

5-2016

# An Actor's Growth: From Student to Professional, Tackling Collegiate Theatre with Michael Lee

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## Recommended Citation

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*Undergraduate Honors Theses*. Paper 342. <http://dc.etsu.edu/honors/342>

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An Actor's Growth:  
From Student to Professional, Tackling Collegiate Theatre with Michael Lee  
By  
Michael Brian Lee

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
Honors-in-Discipline Scholars Program  
Honors College  
and the  
Honors-in Theatre Program  
College of Arts and Sciences  
East Tennessee State University

Michael Lee

Herb Parker

Senior Thesis

15 April 2016

An Actor's Growth:

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**Preface**

Dear Reader,

What you are about to embark on is a journey of my collegiate experience in theatre. With the help of an extremely talented faculty and staff within East Tennessee State University's Division of Theatre and Dance, located in Johnson City, TN, I have been able to develop my acting talents further than I could have ever imagined. Included within this Thesis is my progress, documented through daily journal entries, of the growth I experienced during my senior year at East Tennessee State. With the help of Herb Parker, the Director of the two shows that lead my progress, I have been able to analyze my performance from all aspects within the acting industry.

Upon completion of this thesis, I will have completed all of the necessary coursework to be granted a Bachelor of Arts Degree with a major in Theatre. This thesis was the last required portion for The Honors in Discipline coursework which will grant an honors diploma. Please enjoy reading about my journey as an undergraduate college senior in a professional theatre program.

Sincerely,

Michael Lee

Michael Lee

Herb Parker

Senior Thesis

15 April 2016

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**Introduction**

This thesis is being completed as a requirement for the Honors in Discipline Scholars Program within the department of Communication and Performance at East Tennessee State University. Herb Parker, an Associate Professor within the department of Communication and Performance has assisted Michael Lee, student and author, in completing this thesis.

Upon the completion of this thesis it is the students hope to have completed the following goals:

1. Understand the method behind accurately portraying a character on stage within all aspects of the performance industry.
2. Be able to research a given character thoroughly in order to fully understand a character's basic wants and needs within the script.
3. Be able to identify each beat (change of action or intention) and tactic within the script.
4. Accurately understand the meaning of 'Antithesis' and have the ability to choose the proper active verb for each beat.

In order to insure that these goals are completed, Michael will learn and perform two contrasting characters within two productions in the Division of Theatre and Dance at East Tennessee State

University. During the rehearsal process of each show, a journal will be kept in which Michael will be able to catalogue his learning experiences and findings during the rehearsal and performance process. This completed journal will be a major part of this thesis paper in which a given reader will be able to learn about the process Michael used to develop each character within the given show.

The two shows that Michael will be performing in as part of his thesis are *The Trojan Woman*, adapted by Ellen McLaughlin, and *Race*, written by David Mamet. Each show is unique in its own right and both are polar opposites. *The Trojan Woman* is a play originally written by Euripides in Ancient Greece. As summarized by McLaughlin, *The Trojan Woman* is about the following:

“In the wake of their devastating defeat, the women of Troy, all now widows, wait on the beach below the ravaged city to be claimed by their Greek conquerors as slaves and concubines. Though the war is over, exile and degradation lie ahead and the fates of these women, including Queen Hecuba, her daughter-in-law Andromache, widow of the great Hector, are still in the balance” (McLaughlin Back Cover).

As *The Trojan Women* is a Period Greek Tragedy special care will be required to insure that each actor is portraying the correct period traits according to the director’s vision. A dramaturge will also be needed to clarify any language that may seem foreign and to better understand the concepts within the piece. *The Trojan Women* will be an excellent piece for this thesis as it will give Michael the experience necessary to portray characters in different genres and styles, not just modern drama.

Auditions for *The Trojan Women* are scheduled for January 21, 2015 in the Bud Frank Theatre and will require performing an appropriate monologue from the show. The director, Herb Parker, will choose the audition material depending on the character each actor is

auditioning for. *The Trojan Woman* will open on April 16, 2015 and run through April 19. All performances will take place within the Bud Frank Theatre in Gillbreath Hall on ETSU's main campus in Johnson City, TN. *The Trojan Women* will be expected to run for one hour and five minutes and will be performed with no intermission.

*Race*, having been written in 2008 and produced on the Broadway Stage for the first time in 2009, will be the second contrasting show for Michael's thesis. Samuel French, the play publisher of *Race*, summarizes the show in the following paragraph:

“Two lawyers find themselves defending a wealthy white executive charged with raping a black woman. When a new legal assistant gets involved in the case, the opinions that boil beneath explode to the surface. When David Mamet turns the spotlight on what we think but can't say, dangerous truths are revealed, and no punches are spared” (Mamet Back Cover).

Due to Mamet's strong social topic a unique approach will need to be taken when learning the character. Also, As *Race* is a more contemporary piece, a different approach will need to be used. In addition, Parker, the show's director, has decided to stage the show using the newly renovated Studio 205 in Campus Center Building. The set design will be configured to arena staging which will allow the actors to perform in-the-round. As *The Trojan Woman* will be produced on a proscenium stage (the traditional theatre stage), this will give Michael an additional level of experience to add to his resume.

Parker has announced that auditions for *Race* will be held on September 1, 2015 at 7:00 pm in Studio 205, Campus Center Building. For the audition, actors will be asked to read particular scenes from the script to give him the ability to see which actors will best be suited for the role. *Race* will be performed on October 27 – 31, 2015 in the ETSU Campus Center Building in Studio 205. The show will be expected to last about an hour and twenty minutes and will be performed without an intermission.

**Audition Process:**  
***The Trojan Women***

Once the department of communication and performance at ETSU announced the season, Michael immediately ordered copies of both scripts in order to prepare for the upcoming auditions. Once received, he read each show twice to insure full understanding of the material. While on break from school he contacted his acting coach, Bill Smith, in Denver, Colorado to start preparing for the auditions and to familiarize himself with possible audition material.

During their weekly Tuesday night workshop, Bill Smith had recommended several scenes from each piece to rehearse with a chosen scene partner. At each workshop for the following several weeks Michael and his scene partner would rehearse one scene according to the performance standards. Once a first take was performed in class, Smith would give feedback before allowing Michael to perform the piece again, with the new notes in mind. This method allowed Michael to gain a full understanding of each possible character before heading into the audition.

In addition to working with Bill Smith, Michael researched each playwright in depth to gain a better understanding of the possible themes within the piece. For *The Trojan Women* special care also had to be given in researching the time period and the factual importance of each character.

Once at *The Trojan Women* auditions Parker gave Michael a monologue from the script to perform on stage. The chosen monologue was Poseidon's opening speech in which he confronts the audience regarding the trauma the women are experiencing. Poseidon also recalls several memories from when Troy, now a city in ruins, once stood tall. After completing his initial audition, Parker asked Michael to try the piece again but with differing tactics and

emotions. After performing the piece three times Michael was thanked for his time and told that he would be notified of the cast list within the following week.

During the following days after the auditions a great amount of anxiety was introduced. Michael was constantly wondering if he had shown his ability to Parker during the audition. While he knew that cast lists are produced for countless reasons, the last of which being talent, Michael couldn't help but thinking he hadn't done enough to earn the role. Thankfully, after a couple days Michael had received an email from Parker officially asking Michael to join the cast of *The Trojan Women*. He had been cast in the roles of Poseidon, Talhybius, and The Guard for the production. Parker also mentioned that rehearsals would start the following week with more details to come.

### **Rehearsal Process:** ***The Trojan Women***

The first rehearsal for *The Trojan Women* consisted of a table read with all cast members included in *The Trojan Women*. One of the most unique parts of *The Trojan Women* rehearsal process was the amount of time Parker had dedicated to table reads. He had discussed with the cast that through the process of simply reading the script he wanted the actors to discover what they felt as important beats and tactics. He had instructed the actors to use this process to develop the character until blocking had to be used to gain more control over the characters.

During Parker's introduction he mentioned several important directorial decisions that would impact the actor's performance. While *The Trojan Women* is technically considered a Greek tragedy, Parker wanted us to refrain from falling into the stereotypical acting style seen in most productions of Greek tragedies. This style includes overacting dramatic moments, whaling, screaming, and sobbing, and an overall lack of one's emotions. Instead of this dramatic style,

Parker wanted the audience to feel the dramatic tension at all times, but use the screaming and yelling only when he needed to heighten a particular beat. By choosing when and where actors were allowed to yell, he would be able to control the story and release it at the proper point. This intentional release would create a more powerful response since the audience would be seeing the outburst for the first time.

Michael was also given a specific note that impacted his performance. As Poseidon is generally referred to as a 'God' in Greek Mythology, he wanted Michael to portray Poseidon in his human form. This would mean that Michael would need to consider how a God would act, walk, and behave as a particularly vulnerable human. During the rehearsal process Parker and Michael would learn what it means to truly be a god in 'human form'. They spent several rehearsals brainstorming ways in which Poseidon would show his vulnerable form. One of the ways Parker helped the audience realize this was in his directorial decision to have Poseidon walk on and off the stage without the sense that he was 'appearing' into the city of Troy. By allowing Poseidon the time to walk in and out of the city it gave Michael the time to feel the moment as if he were truly visiting a destroyed city.

After the table read rehearsals had commenced the cast was able to take a two week break so *Proof*, one of the other shows during the semester, could perform. Once *Proof* had closed, rehearsals for *The Trojan Women* were in full swing. During the rehearsal process Michael recorded the following journal to document the growth he had made with his character development. Included is every note Parker had given to Michael to change or remember during his performance. One of the interesting things Michael noticed when reviewing the journal was how different the notes became as Parker was developing the show.

**Character Notes:**  
***The Trojan Women***

**Poseidon**

More hilarity  
Opposite is drama  
Don't play a god  
You were born a God, don't act like it  
Less hilarity  
Hilarity is seriousness  
More prose less poetry  
Break the pauses in 'Odysseus they say'  
Possible to eat grapes  
Grapes were interesting. Didn't work, should only eat one not three.  
'Daughters' - pronunciation  
Pacing, when you can understand hilarity and when you can take a moment to express sympathy and understanding.  
Sorrow for their loss "what do you want us to know"  
'Daughter' - pronunciation  
No pause after "drew her" - keep the pace. No poetry  
I am a man who is horrified. More of the pre-show sympathy  
A little less formal; just talk to us but maintain the ending. The ending was spot on (4/1)  
Enter in the blackout (couldn't hear Brian)  
'All these women' indicate the women  
'Here is loss beyond' indicate Helen  
Less formal on the hand gestures  
Diction in general  
Be further downstage so I can be discovered in place as Poseidon  
Let the arms dangle  
'Sleep' look down at Helen  
Walk slower on the exit  
Walk back upstage the way I came  
Change the monologue for tomorrow night only so I come on and do the pre-show work during my monologue  
Good speech - Continue to relax the arms  
Pick up the opening  
'All of these women' gesture like Michael not because Herb said "gesture here".  
Walk slower off stage as Poseidon  
Keep the emphasis on exiles  
'Who was the queen' only emphasis the word 'queen'  
If Poseidon is ever late, Herb wants me to take my time rather than seeing Michael being late.

**Talthybius**

Say 'do not hate me' twice  
You don't have to like what you do  
Become their sympathy

Feel for their situation  
 Understand you still have a job to do  
 Angle feet when you come DSL to take the baby  
 Bringing the baby back in - great speech  
 Bend down farther for Cassandra to let her kiss me on the cheek  
 Play with the timing at the end of the funeral speech. Don't get official until "then we must go".  
 Bow instead of salute to the dead baby; the same bow as the women do  
 Point out the city walls  
 "Up good; down bad"  
 Let the arms dangle  
 Face upstage as I give her the time to speak  
 Walk extremely slowly  
 Put the grab back in with Andromache and let her hold my leg for just a second before starting to walk out.  
 Remember to walk very slowly so Andromache can follow me out  
 Hug Cassandra before you walk off  
 Stay on the same level when I am with Andromache  
 Jen wants to try dragging Reagan off to be rapped and then sweeping her off of her feet to be taken off as Cassandra  
 I can look at Andromache more when I take away the child  
 'And then we must go' more gentle  
 Last entrance, move it to 'Breathing her last'  
 Smile during Hecuba's speech  
 Make sure to find the path straight center with the child  
 Make sure to stop first then speak with 'to the ships' - fog horn before hand

### Guard

Laugh at women  
 Don't abuse the women  
 No reason too  
 Laughed to soon  
 Clap instead of laugh - laugh was too deep/didn't work (with Reagan)  
 Okay to be a little rough. Show when you take Reagan's hands/restraints  
 Clap is dismissive. "You can sit-up now"  
 Angle towards the women when I take Reagan  
 Give a touch longer before I enter to take Reagan off "Like Bread"  
 Move less formally as the guard but I can still be dangerous.  
 Great angle both times  
 Let the arms dangle  
 "Like Bread" - even more time  
 Exit back on the diagonal  
 Be Michael as a guard not the stereotypical soldier  
 Continue to just walk; "it's looking like a zombie"

**Comprehensive Journal:**  
***The Trojan Women***

**April 2, 2015**

I was sick during this rehearsal so I came with a blanket. Be yourself in each character tonight. Best it's ever been. Two weeks to open. Full run through. I took myself to each character. Herb said he wanted that note to apply to Poseidon so I can just talk to the audience. Transitions were still rough with Talthybius so I will confer with Brian (stage manager) tomorrow.

**April 3, 2015**

Understand that there should be a great character distinction from the guard and Talthybius. I tried thinking up the backstory for each character. The guard comes from a very traditional family where as Talthybius comes from a caring family. He is the oldest and is in the army to feed his family. He is poor and sympathizes with the women. Dead hector's child reminds him of his baby brother. Cassandra reminds him of his younger sister. Good run through but we can get better. Line through tomorrow to help clean it up. Also a speed through to help with transitions. We missed some small sections. Slightly sloppy tonight but still good. We are able to tell the story. We MUST tell the story.

**April 4, 2015 (Saturday)**

Poseidon; I just went for it. Rehearsal is a safe place to play and push the guidelines for our character. Herb: another good run. Tomorrow (Sunday) and Monday off. Move toward show conditions. Tuesday still at 7 not 6:30 and we will get one run in. Same for Wednesday at 7. It was good and we are not ready to move out of the realm of rehearsal.

**April 6, 2015 (Monday)**

Another really good show. Beginning to really tell the story. One hour, as long as it has been. Okay but keep an energy flowing. Two days away from doing the show for Easter but we did well. "Wammo". Melissa was playing with some of the lights during the show to prepare for dry tech on Saturday. The banners were in rehearsal for the first time today which got in the way. We also had the prop dead baby on the shield for the first time as well. Lots of multitasking while still trying to solidify the show. The helmet was finished today so I got to work with the Velcro and the horse's mane. Play against the emotion. Reach an acceptance rather than a hysterical moment. Accept the death and grieving within the show. It is time to edit the whaling.

**April 7, 2015 (Tuesday)**

Today we changed the blocking for Poseidon. It helped in creating the moment before with the character and emotional recall however it took away from the overall effect of seeing Poseidon appear above stage. It made the character seem even more human. As the monologue goes I was able to find moments where I could sympathize with the women. It will be interesting to hear herbs notes after we finish the run. Herb really liked the Poseidon speech tonight and we may be keeping the blocking for it. Working with Jen [Jen Kintner, Movement Coach] for the first time tonight and it is a wonderful opportunity. She has had a lot of great ideas about helping us find our character with the correct movements.

**April 8, 2015 (Wednesday) - Last rehearsal before crew view**

Poseidon really came to life tonight. I am finding a specific continuity that I am able to reach each night. We decided to keep the work we did last night by taking out his entrance in the

preshow. It really helps being able to walk and look at Troy so I can deliver the speech to the audience and let them know what is going on.

When taking Reagan off tonight we added more contact and allowed me to drag her more. It really created a powerful moment that we were missing before. Jen had great feedback. This rehearsal I am trying to play close attention to my arms. The last two nights I have had feedback about how they tend to hang out to far to my sides. I am trying to lead the guard with his chest to fix this problem. We will see if it fixed it. According to Herb the best thing we are doing is telling the story. It is extremely important that the story gets across. It is our first and most important goal. We are getting the story!!

#### **April 9, 2015 (Thursday) - Crew View**

Tonight was a good run. I finally feel the show solidifying with our blocking and our beats. We are getting close! Poseidon's monologue was great and we finally choose to keep the entrance for the show. "We're not done working yet but it is a very good show." The crew liked it!

#### **April 11, 2015 - Wet Tech**

Today we are going over lighting and sound cues with the show. We had to change Poseidon's entrance for a third time. We had to have him be discovered up stage where he will then look at everything that has fallen, discover the women downstage left, then move back to Hecuba for a final moment before discovering the audience and delivering the speech.

#### **April 12, 2015 (Sunday)**

Today was the first day using the mic for Poseidon. It threw me off at first which made it hard to stay in the moment when performing. Tomorrow I will know what to expect with it and

we will be adding the costumes they turned the mic down halfway through the monologue so it was not as loud. If I become a Broadway actor it will be interesting to see how mic's will effect a performance. It makes it that much more difficult to stay in the moment. With all of the elements we have added we have to concentrate that much more on what we are doing. For Poseidon we also tried having me come out upstage center before Reagan says her speech. During the second blackout I come down stage directly above Helen who is lying fast asleep.

### **April 13, 2015 (Monday)**

Tonight is the first night with costumes!! We are doing a full run in costume but we are not using any makeup. We will see how everything goes with the mic tonight. Karen placed the mic in Poseidon's crown so we won't be able to see it. We tested the mic's beforehand so everything should run smoothly. Izaak Potter [Costume Stage Hand] will be helping me change in and out of the costumes. I am worried about the quick change into the guard but it should go okay with Izaak.

The mic was perfect with Poseidon and I knew what to expect so I could only focus on acting. It was a good monologue.

The change was awful. We were late going in and it threw me off. The costume for the guard is very restrictive. We are rigging it tomorrow which should fix everything. Herb may end up changing the costume completely. He said it looks like the Tin Man from The Wizard of Oz. Tomorrow night is second run with costumes and we will add makeup.

### **April 14, 2015 (Tuesday)**

Today was our second run for costumes. We changed the costume for The Guard and Talhybius and it works so much better. I also worked with Karen Brewster [Costume Designer,

Associate Professor] and Izaak so we have choreographed the quick change. I had a solid four minutes after the change. It was wonderful! The show was good and I am finding the new moments now that everything is becoming solid. I did have a piece of phlegm stuck in my throat for Poseidon's monologue. Due the mic I could not cleared my throat until Hecuba. I will make sure to drink water before I come on stage each night.

### **April 15, 2015 - Final Dress**

Everything looks great!! We are looking great for opening night. We had about 20 people who came tonight and their energy was fantastic. Tomorrow is going to be a great show. We did add a hush before I say to Hecuba, "sleep. Don't wake up lady, sleep a little longer"

### **April 16, 2015 – Opening Night**

I am so excited for this show to finally open. We have all put our heart and show into this piece of work and all of our mentors are extremely proud of what we have created. We have been told to remember our notes and our blocking but to create and build along the way. The audience is now the only variable of our show and it is our job to give and take with them. I am so excited to finally be able to perform. I have never felt this solid with a show and I know that I have grown as an actor because of it.

Herb mentioned that I might come on with Reagan when she was rapped as the guard to give it a better contrast to Andromache and then come on as the guard again when I say "to the ships" it's over.

### **April 17, 2015 – Second Performance**

Tonight was the first night my parents came. It continues to become even better each night as we engage the audience. The reaction seems to be good. Most people are applauding softly due to the dramatic content they just experienced. Some audience members have decided to stand as well.

### **April 18, 2015 - Third Performance**

Tonight was our best performance yet. I was completely in the moment in each character and I found the correct pacing for the guard. Each entrance I come in with a swift pace to allow for the correct action to occur with the women. I am also able to find the right amount of contact with Reagan [Reagan James, Cassandra] when taking her off to be “raped”.

I love being able to play with the opposite we created for Talthybius. He will play sympathy opposite of duty. I do wish that Caroline [Caroline Deaning, Helen] would stop me faster when I clap with her entrance. She tends to be late some nights.

### **April 19, 2015 – Fourth Performance**

This is our closing show. Herb wanted to remind us that this is just another show. He said actors tend to mess up their cues because they are so focused on doing it the best they have ever done. He thanked us for such a wonderful journey and mentioned that this was probably the best show he had ever directed.

### **Overview:** ***The Trojan Women***

One of the most difficult parts of *The Trojan Women* was movement. As the journal was documented Michael received the most notes regarding the posture for his characters. As he

stands 6'4", learning how to walk as a normal individual was one of the hardest parts of developing the character. Parker would constantly remind Michael to be conscious of how his arms should move with the rest of his body to create a seamless flow within the characters.

One of the most important parts within the character development process is when an actor meets with his costume designer. This is one of the few opportunities an actor will have during the rehearsal process to learn what the actor will be wearing for the show. As a person's clothes will communicate to the world around them exactly who they are, and what status they hold in society, getting an accurate picture is a must. During the costume fittings Michael worked closely with Karen Brewster to discuss what clothes would be worn on stage. As *The Trojan Women* was a period piece it was extremely important to research the given era to determine the style of clothes that would be needed. Making things even more challenging was the fact that Michael would be portraying three individual characters on stage who would all need to communicate to the audience that they were seeing a different person. This would make movement even more important to each character as no two people was the same way.

After working with Brewster in almost ten different fittings the two were able to have a complete understanding as to what each character would be wearing and how it would influence the overall production. Brewster had communicated with the stage manager to make sure Michael would be able to start rehearsing with the proper shoes and restrictive clothing for each rehearsal.

After closing *The Trojan Women* Michael realized the hardest part of the show was working with the language during the period. Performing a period piece was extremely different due to the unique language and movement required. The easiest part of the production was

learning to work as an ensemble cast. Due to the small cast size and lengthy rehearsals it did not take long for the cast to trust each other and start relying on true impulse during rehearsals.

### **Part Two:**

#### ***Race***

Once the semester ended classes would take a short break during the summer before resuming in the fall. *Race* rehearsals were slated to start on September 17, 2015 and be performed the last week of October. Auditions for *Race* were to be held during the first full week for the fall semester, and would consist of staged readings from the script.

### **Audition Process:**

#### ***Race***

At the auditions for *Race*, Michael had a much different experience than when he auditioned with Parker for *The Trojan Woman*. During the day before the auditions Michael was approached by Parker and told he was not going to be needed for the first round of auditions since Parker was already aware of his acting ability. Instead, Parker asked Michael if he could come directly to the call backs to read a scene. As Michael headed into call backs he would end up reading three times for two different roles. Each time would include a different scene and scene partner so a variation could be shown to Parker. Once completed all actors were released and told that the cast list would be posted the following week.

Much like *The Trojan Women*, the wait for the cast list was just as nerve wracking. Making the anxiety worse was the realization that this was Michael's senior year which would mean that he would only have one more opportunity to audition if he failed to make the cast. Thankfully, the cast list was posted the following day and to Michael's surprise, he would be playing Charles.

During the first rehearsal for *Race* Parker outlined the following information to the small cast of four. Parker wanted each actor to look at Mamet's language as if it were Shakespearean. He mentioned that each line will have a similar pace and require the same vocal energy and articulation. He also wanted to remind the actors that even though only 60 people will be in the audience, each actor will have to announce as if there were 500. To help the actors understand stage movements for acting in an arena, Parker gave the comparison of a stop watch. He said that as the show is played the actors will need to move around the stage, much like an hour hand, so that each audience member will be able to see the actors from a different point of view. This is the convention in blocking for arena staging because it is understanding that at all time at least some actor's backs will be turned to the audience.

The most important note that Parker gave to his actors was that no matter what personal opinion the actor has towards his character, it is imperative that they play innocence. They must not only believe they are innocent, but they are simply trying to do what is right. As Charles is convicted of being a rapist, it will be the goal of the rehearsal process to determine exactly how much blame Charles should have and what his feelings should be regarding the accusation.

**Rehearsal Process:**  
***Race***

During the first week of rehearsal Parker decided to dedicate the time to reading the script around a table. As Michael had worked this way in *The Trojan Women*, it became increasingly easier to find the character using this process. The small cast of four also made it much easier to find trust within the cast and to rely on each other's instincts to play the scene.

During the rehearsal process the cast would focus on the language that Mamet uses paying close attention to his choices to include punctuation directly in the middle of a sentence.

In a sense, Mamet had actually given the actors clues to determine exactly how the line was to be said. In addition, since *Race* is a modern production, Parker wanted the script to be performed word perfect, as stated in the production contract. The sole responsibility of the assistant stage manager [Izaak Potter, Undergraduate Student at East Tennessee State University] during rehearsals was to take notes for lines the actors had missed or re-worded when compared to the original script. Using this process would ensure that the production was being presented as written.

As he had done with *The Trojan Women*, Michael also catalogued each rehearsal and note given in a journal to document his character growth. The following pages consist of that journal.

### Character Notes:

#### *Race*

#### Charles

Where is the love?

Where is the truth?

Plead

Maintain innocence

Think of yourself as a great success

Emphasize 'SOME' Lawyer – meaning you could find a different lawyer...

Find the humor in the opening scene...

Make it a comedy... more laughs

Think of Susan as a friend – gain her respect

look around you before saying what you called him

earn your outbursts

win them over

pick it up

pacing, faster

play "who do you think you are" under the table

mean it

freeze, until lights come up

'some lawyer will take the case'

let the body react to moods

posture

Aging the character

Wealthy vs. humility

guilty of something...  
 Only pause as directed  
 high light as directed  
 play with 'Entitlement'  
 Susan doesn't like me  
 stubborn...  
 no one says no to me...  
 'now the nickel drops' – cats out of the bag...

**Comprehensive Journal:**  
*Race*

**September 21, 2015**

Today we started by reading the first scene twice with notes around the table. Herb wanted us to use the punctuation that Mamet had given us to hear how he would like us to read it. We went through the script and circled ALL punctuation marks so that we could learn them as if they were lines as well. As Mamet uses many pauses in his writings herb directed us not to simply pause but to fill the pause with a reason as to why we are choosing not to speak.

**September 22, 2015**

Today we read the second scene twice and worked with filling the pauses with need. It was interesting to see how different this run became on the second run through when we all started to slow down and truly understand the meaning behind the words. Herb also gave us a goal to complete the show in 55 minutes...

**September 23, 2015**

Today we read the third scene twice and worked on the emotion behind each beat. Herb mentioned that we were to work for each battle regardless if we are to win or loose it. Attack each other as if your life depended on it.

### **September 24, 2015**

Today we completed the week with a full read. Herb wanted us to remember to find the humor behind the play and not to forget about the love. As we completed the read I was shocked at how different the show had already become with only working on it for a week. Herb mentioned that next week we will begin blocking scene one and run it until he is confident we can move on.

### **September 28, 2015**

This was our first day back since the long weekend and we started off by blocking the first scene. Herb wanted us to develop the blocking organically so after giving us some brief notes we spent the majority of the time working the scene. One of the interesting notes Herb had given me was that he wanted me to remain seated during the entire show to allow the status to change. We experimented a lot with it during this rehearsal and decided to keep it.

### **September 30, 2015**

As my character is not in the second half of the first scene I was not required to be at rehearsal yesterday. Instead I spent my time working on homework and memorizing lines. Today we ran the first half of the second scene and I continued to experiment with his posture. It was interesting working seated again and I am learning how to control the movement to my advantage.

### **October 1, 2, 2015**

The past two days we continued to work on the first and second scene and worked on finding the correct pacing. Herb is also continually experimenting with new ideas and allowing us to find new blocking as we see fit. I am starting to really understand Charles' posture and I am amazed at how fast this process is going.

### **October 5, 2015**

We continued to work on the third scene and we are trying to find the right pacing with it. Today Herb had me try drinking water as if I was nervous and avoiding the question. After words I told him I didn't think it was working and so we decided to cut it. It was very interesting having to complete a scene while constantly drinking water.

### **October 6, 2015**

Today we started with the first half of the show and ran it a couple times. We had to go back a couple times to remember what we had finally chosen as far as blocking was concerned. Working in the round has been an interesting experience so far. I have found it is very similar to working on a film set as you are not aware of an audience. I love that I can focus completely on my scene partner! This is drastically different from working on a proscenium stage as the actor is always required to 'cheat out' (face the audience) so all audience members can have a clear visual view of each actor. This requires the actor to constantly be aware of his posture to insure that he is not blocking himself from the audience which can take away from the scene. In film, blocking can be truly organic since the camera can be placed virtually anywhere to make sure the moment has been captured. There is also no need to 'play' to an audience since the camera is the only audience member.

### **October 7, 8, and 9, 2015**

For the remainder of the week we have been working on full runs with the show and making sure that the blocking was still solid. Herb told us he is extremely pleased and thinks we are in very good shape. We won't be rehearsing for the next week since we have fall break on Monday and Tuesday and Herb is going out of town for Thursday and Friday. We will be

meeting for a line through on Wednesday and then again on Saturday. Once we meet Saturday we will be having intense rehearsals until we open.

### **October 17, 2015**

Today was our first day working with Herb for a little while. It went really well and he said we are still in great shape. He was a little disappointed in the energy today but said that you can only expect so much for a Saturday rehearsal. He explained that all next week we will be completing full runs and starting tech next Saturday!

### **October 19 – 21**

For the last three days we have been completing our full runs and the show is starting to really take shape. I am extremely pleased with how I am portraying Charles and have determined that he is simply not guilty. When asked why I confess to the crime I have determined that the postcard he was given during the discussion made him remember what he did. He became so embarrassed that he said those things that he confessed to the rape. He was fully convinced he deserved to be punished.

### **October 22, 2015**

Today was another full run through. Herb mentioned that he is extremely pleased with the show and that we are ready for tech. He is going to have us meet this Saturday so we can get one final run in before running tech on Sunday. We open Tuesday so tech should be interesting!

### **October 24, 2015**

Today we ran the show from the top and Herb was happy. After running it once he decided that it would be best to let us go home and rest since we were going to have a long day tomorrow.

### **October 25, 2015**

Today was our tech rehearsal! We started off with a cue to cue in the morning before running the entire show this evening. The cue to cue is the process the designers use to set each cue required for the design elements within the show. The actors will run each scene while the design team writes the lighting cues into the board and the sound is synched with the show. After the cue to cue the full run can start to ensure accuracy for the production. I am so happy with how everything is coming together! I never imagined that we would be able to get it this solid. Karen said that it is one of her favorite shows that she has seen at ETSU, which made me feel good about all the handwork we had accomplished.

### **October 26, 2015**

Today we worked with full dress and makeup. I was amazed at how well I was able to work in the costume since we had been wearing our jackets during rehearsal for the last several weeks. I felt very comfortable as Charles on stage which was a great feeling. Tomorrow is opening day and Herb said we are extremely ready.

### **October 27, 2015 – Opening Night**

Everything went perfect! I don't think I have ever had an opening night go as well as this one. The audience was sold out and was really engaged. The makeup looked great and nothing went wrong!

### **October 28, 2015 – Second Performance**

Today was a little rough. After doing such a great job last night I think we all got a little too confident in our ability and we ended up skipping several lines. I am disappointed but thankful we will be able to try again tomorrow night.

### **October 29, 2015 – Third and Fourth Performances**

We hit this one out of the park! I am thrilled that we didn't drop any of our lines again and that everything was able to run smoothly. I guess the moral of the story is that no matter how good you think you are, anything can happen. Tomorrow will be an interesting day since we have two shows.

### **October 30, 2015 – Fifth Performance**

The first show we did went really well except for an audience member tried to come in through the upstage center door during the middle of the performance. It distracted all of us and Pat Cronin [Chair of The Division of Theatre and Dance] left to scold him. Thankfully we were all able to recover quickly after and resumed the normal show. I think taking so many years of improvisation helped me deal with this one. The evening show went much better and was perfect like last nights! My parents came and saw it for the first time and really enjoyed it.

### **October 31, 2015 – Sixth Performance**

Going into this show was a little more difficult because it was Halloween. We were all uncertain as to how the audience was going to react but it turned out to be the best audience we had. The older people in the audience understood the jokes a lot more which created a very good environment. I guess we all thought that the audience was going to be a little different.

### **November 1, 2015 – Seventh Performance**

Today was our closing performance. We all did really well and it was sad to end this show. It was a great experience and probably my favorite production that I have been in. I learned so much and I am thrilled at how many friends I came away with. This was a very special performance for all of us.

**Part Three:**  
**Compare and Contrast:**

After closing *Race* and reflecting on the rehearsal process of both shows Michael found similarities in each. The first was Parker's choice to use the first couple of weeks during rehearsal to simply read the script as a cast. This was probably the best directorial decision that was made considering it gave the cast the time to learn the role in a classroom environment. It also gave the actors the ability to read together and learn how each individual responds. The second similarity was the directorial process that Parker used. Each actor received his blocking before working each scene which allowed the actors to only focus on the intention behind the movement. This helped create a solid performance faster and the actor's intentions were also much clearer.

One of the biggest differences between *The Trojan Women* and *Race* was the use of the different stages. While *The Trojan Women* was performed on a proscenium stage and used traditional acting approaches, *Race* was performed using a found arena stage in Studio 205. This required a completely different approach and took longer to figure out how to utilize the space. Studio 205 is also noticeably smaller with only 65 seats versus The Bud Frank Theatre with a total seating arrangement of 225 seats so the actors would need to learn how to tell the story in a more intimate space. One of the other large differences between the two performances was the era in which the shows were written. As *The Trojan Women* was a period piece it took much longer to learn the characters when compared to the modern setting of *Race*. As the show was based on a situation that occurred thousands of years ago in a completely different culture, learning the characters was a complex process. Thankfully Parker had recruited a dramaturge to ensure the accuracy of the time period and characters that the actors were trying to portray.

While working with both Parker and a dramaturge it ensured the actors were able to create characters that could be believable. Portraying Charles in *Race* was a simpler task due to the modern time period and the simplicity of the current millennium.

After completing two main stage shows at East Tennessee State University, it is clear that Michael feels confident that he has the ability to portray almost any role in a professional theatre company. Working with two completely different productions has given him the tools necessary to attack any production head on. Using Parker's directorial advice with new roles will help Michael use his tools to tackle all future roles.

## Epilogue

Dear Reader,

This concludes my senior thesis research project completed for The Honors in Discipline curriculum requirement as determined by East Tennessee State Universities Honors College. Thank you for embarking on my journey with me and I hope that you were able to get a glimpse of my growth as an actor. I would like to thank East Tennessee State Universities Division of Theatre and Dance, and the amazing faculty that made this thesis a success, Herb Parker [Associate Professor for the Division of Theatre and Dance], Pat Cronin [Department Chair for the Division of Theatre and Dance], Karen Brewster [Associate Professor for The Division of Theatre and Dance, Costume Designer for *The Trojan Women* and *Race*], Dr. Delbert Hall [Associate Professor for the Division of Theatre and Dance, Scenic Designer for *The Trojan Women* and *Race*], Mellissa Shafer [Associate Professor for The Division of Theatre and Dance, Lighting Designer for *The Trojan Women* and *Race*], and Bobby Funk [Associate Professor for The Division of Theatre and Dance]. Without their help I would not have been successful in completing this thesis, and thus would not have experienced the tremendous growth outlined in the previous pages.

Thank you for your support,

Michael Lee

Works Cited

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