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An Actor's Approach to Claire in *Proof* by David Auburn

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Communication and Performance

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Professional Communication

by

Kathryn Patterson

May 2016

Mr. Bobby Funk, Chair

Mr. Patrick Cronin

Dr. Delanna Reed

Acting, Theatre, Alexander Technique, Stanislavski System, Proof

ABSTRACT

An Actor's Approach to Claire in *Proof* by David Auburn

by

Kathryn Patterson

The areas of study in the *Proof* thesis contain research on the play, the playwright, and the acting style utilized in the performance and character analysis. The acting style in this process focuses on the actor's creative work in preparation of portraying a female character. This character is a controlling woman that is unable to manipulate others. By using relaxation techniques involving the Alexander Technique, the actor was able to transition into the character with honest emotions and motives. Finding similarities to the character by using personal relationships gave the actor the ability to discover connections with the character in portrayal. These connections are used to motivate the actor's process in creating an authentic character. The results are found through the actor's reflections and performances. The findings show discipline and routine in the actor's process to portray the character.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTE

This thesis was written to fulfill graduation requirements mandated by East Tennessee State University's Graduate School of Studies. The thesis is written in accordance with the production of *Proof*, by David Auburn that was performed on February 26 27, 28, and March 1, 2015. This production was directed by Bobby Funk and produced by East Tennessee State University's division of Theatre and Dance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From a young age, I have always been interested in performing. I started performing in church musicals at the age of six. Through school, I was in the chorus and involved in the drama department. My first experience in film acting was my senior year of high school where I was cast in the school's weekly television show. After high school, I realized I wanted to pursue a career in acting. In college, I became involved in the theatre and radio, television, and film departments, gaining experience in both stage and film performance. After college, I wished to continue my education and training in performance by attending graduate school at East Tennessee State University in the Professional Communication department with a concentration in theatre.

For this research project, I performed in East Tennessee State University's production of *Proof*, by David Auburn. I portrayed the character of Claire. This thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter I is research on the play, playwright, acting style utilized in performance and character analysis. Chapter II consists of the actor's journal. Chapter III is a summary of what happened, what worked and did not work for me, as an actor. This chapter also reflects the production's performances.

CHAPTER 2:
RESEARCH ON *PROOF*, DAVID AUBURN, ACTING STYLE UTILIZED IN
PERFORMANCE, AND CHARACTER ANALYSIS RESEARCH

The play, *Proof*, is considered a drama. *Proof* is considered a drama because of the conflicts and contrasts between the main character, Catherine, and the other characters: her sister, Claire, her father, Robert, and her boyfriend, Hal. The protagonist, Catherine, struggles to maintain her relationships with the fellow characters due to her insecurities and social issues that have been caused by her father's illness and death. The drama is visible when Claire comes to visit Catherine at their father's home in Chicago. Claire's desire to move Catherine to New York creates conflict between the two sisters that bring up deep rooted emotions, causing the play's protagonist to present her secrets and hidden talents.

Playwright

Proof was written by David Auburn in 2000. Auburn was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1970. Auburn's parents, Sandy and Mark Auburn, raised David in Ohio until the family moved to Arkansas in 1982. Auburn graduated from the University of Chicago with a B.A. in English Literature in 1991. In 1992, Auburn moved to New York City after his yearlong fellowship with Amblin Entertainment. After moving to New York, Auburn participated for two years in Julliard School's playwriting program where he studied under dramatists Christopher Durang and Marsha Norman (IMDb, "David Auburn Biography").

Auburn wrote several one acts that were grouped as *Fifth Planet and Other Plays*. The one-acts were presented in January-February 2008 at the Beowulf Alley Theatre Company in Tucson, Arizona. *Skyscraper*, Auburn's first full-length play, premiered and ran on Off Broadway in 1997 from September-October. Auburn wrote the play, *The Lake House*, which was

later turned into a film in 2006. Two of his other plays have been made into films, *Proof* in 2005 and *The Girl in the Park* in 2007. Auburn wrote the screenplays for both *Proof* and *The Girl in the Park*, as well as directed *The Girl in the Park*. Auburn, apart from being a playwright, is involved in all aspects of the productions that he is a part of *The Best Plays*. Auburn stated, “I like everything involved in putting on a play. I love being in the rehearsal room. I love racking the whole process, altering the play as I hear audience responses. I love that breathing you listen to when a play is being performed in front of an audience” (IMDb, “David Auburn Biography”).

Proof has won multiple awards including the 2001 Tony Award and the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for drama. In 2005, director John Madden made *Proof* into a movie starring Anthony Hopkins as Robert, Gwyneth Paltrow as Catherine, Hope Davis as Claire, and Jake Gyllenhaal as Hal.

Setting

The play is set in Chicago, Illinois, specifically on a back porch of Robert’s house where Claire and Catherine grew up, and Catherine currently lives. Auburn’s personal experience from living in Chicago influenced the setting of *Proof*. For East Tennessee State University’s production, the setting was the back porch of Robert’s house. The porch was rusted with weathered furniture and a rusty grill. The play is set in the modern day, still relatable to today’s society.

Plot

The plot focuses around Catherine, Claire’s younger sister. Catherine lives in Chicago in her family’s home. Claire has moved away from Chicago and pursued a career as a currency analyst, having little contact towards her family. Claire and Catherine’s mother passed away years ago. Their father, Robert, is recently deceased, leaving the two sisters to make decisions

concerning the property and house. Their strained relationship and Catherine's despondency affect their ability to do this.

Robert was a brilliant mathematician and widely known in his field. He fell ill around the time Catherine started college, resulting in Catherine moving home to take care of her sick father. Claire remained in New York where she focused on her career, financially supporting her father and sister while Robert was sick. After Robert's death, Claire returned to Chicago to help Catherine handle details of Robert's affairs and convince Catherine to move to New York. After years of watching her father lose his memory and develop mental instability, Catherine became closed off and focused on taking care of Robert. Catherine put her schooling and social life on hold, resenting Claire for not being around to help her with Robert. Catherine's mental state is questioned by not only herself but also by Claire. Catherine fears she has inherited some of her father's mental insanity, and this fear intensifies whenever Claire nurtures her. Claire worries that Catherine is like their father, and wishes to move her to an institute in New York for people with mental instability.

The character, Harold Dobbs, introduces himself to Catherine as being one of Robert's students. Harold praised Robert's mathematical talents and was often around Robert before his passing. After Robert's death, Harold desired to study Robert's old notebooks, resulting in Harold frequently visiting Robert's house. Harold spends a great deal of time in Robert's study, analyzing and going over old math proofs that Harold believed Robert had written. The climax of the play happens when Claire and Hal realize that Catherine has written an extremely advanced math proof, proving her talents surpass Robert's ability and knowledge.

In the midst of Claire trying to sell her father's house and convince Catherine to move to New York, Catherine's mathematical ability proves her mind to be clear and brilliant. Catherine

becomes independent towards the end of the play from growing confidence by realizing and admitting she is a mathematical genius. Throughout the play's discoveries, Claire and Catherine remain contrasting characters. Claire reluctantly leaves Catherine in Chicago with Harold, returning to New York to her fiancé and career.

The conclusion of *Proof* leaves the audience feeling hopeful. Catherine's hidden genius shows her ability to pull through her social and mental struggles. Catherine's life, in many ways, has just started to begin. After years of being a prisoner in her own home and a caretaker, she is finally free to make decisions on her own.

Acting Style Utilized In Performances

As an actor, my approach to understanding and portraying Claire required analyzing Claire from different angles. Using the Stanislavski System, my acting and performance developed into a natural state of the subconscious, or the creative state. The Stanislavski System teaches actors to first release physical stress in order to think about their feelings (Stanislavski 1). Some actors use the Lee Strasberg method of acting to use the emotions felt in the very moment during the performance (Hull). In this play, I felt Strasberg's method would be less beneficial to my process due to my initial disconnect to Claire. Using the truth of the moment rather than an emotional memory would have hindered my confidence in portraying Claire due to the difficult process I had in reaching Claire's self-assurance. Rather than feeling dishonest, my acting focused on the truth of Claire's objectives and relationships with others. Initially, my understanding of Claire was distant and shallow. Claire masks her emotions and her personal problems by focusing a great deal of her time on her career. Her desire to be in control of her life and the situations she is in causes her to appear cold. Her lack of empathy towards Catherine and her father's death creates conflicts between Claire and Catherine and at times Harold. Claire

speaks of herself in a positive light without ever mentioning any type of flaw or problem in her life. Her biggest issue is Catherine. Claire's impatient attitude is seen when Catherine is initially indecisive about moving to New York. Claire also shows her impatience towards Harold Dobbs when Harold visits their father's home looking for Catherine. Claire demands attention and when she does not get her way, she appears inconsiderate and selfish.

To allow myself to become Claire, an uptight and rigid character, I had to learn to release the awareness of my own self. Initially, I felt disconnected at the beginning of the rehearsal process. Claire was sophisticated and in demand, which was a confidence I struggle with. As an actor, I studied a woman that reminded me of Claire's personality. I often compared Claire to Meryl Streep's character, Miranda Priestly, in *The Devil Wears Prada*. Streep's character desired to be in charge and have control over people and situations. Priestly was also a powerful business woman, much like Claire. Priestly's character triggered my process by fostering my understanding of Claire's goals and why she wants what she does. Claire is business savvy and has worked hard to get to where she is. Like Priestly, she is protective of her position in the business world as well as her dominating presence towards the people in her life.

Using Stanislavski's "Magic If" I worked to imagine myself as this type of woman. I strived to discover a natural and organic process to create a believable, uptight and structured character. Having Streep's interpretation of her character, Miranda Priestly, in mind, I found a connection to the core of Claire. I used my imagination to become the character by asking the question, "What if I was this character in this situation, how would I act?" Director of *Proof*, Bobby Funk, gave the cast significant freedom to discover their characters and their relationships with each other. Bobby, giving me the freedom to find Claire's confidence, allowed honest confidence and belief in Claire's objectives to be true. Stanislavski's the "Magic If," where the

actor asks, “what if I were this person in this situation,” was constantly being asked each time I would question Claire’s intentions or behaviors.

Along with the Stanislavski System, my acting process also included elements of The Alexander Technique, involving relaxation techniques. This technique teaches actors techniques to relax and release tension from the body in order to prepare for a performance and rehearsal (Roig-Francoli). Using The Alexander Technique, my over awareness of my body dissolved into a state of relaxation. The Alexander Technique teaches you to lose stress and tenseness in areas of your body that have built up. Constructive rest is a term in this technique that allows one to relieve physical and mental stresses (Roig-Francoli). Constructive rest is a person lying down on their back with their knees bent and feet flat to the floor. This position promotes good posture and helps release tension within the body (Roig-Francoli). This technique allowed me to move more freely, feeling comfortable in my own body and my acting approach.

Stanislavski referred to the use of “psycho-physical” (Stanislavsky, 49). “Psycho-physical” is the concept that the body is to be directed by the clear intentions in the mind. The mind and body are connected as a union. As an actor, my physical movements had to respond to the right intentions from my mind, where the learned dialogue resided. If my body movements differed from my mind’s objectives, being dialogue and subtext, the performance would be unrealistic and confusing. For myself, I had to learn to process my thoughts in a calm manner as myself and then consider Claire’s perspective while maintaining a relaxed mind. With a relaxed mind, my physical movements could reflect my thoughts with freedom and ease. Throughout the rehearsal process, I frequently attended yoga sessions before rehearsal each night as a means of relaxing my mind and body.

My mind can be an enemy to my acting, bringing about thoughts of self-doubt. Once my body had discovered a natural process to relax, my own self gained confidence to transition into Claire's character with ease and assurance. If an actor is unable to feel secure in the character they are portraying, their performance comes across as dishonest. Audiences will always pick up on an actor's insecurities, making their performances appear rehearsed, as if they are "acting" instead of appearing lifelike. Becoming Claire required any of my personal judgements or disagreements of her to become nonexistent. Claire had a reason and pre-mediated thought for every action she made. I made the decision to make Claire expressive through her facial expressions, stance, and dialogue while minimalizing her physical movements.

Stanislavski's System furthers the actor's process with the concept of emotional memory (Stanislavski 158). Emotional memory is a tool used by an actor to find real emotion on stage rather than faking that emotion. Stanislavski asks the actor to put their own mindset into the character's situation so that any type of sadness or raw emotion is real and honest. In some cases, actors are not able to relate with the character's emotional state. Stanislavski wants the actor to pull from personal memories, drawing emotions from actual life experiences that the actor can relate to in any way.

For my performance, I drew on an estranged relationship I had with my father as a child, and issues I have had with my step sister. My personal relationship with my father is how I envisioned Claire's relationship with Robert to be. There was no falling out but rather an inability to connect and agree on life decisions. As an older step sister, I have often tried to mentor my younger sister, help her make important decisions, and have at times been inconsiderate of her feelings. Claire means well, but her attitude comes across as inconsiderate, rather than caring. Through the rehearsal process, my ability to use emotional recall as an actor

grew. With my experience in portraying Claire, I found many areas of her life that related to mine. Ironically, Claire's life is sometimes how I have imagined mine in my future. I, too, would like to be successful in my career in a respectable city and engaged to a supportive partner. I found Claire's life to be a reflection of what I desire in my future. I believe I've learned what to avoid from Claire's unsuccessful relationships with her family. I desire to be successful in different areas of my life, while maintaining healthy relationships with loved ones.

After reflecting on lessons and similarities between Claire and myself, my performances expressed a stronger sense of knowledge of Claire's character. By making this connection with my personal life, the truthful emotions in the performances were heightened in how I understood Claire's perspective. When Claire is about to make her final exit in the show, she appears frazzled and angry with her younger sister, Catherine. At this moment in the play, I recall moments with my younger sister when we would argue about who she was dating. As an older sibling, I could see certain people were toxic for her, yet she would go against my opinions. Often, I would react with emotional intensity, insinuating myself far too much into her life. Catherine goes against Claire's ideas, resulting in Claire overreacting and yelling. Claire's need for control over Catherine ultimately backfires, pushing Catherine towards independence, apart from Claire.

Character Analysis

David Auburn wrote Claire and Catherine to be two contrasting characters. Catherine is kind, brilliant, but disconnected from society and reality. Claire is polished, educated, and a go getter. Claire is a driven woman that holds strong to her opinions and views on what she believes is right. In order to discover who Claire is, it was essential to discover Claire's objectives throughout the entire play. I had several conversations with Bobby Funk as to why Claire was so

cold to her family. Claire cares greatly about her image and social life. It was understandable that Claire loved living in New York City. New York provided her with the exciting life and experience that she left Chicago to find. Claire cares about materialistic things.

Once we started costume fittings for *Proof*, the discussions I had with the costume designer, Karen Brewster, were successful in finding Claire's personality and image. Bobby had an idea of what he thought Claire should look like, allowing Karen to bring that vision to life. Once we had costumes figured out, I felt more confident in portraying Claire. Claire's costumes were strict, business attire, presenting Claire to be stiff. When I felt that I finally looked the part, I felt the part. The costumes helped strengthen the personality of Claire that is neat, orderly, and in control. During the hung over scene, Claire appears disheveled and a mess. This was the one scene in the play that gave Claire humor and a sense of humaneness. The audience was able to view Claire as a person who "let her hair down" literally. Claire's costumes portrayed the image that Claire is a professional business woman that is focused. In act one, scene two; Claire makes her debut to the audience in black professional slacks, a magenta blouse, a striped black and white blazer, and black high heeled ankle boots. Claire's hair is in a simple, low ponytail and she has minimal make up on. The flashiest aspect of this scene's costume is her diamond engagement ring. Claire's next costume appears in act one, scene four. In this scene, Claire has just woken up from a night of partying and is hungover. Hair was worn down in a disheveled appearance, as if she had just woken up. Claire is dressed in a black dress that is conservative but fitting followed by black high heels. Claire remains in this outfit for her next present scene in act two, scene two. After a quick change, Claire appears in scene three of act two back in her black slacks, a red and grey blouse, magenta cardigan, and black heels. Her hair is half up, half down; appearing more relaxed but recovered from her hangover. In act two, scene five; Claire's final

appearance is similar to her initial entrance in the show. Claire is wearing black slacks, a red blouse, her white and black striped jacket, and black boots. Her exiting scene portrays Claire returning to her original appearance and going home to New York dressed for work.

Once Claire's appearance was understood, the analysis of Claire's intelligence was significant in this play. Both Robert and Catherine are genius mathematicians. Claire did not inherit this level of intelligence from her father. In my understanding of Claire, she pursued a career that could give her great success and earn a respectable salary in order to prove her worth and intelligence within the family. I believe she resented her father and Catherine because she could not relate to them. After her mother passed, she was an outsider to Robert and Catherine. Her way of showing love and compassion to her family was providing for them financially. So while her intelligence was not on the level of Robert and Catherine's, Claire's educational background and social skills allowed her to advance in the workforce and make a comfortable living for herself and her family. In many ways, in my opinion, Claire already felt isolated from her family, typecasting her as the villain, making her comfortable with that role. Because she knew how her family viewed her, she did not try to change their opinions of her.

Claire's intelligence and career reflect on her moral character and her relationships with others. Claire means well and cares for her loved ones. However, her methods of tough love and surface emotions present her as cold-hearted. I believe Claire loved her father, yet had little in common, creating distance and tension between her and Robert. Claire struggled with relating to Catherine and would use condescending tones to make Catherine feel mentally unstable. Claire, in many ways, felt that Catherine moving to New York would relieve her own guilt for not being there for her father's death. Claire also was concerned about Catherine's mental sanity and wanted Catherine to have a better life with more career and life opportunities. Her own

insecurities are present when Claire meets Harold Dobbs. Claire, though engaged, appreciates male attention. When Hal appears to be interested in Catherine, Claire feels somewhat jealous but also threatened. Claire does not want Hal to interfere with her plans to move Catherine to New York, therefore Hal poses as a threat, presenting Claire's hostile attitude. As I approached Claire, the moments of compassion were rare, making them feel honest, rather than staged. Claire is kind but cold. In order for Claire's love towards Catherine to be apparent, Claire had to show her kindness sparingly.

Claire's objectives throughout the play demonstrate her selfish personality as well as her desire to take care of Catherine. In order to get Catherine to New York to live in an institute for mental health, she tries to convince Catherine she is worse off mentally than she actually is. However, in Claire's defense, Claire truly believes Catherine is on the verge of mental insanity, like their father. Claire's plans backfire when Harold Dobbs becomes romantically interested in Catherine, providing her companionship and praise for her mathematical talents. Harold was standing in Claire's way of making decisions for Catherine's future.

Claire is complex, smart, business savvy, and in her own way, loving and supportive. She is impatient towards the ones she cares about most, believing her distance is best. In order to maintain control over situations, she must remain uninvolved emotionally. Claire shows strength because she feels she is the one that has to keep the family maintained.

Actor's Character Analysis

I, Kathryn Patterson, portrayed the female character of Claire in *Proof* by David Auburn. In this actor's character analysis, I will explore Claire's character traits from my perspective as an actor and discuss my own understanding of Claire's background. Claire's emotional strengths are her ability to maintain her composure in stressful times and typically blocking away

emotions, in fear of appearing powerless. In doing so, she shuts out empathy as a weak emotion, yet a necessary one for relating to others. This causes Claire to appear superficial and selfish. While she lacks understanding for others, Claire's appearance is aesthetically pleasing, showing that she is proper and in control of her life. Her appearance is misleading. She cares about how she appears to others but lacks caring for her relationships to others.

Claire feels she is living the American dream in New York City, where she is powerful in her career and the level of financial comfort she is able to maintain in her lifestyle. Claire is well off but not necessarily wealthy. She is bright in many areas, both street and book smart, though not as brilliant with mathematics as her father and sister were. She makes a good living as a currency analyst and is able to afford the expenses of her New York lifestyle.

Because Claire has a desire for materialistic things and social status, her moral viewpoint is rarely apparent to the audience. At her core, Claire does feel love and cares for her friends and family. She wants the best for everyone but at times resents her father and sister because of their genius in mathematics in comparison to her.

The year of this play is set in 2000 or modern day and taking place in Chicago. Claire fits the modern day business woman that is independent and not necessarily depending on a partner to support her. The time of year is not confirmed but it is likely early spring and windy. Claire is confined in her run down childhood home in Chicago with her sister, mostly sitting on the back porch. The house is likely cluttered due to Robert and Catherine lacking order and tidiness. Claire is surrounded by memories of her family in Chicago and the life she desired to leave. Sitting on the back porch, though, brings positive memories to Claire. She appreciates the fresh air, the swing, and the calm setting of the porch. This part of the house is probably a comforting contrast to the constant commotion in New York. The majority of this play is focused on present

day details while often making reference to previous events. Claire's character does not have flashback scenes but discusses memories and past issues regarding her family. Because her father has just passed away, Claire has to return to her past and attempt to make amends with her sister. Claire appears to feel nothing about her father's death except relief. Claire is detached from her father's death and is focused on the details of his affairs. Her relationship with Catherine is troubling and unresolved. Claire fails at her main objective to bring Catherine to New York to live near her. Claire treats Catherine as though she were a child and mentally insane, causing Catherine to deny Claire's plans to move her to a mental institute in New York. Catherine's interest in Harold Dobbs derails Claire's plans for her sister. Catherine wishes to remain in Chicago with Harold and proves her sanity at the end of the play. Though Claire returned home to Chicago to take care of her father's funeral and assets, she is unable to convince Catherine that her intentions are for the best. Claire is relentless in attempts to make Catherine appear mentally unstable in order to get her way. Claire's intentions were good in attempts to take care of her family but her methods were unsuccessful due to Catherine's ability to realign her reality and prove she was mentally stable.

CHAPTER 3

THE ACTOR'S JOURNAL

Rehearsal Journal

January 19: Auditions were held in the Campus Center Building's Studio 205. Auditions were held in Campus Center Building rather than the Bud Frank Theatre because of an overlap of auditions for two different shows. The first night consisted of cold reads. Bobby asked everyone auditioning to line up based on their height, ranging from shortest to tallest. This was to see what actors looked best in contrast to one another. I only read for the character Claire.

January 20: The second night of auditions was callbacks. The callbacks were held in the Bud Frank Theatre. It was nice to be on the stage and in the space that the performances would be. I read for Claire only, like the first night. The auditions felt very relaxed and were once again cold reads.

January 26: *Read through*—the cast all met in the Campus Center 205 Black Box for our first read through. The environment was exciting, but the cast also felt somewhat timid. The cast consisted of three freshmen and me as the only graduate student. I was somewhat nervous as to how this production would turn out due to such a young cast, but was impressed with each of the freshman actors. I had worked with Evin and Ryan previously in the *Bald Soprano* and had seen Aubrey's work in *Oklahoma!* The read through allowed us to talk with Bobby about his vision for the characters and how they relate to each other. I left the read through having a better understanding of Claire. I realized that in this production of *Proof* Claire was going to be portrayed as the villain. The rest of the characters did not like her due to her know-it-all attitude. Claire comes across as a jerk and self-centered but in the end, means well. Claire loves her sister, Catherine, but finds relating to Catherine very difficult.

January 27: Not Called

January 28: Off

January 29: ACT ONE: First scene with Catherine. This rehearsal was the first day being in the theatre and on our feet. Found understanding with my character's relationship with Catherine and the relationship that Claire had with her father, which seems nonexistent. Claire has no scenes with her father, only reiterating the lack of relationship they had. Catherine is the complete opposite of Claire and my character feels annoyed with the entire situation.

January 30: Claire believes Catherine is crazy. Claire is constantly in demand and in control. I sense her to be a control freak. I found it somewhat difficult during rehearsal tonight to keep up energy with how high strung Claire is. Claire wants to have control of everything but also cares about how others view her. She desires to appear sweet and appealing to everybody, including Harold Dobbs, who she is not even interested in. I sensed Claire wants men to love her, regardless of the fact that she has a fiancé, Mitch, who makes no appearance in the play.

February 2: The most difficult part of rehearsal tonight was working out the physical aspect of Claire grabbing the book proof from Catherine and pushing each other. I am very timid when it comes to any type of fighting on stage. Thankfully, Bobby was very helpful with making it look realistic and showing me the proper safety moves. I was worried about hurting Aubrey and wearing high heels during this scene. I immediately wanted to start rehearsing with high heels to gain confidence and become comfortable walking.

February 3: Not Called

February 4: Tonight we finished working the rest of Act 1. Bobby wanted me to focus on the objectives of what Claire was trying to accomplish during this act, especially the final scene in Act one where the emotions and tension were highest. The first act is the hardest act for me. I

feel like I carry more of the scenes with Catherine. I am trying to find the parts of our scenes where I need to be more demanding and other areas where Claire needs to lessen her intensity. I finally understand how Claire feels towards Catherine and Hal, as well as her feelings towards her father. After rehearsal, I took time to go through the script and mark the areas that I struggle most with lines. Claire is so demanding that half of my lines were prompting the other character's lines, forcing me to never miss a beat or drop a line.

February 5: Finally getting to Act Two was helpful. The second act allows the drama to unfold, which my character, Claire, thrives on. I enjoy the second act from an acting perspective because the plot twist from the first act is being explained. Claire, Catherine, and Hal are figuring out the truth about the math proof and emotions are heightened. The audience is becoming aware with the characters, allowing the energy from the first act to be maintained.

February 6: Tonight we finished blocking the second act. It was enjoyable to get to the end of the play and see how the ending was going to turn out. The blocking for act two was much more relaxed for Claire. Claire means well but she is difficult to deal with regarding other people that she cannot relate to. I think she loves Catherine and her father, but doesn't necessarily like them. The audience finally sees Claire act like a person and show emotion other than being annoyed with her family.

February 9: Tonight we still focused on Act Two. I found it somewhat difficult to find the right place for Claire in regards for scenes with Hal and Catherine. However, it is helpful during scenes with all three of us because we all help carry the scene. The pressure is carried evenly. I am working on getting angry towards Catherine and Hal. I really tried to tune into my emotions now that the entire show was blocked. I also had my second costume fitting. I'm excited to see what Karen Brewster, the costume designer, chooses for Claire to wear. Karen and I had

conversations about how Claire desires to be viewed from others and how she views herself. She is the type of woman that takes value in her appearance, but is not overdone. Claire is very sophisticated and demands respect and attention. Her wardrobe should reflect confidence and professionalism.

February 10: Act I is my weakest area. I am still struggling with the lines in the scene with Catherine and the cops. Claire is so pushy and controlling. Claire is completely different from who I am, forcing me to find ways to connect with her. Finding peers of mine that have similar personalities to Claire has helped me study them and find ways to put my own touch on her character.

February 12: Act II is my stronger act. I am able to confidently have my lines and blocking down without questioning myself. I felt that I had low energy during tonight's rehearsal, which impacted my performance negatively. I am having trouble focusing, forcing me to work much harder to memorize my part. I am upset that I did not have a great run through tonight, but realize this is unacceptable. We open in less than a month-I have to get it together.

February 13: I am starting to feel the pressure to get my lines down because the show opens soon. The rehearsal process is very helpful. Bobby has given us a lot of freedom to find out and figure out our character's objectives and why they act the way they do. I like Claire but she is difficult and I do not like how she is portrayed in this play. I decided to not watch the film version of this show. I felt I would be influenced by the film and that was what I have been avoiding. Claire is the complete opposite of how she is portrayed in the film.

February 15: Designer Run through Rehearsal. We were allowed to use our scripts for the designer run through and I definitely needed it. This is going to be the roughest week of rehearsal because it is getting down to the wire. However, it was the first time we have gone through the

entire show, allowing us to find our stronger and weaker scenes. I am getting excited for the upcoming rehearsals to see when it all falls into place.

February 16-19: Snow days: The entire cast is stressed from the rehearsal time we have lost. I have spent the past few days studying my script thoroughly and focusing on my trouble areas. I feel confident in our cast and our ability to put on a great production regardless of the lack of rehearsal time.

February 20: Tonight was our first run through of Act I. We were completely off book without calling for lines. I felt it went much better than we had expected. I felt confident of the show and where we were, due to our lack of rehearsal time. The snow days were stressing the entire cast out, causing us to question our performances. I felt that this was the first rehearsal that I channeled Claire the best throughout the entire act. I felt great about the production and impressed with the cast's ability to push through, regardless of scheduling issues.

February 21: Tonight's rehearsal was our first run through of Act II completely off book. I felt this act went much smoother than Act I from the previous night. I felt comfortable with Claire's choices and understood the motives behind the text and blocking. Tonight was my best night, personally. As a whole, the cast appears more comfortable with Act II.

February 22: Tech Rehearsal. The tech rehearsal went very well. This was the best tech I've ever experienced. The cues were smooth and transitions worked nicely. Incorporating the real props that will be used in the audience performances was difficult. The tray that I carry is heavy and awkward. I practiced backstage with the tray, gaining confidence with the shape and size. I felt confident in my lines and the entire production. I'm proud of the cast.

February 23: Tonight's rehearsal consisted of the addition of our quick changes and tech. the show is finally coming together, which is causing excitement throughout the entire cast. Walking

around in high heels in each scene is more enjoyable and natural than I thought. I'm thankful Karen Brewster found shoes that fit perfectly and allow me to feel comfortable walking around the stage and porch.

February 24: Snow day-No rehearsal. I ran lines and practiced blocking.

February 25: Preview. The preview went great. The audience had more than usual, making the performance felt real. I finally feel the most confident in the scenes where Claire is extremely demanding. This was such a struggle for me throughout the rehearsal process. However, now that everything has come together, I found Claire's identity and ran with it. The energy of tonight's performance was excited and positive. I am ready for opening night tomorrow.

Performance Journal

Note: To prepare for each night of performances, I used Stanislavski's System to acting to focus on my objectives, emotions, and honesty. I also drew from the Alexander Technique to help relax. Sitting in a chair in the dressing room, I made note of the tension in my body, strived to release the tension and channel energy and emotions for the performance. I said a prayer with Aubrey Mullins, who portrayed Catherine in our dressing room each night. This allowed us to focus on improvements and our art. Our nerves were turning into excitement and this caused better energy among the cast.

February 26: Opening night. Our nerves and energy were positive and excited. The opening night performance went smoothly and the audience was receptive. The attendance was better than expected regardless of the snow day. I was nervous at the beginning but this is always typical of an opening night. So far, I enjoyed the actual performances more than rehearsals. All of our hard work is finally being presented, which is the part of the process that is most rewarding.

February 27: Second night. Tonight's performance was better than opening night. The cast's energy was more relaxed. Attendance was high, giving us a nearly full house. The audience was very responsive, which makes it encouraging for the actors. A phone kept ringing throughout the performance from the audience. This happened during a scene with Catherine and me, which was actually very distracting. Luckily, we were able to get through the scene without any dropped lines. My performance and relationship with Claire was even better than opening night, allowing me to see sides of Claire that I had struggled with previously.

February 28: The third performance was the best it has gone yet. Tonight we all flowed so well together as a cast and crew. It was the smallest audience we have had, but allowed an intimacy to be experienced with the cast and crowd. The audience was small but appeared to be the best audience we have had from all three nights. While we all felt so relaxed, I do feel that some of the intense, emotional scenes felt less energetic, influencing the intensity of the show.

March 1: Closing night. The final performance went wonderfully. It was bittersweet because the show was coming to a close. It is also the last time I will perform in the Bud Frank Theatre, on that stage. The final audience was receptive, involved, and they laughed often throughout the show. I felt that my last performance as Claire was comfortable in the sense that having an audience was second nature to us at this point. For the final performance, I do feel we could have had more energy, but I am thankful for a wonderful run with such a great show. The overall experience was professional and calm. The entire cast and crew did amazing work, and pulled through regardless of scheduling setbacks.

Final Thoughts and Reflections

I am so grateful that director Bobby Funk chose me to portray the character Claire. This role was new to me and allowed me to grow as an actor. Not only was I playing an older character, this production and process caused me to practice acting methods from Stanislavski.

The pressure of putting up a college level production with little rehearsal time showed me the true pressures of real life theatre productions. The show must go on, always.

CHAPTER 4

REFLECTION ON THE REHEARSAL PROCESS AND PERFORMANCES

Throughout the process of *Proof*, I continuously worked on character development. I analyzed who Claire was as a person and what caused her to act the way she did. I initially felt pressure with this show because I had chosen *Proof* to use as my thesis performance. I read through the script over a dozen times, taking notes and attempting to come into my character through different angles. This chapter discusses and reflects on the elements of this acting process I chose. This chapter reflects on what worked, what did not work, what I would choose to do differently, and why I chose the process I did.

For the spring 2015 semester at East Tennessee State University, the ETSU's Department of Theatre and Dance put on the production *Proof*. Starting from the beginning of the production of *Proof*, I immediately felt aloof and unrelated to my character, Claire. I feared that I would not be able to channel Claire. For the first few weeks, I read and rehearsed for Claire from a distant perspective. I was uptight, stressed, distracted, and uncomfortable. From studies of Constantine Stanislavski, I drew from his technique. Constantine Stanislavski stated in his book, *An Actor Prepares*, "As long as you have this physical tenseness you cannot even think about delicate shadings of feeling or the spiritual life of your part. Consequently, before you attempt to create anything it is necessary for you to get your muscles in proper condition, so that they do not impede your actions" (Stanislavski 1). In furthering my character development of Claire, I then went through a process of attempting different techniques of relaxation and preparation for performing to find Claire's identity.

Elements of the Play That Worked

Discussing elements of *Proof* that worked and were successful, I greatly owe the director, Bobby Funk, for all of his helpful suggestions, relaxation reminders, and discoveries that I originally did not understand about the character Claire. Claire is complicated and somewhat artificial initially. She is cold, lacking any type of empathy for her family members, and appears to have issues relating to others. Claire is self-centered and controlling, even when she means well. To truly understand the layers of Claire, I started studying peers of mine that I felt were similar to Claire. This was a suggestion from Bobby Funk. By observing those who resemble Claire's character, I discovered their reasons for their behaviors. What I discovered was that though Claire appears cold and self-centered, she truly cares about her sister and family. Claire wanted a better life, therefore she moved away from Chicago, pursued a career in New York, dated elite men, and made herself successful, though she is unsuccessful in relations to her family and loved ones. She sacrificed quality time for her family in order to provide for them financially. She wanted results and was action oriented. I always sensed that her relationship with her mother was similar to Catherine's relationship with their father. Claire was driven as I believe her mother was. Catherine and their father, Robert, had a close relationship and related to each other best. Robert and Catherine were both brilliant mathematicians but lacked the drive that Claire had. I believe that Claire felt trapped in Chicago with her family. She comes across as though she is better than the rest of her family, but I believe that is how she chose to cope with her parents' death. Claire felt guilty for not being around while Robert was dying, leaving Catherine to be the care taker. Claire wanted action, wanting to place Robert in a caring home, and desiring Catherine to move to New York so she could help her plan for her future. After picking apart Claire's family issues and self-image problems, it is understandable that Claire

masks her feelings with her attitude and coldness towards others. Her inability to relate to her father and sister after her mother's passing made her feel like an outsider. Even though Claire excelled in her career, she still wanted to be valued and needed by her family.

This discovery allowed me to understand and come at the character from a different perspective. I understood the challenge of consuming yourself in areas of your life that you succeed in while avoiding your weaker areas. Dealing with yourself and your own issues becomes messy, which is the opposite of Claire.

Furthering the elements of the process that worked was the study of The Alexander Technique. Throughout my acting career, I have struggled with the ability to hone in and own my material. The Alexander Technique taught my body how to relax and transition into Claire. As an individual, I am not controlling or highly demanding unless I see it fit to be so. In order to portray Claire in a believable way, I had to channel an inner confidence that is difficult to obtain in my personal life. I felt sensitive to the freshman cast because I was the graduate assistant to Patrick Cronin, their professor, as well as a fellow cast member and student. Initially, this caused a struggle for me to prove my acting ability. To overcome personal issues, I regained perspective on my reality. Claire was neither Kathryn nor a graduate assistant or a friend to fellow cast members. With this perspective, I was able to transition into Claire's personality and set aside Kathryn's reality.

Coming back to methods of relaxation, I focused on breathing techniques as well as wearing business professional attire with high heels. A large part of the confidence issue remained my fear of falling in my shoes while on stage. I was overly focused and aware of my costumes, causing my rehearsal process to be hindered by a costume conflict rather than an acting performance. Out of the rehearsal setting, I rehearsed my lines, blocking, and movement

in heels at home in order to practice the confidence I needed to portray Claire as a believable character. This worked well with my success in *Proof*.

Focusing on the rehearsal and performance process as a cast, it was surprisingly valuable to get to know each other as individuals apart from our characters. This created a level of comfort, respect, and trust that is needed, in my opinion, to be successful in productions. I learned to trust my scene partners and proved my trust to them. By spending time with Aubrey Mullins, Ryan Stapleton, and Evin McQuiston outside of production in classes, friendships formed allowing the production to be enjoyable. I wanted them to view me as a peer rather than a superior, which never seemed to be a problem. As a graduate student in my first year of graduate school, I felt a tremendous amount of stress and emotional issues that heightened the pressure of performing well in the production I was choosing for my thesis. Being involved with a cast of younger students allowed a level of softness and judgement free area that caused *Proof* to be a positive experience rather than add to the stress of graduate school.

Elements of the Play That Did Not Work

While *Proof* went on without a glitch and four successful nights of performances, there were elements of the process that did not work for me as an actor. When I gained understanding of Claire in order to make her relationships clear, there were aspects of rehearsal that hindered my growth. The lack of rehearsal time due to inclement weather created a level of uncertainty for the production. We were unsure when opening night would be, how many performances we would be able to do, and if we were even ready to open. While our cast and crew were strong enough to go on with over a week of rehearsal lost, it created energy loss and emotions that we were working nightly to master. The initial night of rehearsal after snow days was a rusty run through. This rehearsal revisited problems that had been previously resolved.

The concept of energy was crucial for this show. That is ironic in the sense that this show did not require major physical movements or blocking, it required emotional strength. During the rehearsal process, there were nights that we were tired, confused, and not giving emotions the amount of energy the scenes required. For the final scene between Claire and Catherine in Act II, the scene failed to work unless Claire and Catherine were both fully present and giving one hundred percent of their time and energy into the subtext of the scene. This is a raw scene between the two sisters, showing sides of both Claire and Catherine that the audience has not witnessed previously. On rehearsal nights when our emotions were blunted the scene did not work. The scene felt scripted, rehearsed, and unbelievable. In order to bring this scene to life, it required that we give it our all. With Stanislavski's Method, implementing emotional recalls and magic ifs were crucial. If we did not do this in rehearsal, the performances would reflect what we did in our rehearsals. After discussions with Bobby, Aubrey, and me, our objectives became clear. Each of our characters was fighting for something different, and that required the right energy and raw emotions. In order to maintain these raw emotions, Aubrey and I rarely spoke before the second act or backstage. I had to be detached in order to scream at her and work up to hurting Catherine verbally so it was real for the audience.

Before each performance and rehearsals, Aubrey and I would run lines in the dressing room. We focused on the scenes that we struggled with most. At times, we would get to rehearsals early enough to run through each of our scenes. The final scene with Catherine and Claire was the scene that we chose to run the least. Aubrey and I knew that the scene had to feel real to be believable to the audience; therefore running the lines with little emotion lessened the work up for when we were on the stage. Ironically, this scene was the strongest between us. It was the least rehearsed but the most honest.

Reflections on Why Certain Elements Worked and Why They Did Not Work During Proof

Reflecting on the process and experience with *Proof*, I find that certain acting methods and techniques that did not work were minor. The scenes in the play that required inner emotions, in contrast to Claire's superficial personality, could not be faked. It felt forced each time Aubrey Mullins and I would rehearse the final scene in Act II in a calm manner. It worked best to trust our memorization and acting abilities to take the scene where it needed to go each night without additional rehearsals.

Surprisingly, the lack of rehearsal that we had for *Proof* allowed us to present performances with honesty that could have been faked. As much of the rehearsal time that we lost, it allowed the show to not seem over-rehearsed. The nerves that the cast and crew felt were channeled towards the performances, and turned the energy into positivity, regardless of the size of the audience. The pressure to go on created closeness among the cast and crew because we were all dependent on each other. The amount of trust I felt with my fellow actors and crew members was rare in my personal experience from previous college productions.

In terms of discovering the character of Claire, I was forced to find aspects of Claire with which I could personally relate. Besides observing peers that were similar to Claire, I needed to understand her on my own terms and perspective. Claire had a strained relationship with her father, which is something I could connect to. Claire loved her father but had little in common with Robert. I believe Claire valued her father's opinion, but her way of showing love was providing financial security for Robert and Catherine. Growing up, my own father was heavily focused on his career, often causing him to be an absent parent. My father's way of showing love was being able to financially provide for the family. Becoming Claire was not only a challenge

but also therapeutic. It was a way for me to understand my father's view on family, work, and definitions of success.

Claire has many layers, yet chooses to keep most of her emotions contained to others around her. I also found it important to analyze Claire's relationship with her fiancé, Mitch. Mitch was not present in the play, but Claire would often mention Mitch to Catherine and Hal. Mitch was a symbol of security and social status for Claire. I believe Claire loves Mitch, but needs him to maintain her lifestyle and image. Claire also seemed to show dominance over Mitch, reinforcing Claire's controlling, in demand personality. In many ways, Claire's controlling personality seemed to hide her insecurities and fear of failure. If Claire was always in control, she would have less chance to be rejected by others, including her family and fiancé.

The opportunity to portray Claire in *Proof* allowed my ability as an actor to grow and stretch. Though Claire is one of the most controlled characters I have portrayed, her subtext and inability to connect with others intrigued me. Claire's controlled behavior allowed me to discover her true character to be portrayed from her body language and the way she presented her dialogue. The concept of subtext was heavy with Claire, though it may not have been as apparent with the audience. Because of the opportunity to study Claire, my performance as an actor focused more on Claire's objectives rather than being a dramatic character.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Proof is a collaborate production within an academic theatre environment. The director, Bobby Funk allowed the actors the freedom to explore the character's personalities, objectives, and motivations for their actions. At the end of rehearsal each night, Bobby would often give us topics to think about in reference to our characters and their relationships with one another. This allowed the actors to begin their process of finding their characters and resulted in character growth each rehearsal as well as during performances.

To find Claire's character, I had conversations with Bobby as to how she feels about herself and her family. Understanding Claire's objectives and inner struggles provided clarity of her motives behind her decisions. To transition into an uptight character, relaxation techniques were helpful for me to feel at ease within my own body in order to become Claire. Relaxation assisted in reducing the self-awareness I had of my own self, allowing Claire's character to strengthen and become apparent. This production required my training to become more structured and provided opportunities for me to find what techniques work best with my acting style. Through this process, I have obtained the understanding of the importance of character development and learning to get out of your own way in order to find your character.

Proof shows Claire's intentions and objectives throughout the entire play. Claire is relentless when it comes to getting her way, especially regarding her family. As an actor, I valued Claire's stability and her unchanging personality. She is aware of who she is and unapologetic of her faults. Though Claire was portrayed in a somewhat negative light in this production, her unwavering demeanor communicated her confidence and her intimidating presence. The discoveries of Claire's truths were briefly shown in *Proof*, yet as an actor, I had to

understand her perspective. She did care, yet felt the pressure to be the stable unit of the family, regardless of her presence in her family's lives. Through painful discoveries and surprising triumphs, the theme of hope was ultimately expressed in *Proof*.

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VITA

KATHRYN PATTERSON

- Education: B.A. Mass Communications, East Tennessee State University,
Johnson City, Tennessee 2014
M.A. Professional Communication, East Tennessee State
University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2016
- Professional Experience: Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, College of
Arts and Sciences, 2014-2015
- Honors and Awards: Outstanding Graduate Creative Achievement
Department of Communication and Performance