to deeper more muted colors and less interest in fit and fashion. My actors were also vastly different heights which made Heathcliff's billowing layers that much more imposing, and Cathy's energy that much more spitfire and flashy by comparison.



Figure 6.2: Heathcliff mood board

finery, showing that Lizzie was able to obtain her own financial security and success without marrying a rich man. Darcy, meanwhile, followed the male lead trajectory of becoming more rumpled and dirtier during the war to a more refined and grown-up version of himself in at the reunion.

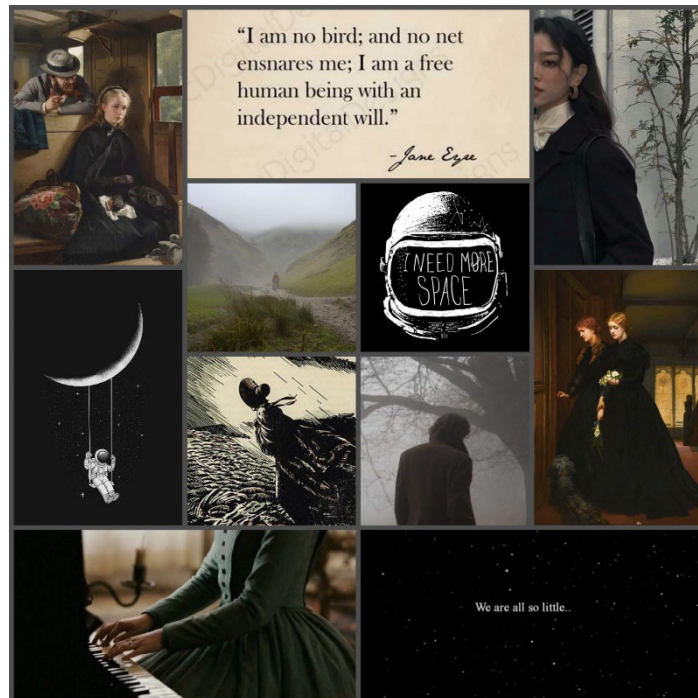


Figure 6.4: Jane mood board

Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester are also well-known in pop culture, albeit for being quite gothic and melancholy in their personalities and as such would be the darkest and most grayscale of the groups. However, I didn't want to go full gothic grayscale and so choose to use blue tones for Jane and brown and deep red tones for Rochester, allowing more color variation while keeping them the most sober pair onstage. However, over the course of the show Jane learns to

embrace her loneliness and is thus transformed in the final scene into someone more confident in herself. I wanted to keep her iconic look though, because I felt that she was less changed and more empowered, leading me to design a royal blue and silver gown covered in stars for her. I kept Mr. Rochester in the same color scheme throughout, with his primary changes being through the addition or removal of layers. I also gave him a billowing greatcoat which the actor used to his every advantage, highlighting just how much a costume can impact an actor's ability to perform.

The final pair if of course Jo and Laurie, they are the pair that feels the youngest and as such I designed them to be the brightest and most youthful pair.

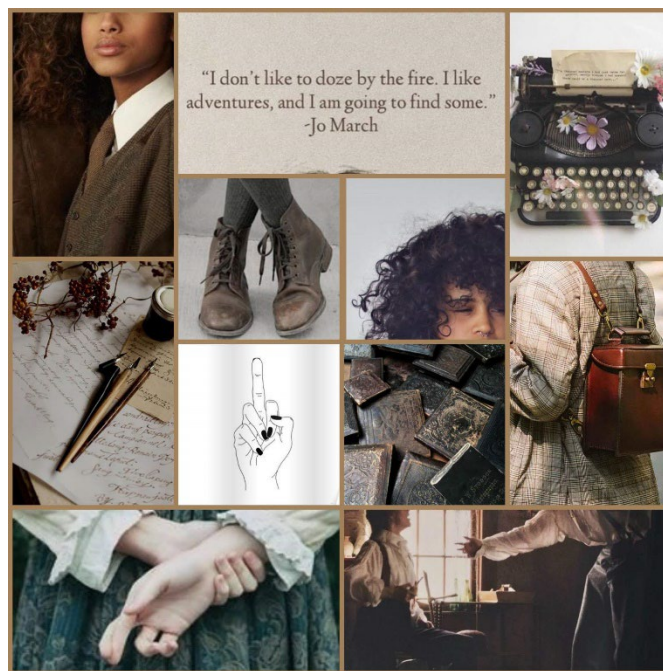


Figure 6.5: Jo mood board

Jo is also the most non-traditionally feminine and something I loved about this portrayal of her was how rough and truly like Laurie she is. Laurie and Jo of course do not end up together and I am not one who believes they should have. I did however want to convey somehow through their costumes their sameness without making it look like they are a matched set. Jo was also the character that the director and I spent the most time discussing in our early meeting and we both landed on an interpretation that felt somewhat gender non-conforming, at least for her true self. As such, Jo was in pants as soon as possible and in the final scene she and Laurie entered to find themselves wearing the exact same suit, except for their neckties and the dominant color of their waistcoat. One of my favorite moments to watch during tech was that reveal, which included a proud Amy gushing over how cute both were.

Lessons in Team Building and Management

Another great learning experience that came with this design assignment was the chance to put my ideas about leadership, collaboration, communication, and workplace dynamics into action. I resolved to be a clear communicator with my shop and with stage management. I tried to keep accurate paperwork as much as I could, although as the situation became more strained that did fall more by the wayside. I wanted to be aware and informed about the process and I wanted my team to be too.



Figure 6.6: Renderings for *You On the Moors Now*

One way I did this was by asking the shop manager what our labor and time constraints meant for our build abilities. Before I'd gone over my list of costumes to decide on builds I had an idea of how many we could produce which meant both I and the shop were able to prepare our expectations better. I also tried to communicate with stage management as much as possible, as I had



Figure 6.7: Renderings cont.

perceived some tensions and issues there in the past. I tried simply to be forthcoming with answers to their questions and relevant information as I became aware of it. When one department went back on their word to provide certain covid-required resources for costumes we were unable to really settle the situation well due to stage management having been kept out of that meeting and not having notes on it. However, my work in developing a positive relationship, as well as my willingness to respond and meet up to discuss options, meant I didn't feel the added pressure of being part of the cause of stress for another department.

I also wanted to make sure my team felt appreciated, especially after an incredibly trying build process due to labor shortage and lack of institutional support. I brought in thank you gifts for my drapers and crew especially and

The image displays three screenshots from a costume design software interface, likely 'Action Plot'.

Top Screenshot: Actor-Character Grid
 This view shows a grid with columns for actors (Emma James, Susan Savvelly, Zoe Chan, Sydri Brown, Michael Williams, Cameron Eubanks, Michael Taylor, John Romanski) and rows for characters (Elizabeth Bennet, Jo March, Cathy, Jane Eyre, Mr. Darcy, Laurie, Heathcliff, Mr. Rochester). Columns represent different scenes (1.1 to 3.1), with 'X' marks indicating when a character appears in a scene.

Middle Screenshot: Detailed Actor Look List
 This view provides a detailed look list for each actor. Columns include Actor, Character, Looks, and various scene numbers (1.1 to 2.9b). It tracks specific items like 'Icon', 'Battle', 'True Set', and 'Fisale' across different scenes, along with notes on alterations and status.

Bottom Screenshot: Detailed Piece List
 This view details the items for Emma James (Elizabeth Bennet) and Sydri Brown (Jane Eyre). It lists items such as 'Orange dress', 'Purple socks x2', 'Brown army boots', 'Understitch/cams', 'Wig', 'Pink and white gown', 'Purple overlay', 'Studded gold shoes', 'Backstays', 'Earrings', 'Two-tone blue dress', 'Socks', 'Slimy boots', 'Cloak', 'Brown and tan checked bodice', 'Blue rough pants', 'Starlight dress', 'Backstays', 'Shoes', and 'Red striped bodice'. For each item, it specifies cleaning instructions (e.g., 'Wash', 'Spray') and alteration notes (e.g., 'Out out armye 1.5" @ SS, taper to 0 @ shoulder, let down 5"', 'Let out back closures 1" total, fix shoulder seam, let down sleeves as much as possible').

Figure 6.8: Examples of tracking paperwork

tried to being openly grateful for the many hours of overtime on my production. I had tried to avoid overworking them as much as possible, knowing we were all burning out after the year of pandemic graduate school, and for the most part I feel like I was successful in that. I was generally proud of my work on this piece, and again, consider it a highlight of my time in the program.

The image displays a collage of screenshots from a project management application, likely Trello or Asana, used for tracking paperwork and note-taking for a production. The screenshots are arranged in a grid-like fashion, showing various sections and lists:

- Top Row:**
 - Left:** A 'To Do' list for 'You On the Moors Now' with tasks like 'Dye Jane's pants/dress', 'Finish quick change skirt', and 'Scan measurement sheets and email to Campbell (also actor photos)'. It includes a sidebar with categories like 'Shop Info', 'Production Meetings', 'Sourcing and Orders', etc.
 - Middle:** A 'Final Notes' section for 'You On the Moors Now' dated Thursday, April 8, 2021, 12:46 AM. It lists tasks under categories like 'DYE', 'DISTRESS', 'PULL', and 'CRAFT'.
 - Right:** A 'Design/Crafts' section for 'You On the Moors Now' dated Friday, March 19, 2021, 10:23 PM. It lists tasks under categories like 'Dyeing', 'Mini-Builds', 'Wigs', and 'Millinery'.
- Second Row:**
 - Left:** A 'Final Notes' section for 'You On the Moors Now' dated Thursday, April 8, 2021, 12:46 AM. It lists tasks under categories like 'DYE', 'DISTRESS', 'PULL', and 'CRAFT'.
 - Middle:** A 'Final Notes' section for 'You On the Moors Now' dated Thursday, April 8, 2021, 12:46 AM. It lists tasks under categories like 'DYE', 'DISTRESS', 'PULL', and 'CRAFT'.
 - Right:** A 'Dress 2' section for 'You On the Moors Now' dated Wednesday, April 7, 2021, 7:48 PM. It lists tasks under categories like 'ACTOR', 'WARDROBE', and 'DESIGN'.
- Third Row:**
 - Left:** A table listing items for 'ACT I/Top Priority' with columns for item number, name, and notes. Items include 'Laurie 1', 'Cathy', 'Heathcliff', 'Darcy', 'Rochester', 'Caroline Bing', 'Mr. Bingley', 'Healy Dean', 'Joseph', 'Amy March', 'Beth March', and 'Marmee'.
 - Middle:** A 'Pull List' section for 'You On the Moors Now' dated Friday, March 19, 2021, 5:35 PM. It lists items under categories like 'Jewelry', 'Tights', 'Belts', 'Socks', 'Suspenders', and 'Cloaks'.

Figure 6.9: Tracking paperwork and note taking formats

You On the Moors Now ▾

- Shop Info
- Production Meetings
- Sourcing and Orders
- Measurements
- Fitting Notes
- Tracking Paperwork
- Design
- Rehearsal and Show ...
- Purchases and Rentals
- Tech Notes

Design/Crafts

Friday, March 19, 2021 10:23 PM

To Do

Dyeing

- Jane B dress (light blue)
- Jane E pants (deep blue)
- Lizzy dress fabric (match dress)
- Heathcliff shirt (bloodstain)

Mini-Builds

- Lizzy court dress train
- Meg/River Sister quick rig skirt
- Jo and Laurie vest covers
- River Sister pleats
- Finale Amy belt

Wigs

- Caroline bun/extension
- Felisha bun
- Felisha ponytail
- Isabella bun
- Isabella ponytail
- Jacob Marmee wig

Distressing

- Michael T. pants
- John pants (pull)
- Michael W. shirt
- Cameron shirt
- Jacob coat (patch)
- Jacob pants
- Caroline shift
- Caroline apron
- Caroline skirt

Millinery

- Isabella pink fascinator/feather piece (Caroline Bingley)
- Isabella teal/green hair ribbons (Adult Amy)

You On the Moors Now ▾

- Shop Info
- Production Meetings
- Sourcing and Orders
- Measurements
- Fitting Notes
- Tracking Paperwork
- Design
- Rehearsal and Show ...
- Purchases and Rentals
- Tech Notes

Tech 1

Saturday, April 3, 2021 8:06 PM

Trim on Zoe, what is the wrinkle

Trim on Emma, Check her wig

Dye Sydny socks blue

Darken-masks

~~Shorten and make straight Bingley vest.~~

Dye Joseph's socks green + distress pants + Coat

Take in Caroline's skirt + add dirt to apron

Felisha crinoline hanging out

Jesse coat tight - button burst?

Marmee needs a belt/sash, add hair snood

Lizzy needs shoulder fringe

Shopping (11-1)
Pants for Jacob
Strapless bra for Isabella
Bike shorts for Susan
Dirt makeup

Pull (1-1:30)
Darcy distressed shirt
Laurie distressed shirt
Button suspenders for Bhaer
Trims for Lizzy
Marmee belt

Build (1:30-3)
Sydny pants

Dye (3-4)
Joseph socks (green)
Joseph cheesecloth

Distress (4-5:30)
Joseph pants and coat

You On the Moors Now ▾

- Shop Info
- Production Meetings
- Sourcing and Orders
- Measurements
- Fitting Notes
- Tracking Paperwork
- Design
- Rehearsal and Show ...
- Purchases and Rentals
- Tech Notes

First Production Meeting

Wednesday, February 24, 2021 11:35 AM

YOU ON THE MOORS NOW - Production Meeting Agenda for MON 2/8/2021

DIRECTIONS SUMMARY
- Introductions and General how are things going

CALENDAR SCHEDULE
- First Rehearsal 3:1 at 4:30pm in BTW, starting with Design Presentations (via zoom as well) (HEAD/Adapt)
- Share performance Calendar (dresses look over later weekend)
- Hard copies of Script are available
- Updated Cost List

INDOOR COVID COMPLIANCE
- Use of Masks
- Confirm Social Distancing policy
- Locking for (1) "State of Emergency" run crew person

SCENERY
- General Plans to tape out Dress & skirts for SM scripts
- Is there a Scenic Model for this production
- Estimate Early date to review and discuss March 22nd
- Early thoughts on Run Crew: trying to get (1) Fly Operators, (2) ASMs for St. & SR, General Deck crew**
- Face Locking in stage directions

PROPS
- I created a VERY preliminary Props list based solely on the Script

COSTUMES and HAIR & MAKEUP
- Measurements and Fittings to begin
- Early thoughts on Run Crew: trying to get (1) Maria Dresser, (1) Women's Dresser, (1) Hair/Wig

Questions

- Casting updates?
- Is Jane parkouring?
- Physicality in general (stays for Cathy?)
- Pockets?
- Marmee shoes- male or female? _
- Heeled boot
- feminine Shape
- Fabric follow-up

Notes

- Rehearsing in BTW
- Design Pres in person @ 6:30pm
- Design Concepts for Rehearsal
- Room Renderings
- Mood Boards?
- Move to Drayton 3/22?
- Crew Watch - 3/31
- Arm movement needed
- Caroline McGee- Player 3
- Not told yet
- Photoshoot: 3/19 @ the latest

Figure 6.10: Notes and to do list formatting

I tried my best to keep clear an up-to-date paperwork, with varying degrees of success. I found myself often overwhelmed with things that needed to be done, either for classes or for the shows I was both building and designing

n that semester. I wasn't the only one, I've already mentioned our requests for overhire in the fall which we knew would be needed in the spring as well if we were to get all the shows scheduled onstage with the labor we had. As the semester continued those feelings of overwhelm continued to build, as did the perceived lack of support, until I finally met with my graduate director about taking incompletes in half my course load for the semester. I was devastated and relieved at the same time when the plans went through for extensions on two of my heaviest workloads, allowing me to put my educational degree components on the backburner for a time to achieve the professional development ones. I also decided at this time to forgo my original plans to stay on campus an additional semester into my third year for more course work, both for my own reasons and at the recommendation of my mental health team. These incompletes feel like a defining moment in my educational experience, and they shaped how I saw myself and my time at the institution.

Despite those hits to my self-esteem, I also found pride in myself during this design process. Not only did the guest artist director indicate having enjoyed working with me, she also expressed interested in doing it again in the future. My peers were also very complimentary and recognized the work and struggle I had put in to make the show happen the way I wanted. Perhaps most notably, a design faculty known for not having anything positive to say about any graduate

student's work stopped not just me, but my head of program, to tell us that the costumes were well done. The mix of positive and negative made for a strong learning experience, of things I wanted to repeat and never do again. While I am



Figure 6.11: Production photos for *You On the Moors Now*

proud of the design and stand by my choices and those of the director, I also already have different ideas for how I might do the same production in the future. I expect that is something that will remain consistent in my work that I



Figure 6.12: Production photos cont.

always find an even better idea after the fact. Overall, this was still the highlight of my time in the design program for sure, and one of the proudest accomplishments of my time in the university overall.



Figure 6.13: Final production photos for *Moors*

Chapter 7 : Workplace Culture in a “Post-Covid” World

American Players Theatre

Driving the 16-hour trip north to Wisconsin for my first internship experience I felt uncharacteristically nervous. Not only was this my first professional theatre position since before starting my masters, I was also so burnt out by the pandemic graduate school experience that I felt uncertain I would be happy or even healthy working in a costume shop. Those fears were put at ease, however, when I called in to a virtual mixed staff orientation on the first day of my drive. American Players Theatre, or APT, has a document entitled "APT Values" that is reviewed and revised regularly, most recently considering the pandemic and its effects on the community. These values are included in the welcome packet along with an employee's contract, as well as posted both in the staff buildings and show programs. They were also read aloud during this orientation, meaning that I was able to listen to each one as I drove and really take into consideration what those words meant and how they applied to the department I was heading into.

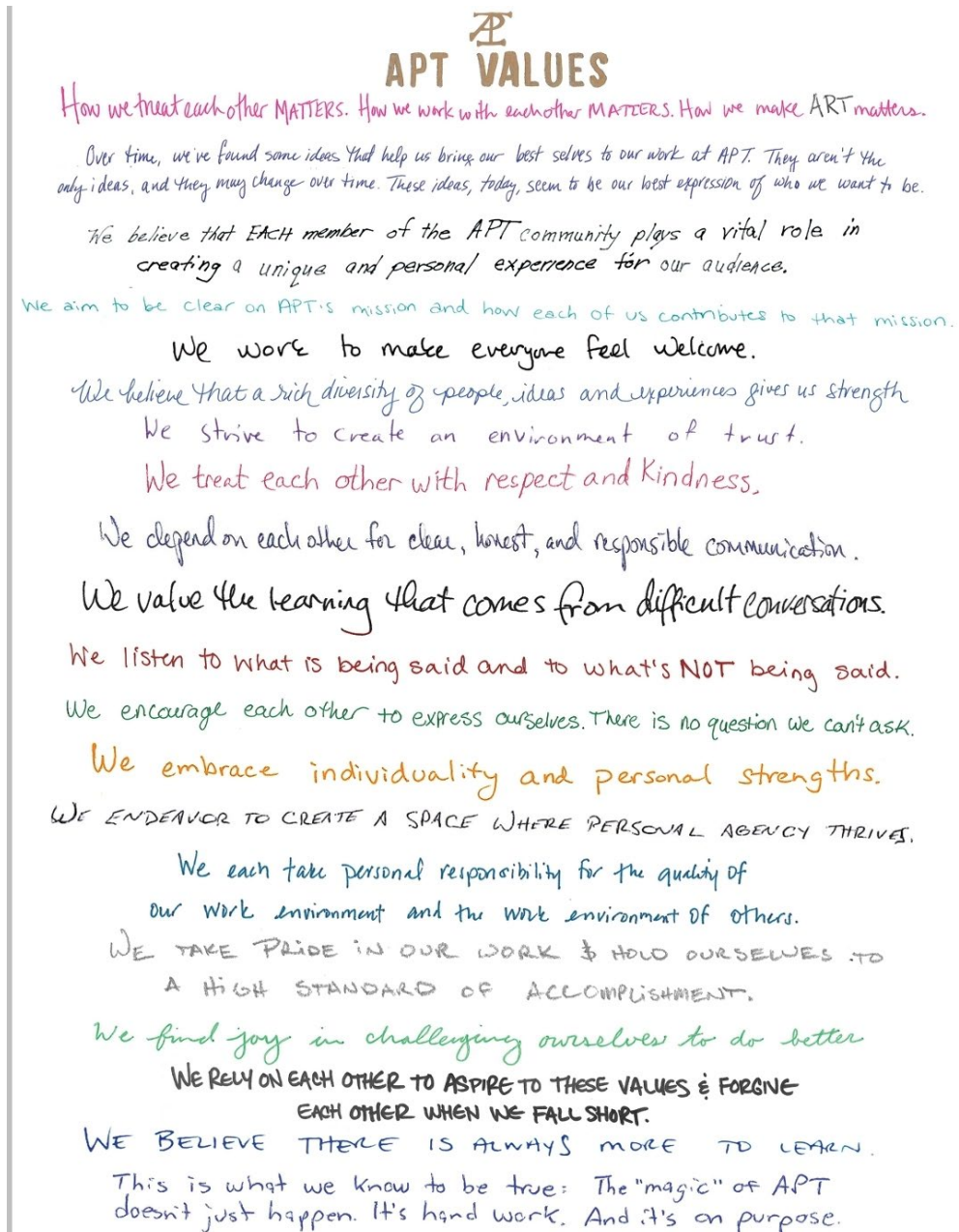


Figure 7.1: The "APT Values" as seen in both the employee handbook and on the worksite

One of the other employees in that virtual meeting was the draper I would be working under, one who I had worked with in the past both at APT and at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park prior to starting graduate school. She was who had referred me to APT in the first place, after we spent much of a season

working together on multiple projects. Not only does she have an extensive professional resume, she also spent over 20 years as the shop manager for the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music costume shop where she supervised and educated graduate and undergraduate students in technical skills. This background of experience has made her a fantastic team leader and invaluable source of information and skills, which she shares readily and enthusiastically with anyone who seeks it. Working with her has been the single most impactful thing for my technical training, not to mention the example she has been for how to behave and treat others in the industry. I was able to work with her directly on three of the four shows I did with APT in 2021 and she made each experience a positive one, even in the face of post-pandemic theatre and communication breakdowns. Not to mention, all the learning opportunities she allowed not only me, but the rest of our team to experience through our work.

For example, in the first show we worked on together we were going to be doing a lot of thread eyelets, something we used her personal machine for. When I arrived, I was still working on my virtual finals, including my final ensemble for my Underpinnings patterning and construction class. Before I even had a make my piece look more historically appropriate and our whole team spent a



Figure 7.2: Suit built for APT's *The Taming of the Shrew*

portion of our afternoon all learning how to use the eyelet settings on her machine and practicing together. It didn't matter that only one of us would have

Another example was during my final show of the season, our five-actor production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, which had multiple builds that included a couple of suits. Having never worked on menswear construction, I asked if I

could build one of the suits for the show. Not only did she agree, but she would also pause during her process of building the other suit to show me how to do the different techniques I would be needing later, allowing me to watch an example and think through the process twice before I finished my own project. I was able to learn and not feel rushed in my own build process, due to her



Figure 7.3: Production photos from APT's season opener, *The Mountaintop*

forethought in helping prepare her team for future tasks. In addition to these more specific examples, she was also a very calming and reassuring presence for all of us during even our most hectic tech week moments. I think the most telling sign of her leadership qualities is that when the pressure is on, she never allows her team to feel burdened or blamed, instead acknowledging the situation as it

stands while also reassuring her team that it will work out alright in the end. Her ability to balance the emotional pressures of working on a creative process with the need for self-care and prioritizing herself and her team are an inspiration and I hope to one day be half the teacher and mentor she is.



Figure 7.4: Drape for "The One From Within" from *Oedipus*

Overall, my experience at American Players Theatre was the most important part of my graduate school experience. Not only did it allow me to return to a professional environment for the first time since starting my masters, it also helped me heal from my pandemic education experience and fall in love with theatre again. I was able to spend about thirteen weeks there, working on four different shows of varying sizes, between May and October with breaks in between. I was working as a first hand, under two different drapers, and I

learned so much from both, unsurprising considering they both have experience in education. I also was able to drape one of the looks for a show, which was a fun bonus to the internship.



Figure 7.5: Production photos of APT's *Oedipus*

In terms of pandemic safety, they are an Equity theatre and so followed the union standards and CDC guidelines throughout the summer and fall. We went from masked and strict social distancing guidelines that included podded living and work to more relaxed masking and social distancing rules as the season went on and we achieved vaccinated workplace status. There was also mandatory and provided testing for certain groups of people on site. Towards

the end of my time we were masked again for my final two weeks due to an exposure but had been mostly issue free the entire season.



Figure 7.6: Production photos of APT's *The Taming of the Shrew*

The overall workplace culture was positive, my supervisors all were understanding of my abilities and needs as a student part of my time there. I also saw multiple times, people in higher positions in the company either stand up for their team or acknowledge when they had failed to do so. One of the productions caused a lot of issues in multiple departments, primarily due to the director and a couple of designers and impacting the technicians most. After a day in a tech week full of final straws our costume director put his foot down and sent us home an hour early, told the team we would be working one more

day of notes, but our final day would be off, and met with the artistic director for an hour after we left. The next day, that artistic director came into our shop to apologize to us for not preventing more balls from dropping, and to assure us that she took full responsibility for any mismanagement, as the head of the company. It was such an important and impactful thing to do, and something I



Figure 7.7: Production photos of APT's premier production of *An Improbable Fiction*

really needed to see after the years prior.

Kentucky Opera

In the month after I returned from APT I was contacted about a position draping for Kentucky Opera in my hometown of Louisville. When I met with the

production manager and saw the renderings of what I would be draping I felt confident I would be able to achieve the look the designer was going for. I had made a similar garment for one of our school productions and the timeline I was promised was much longer than anything I had experienced at school or at other professional companies. The pay was also better than anything I had been offered before and I was excited to work in a city that I was strongly considering moving back to.

The experience, while incredibly educational, was much more disheartening than I could have imagined. I felt so ill-prepared, both by the company itself and my academic institutions. It was as if everything that could have gone wrong with the pattern and fabric, went wrong. And I struggled to correct for those things, particularly with the timeframe issues I ended up having due to performer availability. However, the experience was still incredibly educational, and I made some contacts with other freelancers in the area I plan to move to following graduation. Their covid safety was also particularly good, with masked and pretty spread-out workspaces, temperature and symptom checks when we arrived, plus weekly and then twice weekly testing either on site or nearby. Because of our strict covid restrictions there were more days I was unable to work in the shop proper, but I was able to pick up work and take it

home with little issue. Much like at APT, I felt comfortable with the safety measures being taken and I never tested positive while working there.



Figure 7.8: Eurydice's wedding jumpsuit, draped for Kentucky Opera's *Orfeo*

The work culture, however, was less impressive. While the pay was good and I was able to make some local contacts, the way the senior administration viewed the costume shop and specifically shop manager was unfortunately negative. The shop manager has been working for the company for nearly forty years and while she is a bit abrasive a times, she also knows her stuff and works hard every day she's there. There were multiple times she brought an issue to

their attention, only to be dismissed or outright ignored until someone else brought it to their attention as well. For example, our heat was broken and unfixed for months until more people than our manager complained about it, and our dry cleaning (including rentals) for the show prior to mine wasn't even considered until after the show had been closed and struck otherwise.

The work was much harder than I anticipated, and I felt like my draping skills hadn't improved at all since starting my program. I also felt like I might be burnt out from the stress of the past year and struggling to retain what I had learned when put in a professional setting. Either way, I felt ill-prepared and like I was letting down the entire shop and team when I had multiple fitting issues that required double the normal number of fittings to address. While the issues were more certainly not all my fault, there were many that I could have avoided if I had been more prepared than I was. Issues caused by lack of equipment or inappropriate materials included lack of a hanging form for a jumpsuit (I asked for one and got a pair of legs to go with a standard torso), narrow fabric to make a shroud-like veil out of, a wiggly charmeuse to make a tailored garment out of, etc.. My own issues were lack of knowledge about what to do when things didn't work out the way I thought they might, specifically in altering my garments. This was made more difficult by the fact that while I had nearly two whole months of build time, only three weeks of that time would have access to the

performer in question. That meant I would be doing a mockup fitting on the form or a comparable body double if possible, so that I could go into real fabric on the performer. This only made the many alterations more difficult to manage and it was hard to get a hold of it again.

However, the performer loved her piece and wanted to buy it after the run. And the shop and design assistant was complimentary on how well I handled the chaos and pressure of the situation, especially once they started raising and lowering the hem at the last minute of tech. He helped me complete the piece and talked me through my mistakes which helped process them and learn from them even more. The shop manager was supportive and frustrated on my behalf, as were the dressers and stitchers who watched the whole thing. Overall, it was a more positive than negative experience, although it did make me frustrated with what I feel like I got out of my formal education, in terms of preparing me for the professional world.

Chapter 8 : Mentoring High Schoolers and Reflecting on Goals

My final internship experience is still ongoing at the time of writing, and it is with Assumption High School in Louisville, KY. I am working as their costume supervisor and mentor for their spring production of the musical of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, supervising ten high school girls, including two production heads who design and manage the production. This is another job local to where I grew up and want to move soon, as well as being in youth theatre education which is an area I have a growing interest in. Therefore, I was incredibly excited to be given this opportunity to work in that environment to see how I feel about it.

So far, I am enjoying it a lot. The students are excited to learn and enthusiastic about the process and all their peers. I enjoy their questions and I like the challenge of working with smaller budgets and quirky shop stocks. I have enough girls on my team that I feel confident in our ability to put together a good show, and I believe the other directors and mentors believe in similar educational philosophies to myself. I am hopeful that this job will continue into

their next year, and potentially my connections there would allow me to do similar work with other schools in the area.

I have enjoyed working with the students, especially as we start planning what we might do next year differently. I find myself reflecting on my time both in undergraduate and graduate school as I think about what I want to focus on in my teaching philosophy if I follow that path. For example, something I would like to take from the program is the adaptability of some classes and course content. For example, I was interested in taking a lighting class because it had



Figure 8.1 Lighting recreation project

interested me in my previous program, and I wanted the chance to learn more about a design area that could have such an impact on my designs and how they came across onstage. The head of my program worked with the head of lighting

to put together an opportunity for myself and a couple there MFA candidates in areas besides lighting to learn about that medium. This type of course offerings based on student interest made logical sense to me and I would plan on incorporating it into any educational programming I was in leadership of.

Another similar class was my second-year draping and patterning class in historical undergarments, otherwise known as underpinnings. This class was one



Figure 8.2: 18th century underpinnings final

that our technical faculty member and my mentor had been wanting to teach for a while and both myself and my year mate were interested in taking it. We initially planned to do a set of stays and a corset, but the production schedule

didn't allow us enough time to do two ensembles, so we had to pick one. I also appreciated that choice by our instructor, to adapt her syllabus when she saw the production load. It was something I think other faculty should be doing, at least as long as they insist on having as many supported shows done with the same amount of labor we had during my time there.

Future Career Goals

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, I initially sought to obtain my MFA to pursue a career in higher education. While that career path is still available to me with this degree, after spending a combined seven and a half years academia, and seeing what that environment does to me, I have decided I cannot pursue this field, no matter how much I might enjoy teaching. One thing I can thank the pandemic for is giving me a rapid fire experience of issues in academia during my time in the program, which I have been able to use to assess how I feel about the system as a whole. What I had seen has been more focused on personal image and hierarchy and power plays than the well-being of their students or their ideal educational environment. I also felt like my institution saw me as a resource rather than an investment, something to be used for underpaid labor and my tuition charges, rather than a student who was paying for and thus entitled to the education she had been sold, or even a person deserving of compassion and understanding. As one of my stitchers from APT

said, “it’s like you can care too much about students to be a teacher” and that’s not how I want to have to work. I was thankful for the final year’s structure of allowing us to find jobs and work professionally for a time. As mentioned previously, I planned to stay on campus for part of that year until I received medical recommendation to either drop the program or attend remotely. Thanks to the internship expectations I was able to do that and still obtain my degree, without having to transfer to another institution. I was also able to learn on the job, something I had been doing before the pandemic and starting my MFA and had missed, although some of the lessons learned were just confirmation that my education had fallen short of my expectations.

Another thing the pandemic afforded me was the opportunity to reflect on what I had most enjoyed about past theater work. I realized my favorite work experiences were with school-aged children and programs for them. I would rather devote my time as an educator to the children’s theatres, camps, after school programs, and more available and in need of staffing. In Louisville alone there are two youth specific companies, multiple camps and after school programs, and a large population of private and charter schools with robust arts programs that hire freelance. I plan to live there for at least a couple of years and might try to work more in that realm of theatre education. I might also take the time to work in something other than the arts, to give myself a chance to recover

from what I feel is a lot of burnt-out creativity and brainpower. However, I know that if I do go in that type of work, I have many ideas for workshop curricula, methods of teaching, and my philosophy and attitude towards me colleagues and students.

I do find it rather difficult, however, to really explore what I want my long-term life to look like in regard to theater and costumes. While I love my time in certain positions and with certain people, I also am incredibly burnt out after my draining experience in graduate school and to think about the future feels impossible. I'm exhausted, I want to rest and not think for a while, I've started working in bridal alterations to supplement my assistantship and it is nice to work somewhere with two days off a week and the ability to leave the work at the door when I leave. I don't think I'm done with theater forever, but I do think my time here will be limited, at least for the foreseeable future.

I will reflect on my time in both professional and educational spaces and try to be an open communicator, even with my newest students and staff. I will strive to treat everyone with equal respect and dignity, as collaborators and people. With my students I will try to teach them what they need, and more importantly, why they need it. I want to structure history courses that focus on non-European cultures and why we study the history we do, alongside classes that teach rendering through medium exploration and technical classes that

build on one another like blocks. If my educational experience during covid has taught me one thing, it is that I can push through almost anything and I can adapt even the worst situations into something I don't regret. Whatever I do with my degree, I plan to turn my education into something I am proud of, and happy to do every day.

References

Backhaus, Jaclyn. *You On the Moors Now*. Dramatists Play Service Inc. 2019.

Borgeson, Jess, Adam Long, and Daniel Singer. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*. 1994.

Hall, Katori. *The Mountaintop*. Dramatists Play Service Inc. 2012.

Nyuyen, Qui. *She Kills Monsters*. Samuel French Inc. 2012.

Ruhl, Sarah. *Eurydice*. Samuel French Inc. 2008.

Shaffer, Peter. *Amadeus*. Samuel French Inc. 1979.