

2005

The roles of Elicia/Lyse/Clarina in Tony Kushner's *The Illusion*: a production thesis in acting

Sarah Jane Johnson

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses



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

Recommended Citation

Johnson, Sarah Jane, "The roles of Elicia/Lyse/Clarina in Tony Kushner's *The Illusion*: a production thesis in acting" (2005). *LSU Master's Theses*. 3352.

https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/3352

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

THE ROLES OF ELICIA/LYSE/CLARINA
IN TONY KUSHNER'S THE ILLUSION:
A PRODUCTION THESIS IN ACTING

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

In

The Department of Theatre

By
Sarah Jane Johnson
B.F.A., the University of Colorado at Boulder, 2003
May 2005

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother

Nadjeschda Lynge Overgaard

December 23, 1905 - October 13, 2002

Who planted the seed in me to be an artist.

And to my mother

Ebba Overgaard Johnson

My biggest fan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my partners in this three year journey. Michelle, Chaney, Shawn, Preston, Tara, Brace, and Eric. John Dennis deserves words I can simply not describe. His ultimate guidance and wisdom was and will always be my deep foundation as an actor. Leon Ingulsrud, Jo Curtis Lester, Nick Erickson, Jennifer Jones Cavanaugh, Laura Wayth, Kristin Sosnowsky, Polly Boersig, Heather Gilbert and Les Wade accompany him. To our Chairman, Doctor Michael Tick, I am grateful for your commitment. Without you I would never have arrived in Baton Rouge. I also wish to thank Sean Kelley, Lee Potts, and Candace Taylor from Colorado University. And to my very first director and acting mentor Russell Johnston.

I also devote this to my beautiful family. My brother Willy will always supply me with the latest in culture and companionship. Denise my sister, best friend, therapist, entertainer and so much more. To my Father and Step-mother, Mac and Susan Johnson, whose support in life and gift of an education has brought me to where I am and will supply me with opportunities for the rest of my life. To Gerhardt, an unabashed giver, and a man who I could turn to when there was no one else. To my mother, Ebba Overgaard Johnson, who I wish will attain as much joy in her life as she has given me. I would not have made it without her.

And to Reuben, my protector and companion, whose never ending support gave me the strength to continue.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHARACTER ANALYSIS.....	3
JOURNAL.....	17
CONCLUSION.....	30
REFERENCES.....	31
VITA.....	32

ABSTRACT

The roles of Elicia/Lyse/Clarina in The Illusion, freely adapted by Tony Kushner, was selected as a thesis project in the fall semester of 2004. This thesis is a written record of the actor's work on the character throughout the rehearsal process and performance of the production in the form of a Rehearsal Journal. It also includes an Introduction, Character Analysis and a Conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Love and hate race after each other,
Round and round
Till not even Solomon could tell them apart;
Indistinct, dangerous, frayed with pain
They riot in my gray and gloomy heart.
Is there no healing for this raw wound,
No shelter from this unforgiving wind,
No release from this life of love and loss?
--Lyse, The Illusion

The Illusion opened at the Reilly Theatre on the campus of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, November 17, 2004. The production closed on the fifth of December and was directed by Steve Young. The cast was as follows: Pridamont of Avignon, Brace Harris; The Amanuensis, Eric J. Little; Alcandre, Tara MacMullen; Calisto/Clindor/Theogenes, Preston Davis; Melibea/Isabelle/Hippolyta, Michelle McCoy; Elicia/Lyse/Clarina, Sarah Jane Johnson; Pleribo/Adraste/Prince Florilame, Chaney Tullos; Matamore, Shawn Halliday.

Playing the roles of Elicia/Lyse/Clarina in Tony Kushner's free adaptation of Pierre Corneille's The Illusion was the most valuable experience on the stage I have had to date. Its humanity and versatility, and the flexibility it brought out in me as an actor, brought this play and its characters close to my heart. Not only did my fondness for the material grow with the process, but so did my abilities, focus and determination as an actor. I respected the complex, poetic profundity in the heightened language that the playwright Tony Kushner created. The comedic qualities enhanced the entertainment value of the characters and story without devaluing the innate human needs of love, the flirtations of desire and greed and the debilitating aspect of loss.

The Illusion was a valuable learning experience because many aspects of the process were new and different for me from my previous experiences. It was the first time I had rehearsed in a format similar to a repertory theatre schedule. We rehearsed daily for both The Illusion and Macbeth, which opened at the Reilly Theatre on October 22, 2004. This was more difficult than a repertory schedule because I was teaching and was a full-time student. It was very enlightening because I plan on working professionally for a repertory company and now realize how challenging and exhausting it is to do more than one show at a time. This change launched me into a new way of thinking about character development and methods of creating physical, emotional and vocal choices for a specific character. It allowed me to make stronger choices for these characters. The physical life of these choices occurred sooner in the rehearsal process because there was less time for personal analysis outside of company rehearsal time. Not only were Lady Macduff from Macbeth and Elicia/Lyse/Clarina very different roles than I had played before, but the directing and acting styles were jarringly different. Though I do not know to what degree this helped or hurt my success at creating these characters, it did create an environment of continuous personal growth. At the end of this struggle I found confidence and composure in my work.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

I had never seen The Illusion staged before I began the rehearsal process. I knew no stereotypes associated with this role that I had to work against. Unlike the process of Macbeth with which I was very familiar, I was unfamiliar with Corneille as a playwright and with Kushner's adaptation of this play. I looked forward to creating my own understanding of who I thought this character was and how she functioned in this world. I had the delectable task of sifting through the beautiful layers of this play where I, Sarah, was the actor playing an actor who was playing a character.

This character analysis is through the voice of Elicia, Lyse and Clarina. The play is written with three distinct characters and time periods. In the middle of the rehearsal process, after much thought and application, I decided that Elicia, Lyse and Clarina would be the same person. This person grows over a considerable length of time and goes through three distinct events in her life shown on stage. The voice that follows is a composite of all three (the questions asked to Elicia are about the struggles of her childhood and upbringing; those at present situations are addressed to Lyse; and Clarina deals with the future). I decided that Elicia's name changes in the early part of her life to Lyse, just as mine changed from just Sarah to Sarah Jane as I got older and matured. When Lyse and Isabelle rescued Clindor and had to flee in order to escape persecution for their actions, Lyse changed her name to Clarina to change her identity and to better hide herself.

My Past

I come from a small village in the countryside of France. I live a few hours from Paris, though I have never been there. People in my village talk about how beautiful and

amazing it is there, but I think it is gorgeous here. We have the most astounding sunsets. Rolling hills surround our cottage. My friends here are bored with the slow pace of life and do not see any beauty in the nature that surrounds us. I think it is exquisite. You can see for miles and miles. I wonder what else lies out there through all that distance. I doubt I will ever see much but I am content here with my family.

My childhood was much different than those around me because our family was unusually dependent on one another. I only knew my mother through stories. My father loved to tell me about the day my mother found out she was pregnant with me. She twirled around the kitchen wishing she would finally have a daughter. Her wish came true though she was never able to hold her first daughter. She died during child birth. It was harder growing up for me than those around me with mothers to teach them how to be a woman and even what to cook to keep my father and brothers happy and healthy. This is one reason why I remained devoted to my mistress Melibea and kept her as my friend throughout our life until her death. Though my job was to take care of her, in so many ways she took care of me and we grew up and became women together.

My father cared for me in a very different way than he cared for my brothers. He tried to be gentle and affectionate with me but insisted that I be tough. I needed strength at that age. I did not realize it at the time but I had taken the role of my mother. I did the errands, mended my family's clothes, took care of the house, and cooked all of the meals.

Family conditions were very hard. We had no money. It is not that we desired grand things. We always got by with what we had. I know Daddy wished for just a little more so that we wouldn't have to worry. We didn't have big dreams. We just wanted the comfort of knowing that there would be enough money for food and essentials to run

our farm. I wished that things were better for Daddy so that he could have some peace in his life. It turned out to be the opposite.

A major influence on me was the loss of our farm. When I was thirteen we had two very difficult years. Money was tighter than it ever had been. My Dad made the toughest decision he ever had to make. We sold the farm and he and my brothers moved in with my uncle and worked on his farm. There was no place for me there and my father sent me to live with Melibea's family to work in their kitchen and later be their maid. I knew it was what I had to do to help my family but it felt like I was being ripped away from the only things I knew. I lost my father, the countryside, small and simple meals, my brother's teasing and wrestling. I lost a piece of me.

Ten most important facts about me are that my family is the most significant influence I will ever have. I long for my mother. I want to fall in love. I want money. I want freedom. I see beauty where others do not. I am tougher than other girls around me. I hope that I can take care of father when he gets older. I am confident. I expect a lot from people.

Five people whose opinions are most important to me are my own, father's, Melibea's, Calisto's and God's.

A crucial event in my life to date is the day that I met Calisto. Everyone always paid attention to Melibea because she was so beautiful. She always has had beautiful clothes and lots of money. Suitors from all over the country came to see her and she acted like she did not care. Calisto came for her, but he liked ME! No one had ever given me attention like he did. He liked my eyes. We almost kissed.

My outlook on life was primarily determined by how Melibea was feeling. Because I could not show my emotions as freely as she could I always saw the world through her eyes and her experiences. It was frustrating because I wished I could have freedom in the life I had with my family. There was never a dull moment at Melibea's home. I missed my family, there was simplicity to the life I once had, we worked hard, but we had each other. I knew Melibea cared for me but I felt so alone.

My Present

There are many factors influencing how I feel at this moment. Clindor broke my heart. He thinks I am beautiful. We make love in a way I never would have dreamed. He kisses me all over. He looks me in the eyes, then he leaves me and goes to Isabelle and her money.

Other people tend to describe me as fun, helpful, cute, mischievous, charming, obliging, diligent and poor.

I often use these terms to describe others like wealthy, arrogant, selfish, egotistical and sheltered.

In groups, my physical appearance is always at its best. I have a duty to uphold the sophisticated nature and importance of Isabelle's family in society. My clothes always have to be clean and pressed. But even if I did not have this duty to serve I would strive to look by best. I want to be attractive for Clindor. Without money, my looks are all I have. I know that I can sway a man with flirtation. I have no shame making sure my breasts look great in the dresses I wear.

My most distinguishing characteristics are my loyalty, my patience, and my passion. I seek out escapades and love all things new and exciting.

My favorite activities would have to include lying in bed naked with Clindor talking about our dreams and passions.

My temperament would be described as up-tempo but easy-going.

My lifestyle involves being at Isabelle's side whenever she calls and doing whatever she asks. I do everything from bathing, dressing and doing her hair to taking walks with her and entertaining her when she is bored.

I am most and least interested in Isabelle. My days are full of her. We are friends. I am consumed with her. Though we are friends she is my boss. Some days I would run away screaming at her naiveté, commanding and whining, others I would be running towards her for a hug. She gives great hugs and loves me very much. I love her. She is all I truly have.

Future

What I want most to achieve in life is freedom from pain, thoughts, and struggle. I thought that the money I got from Hippolyta would do this, but it has distanced me from myself. I want to achieve happiness. I wanted to love and to be financially stable. Now, I just want to be happy with who I am.

Other important objectives would include saving Hippolyta from the destruction that lies in wait. She has not learned from her past as I have. I wish I could shake reason into her brain and guide her choices. But nothing changes her focus and what she feels is her destiny.

There are many obstacles I currently am facing. I feel guilty for losing touch with my family. Family is most important to me and I do not know how I lost sight of that. I will never have a family of my own. Hippolyta is not a person that will ever fully

understand me. It is hard to admit that I am jealous of her. I will never love again and though the love she has for Clindor has destroyed her, it also keeps her alive and will be there for eternity. I only have my heart and this money that will not fill the void. I know no eternity.

Specific tactics I am most likely to use and have used in my life are manipulations of people through my emotions, people, situations, love and money. If I am remembered it will be for very little. I have not left a positive impact on those around me.

In my darkest fears, I am terrified that I will end up alone and poor. I am horrified at the thought of growing old, isolated, solitary and forlorn. But even more horrific is the thought of opening up my heart. I will never be able to trust again. How can I take a chance once more? I cannot buy a guarantee with all the money in the world that someone will love me unconditionally.

In my wildest fantasies I will have a family--children and a husband who love me unconditionally--that gives me a purpose in life.

If all my dreams come true, I will achieve happiness and satisfaction with my fate in life. I need to repair my heart to have any dreams at all.

The relationship I most seek is one that will never end. I know it does not exist.

Analysis of the Entire Role

Since I have melded three separate characters into one, I included examples from the text, what I say about myself and what others say to or about me. This helps to show Elicia's transformation from child, to young adult, to a mature adult. It helped to justify thinking of them as one person without losing their own identities in three very dissimilar points in their lives. The following text conveys who these women are. This text shows

how each was viewed, and how others viewed their role as a servant, maid, friend and a companion. Looking at this isolated text makes the characters so vivid and condensed. I love the fact that Elicia is so self-assured, even as a young servant, and that her low status never makes her weak or dismissive. So many times I questioned Lyse's heart because of her fierce actions and reactions. But looking at the text I realize the torment she put herself through with each decision and the guilt she suffered after each event. Clarina is a person who has formed as a result of Lyse's extreme actions. Clarina is completely in control, solid, resolute and determined never to be hurt again. She knows what Hippolyta must do (but will never do) to save herself from pain and death. The overwhelming questions an actor goes through in any rehearsal process of any play is of a great magnitude, often with much confusion at the lack of immediate answers. Through this confusion I always returned to the text to ground my work.

What do I, Elicia, say about myself?

"Oh we maids know these things about our mistresses;
We're in and out of their lives like bees in lilies,
Tidying up more than their bedclothes and their hair."

"But she didn't. I would have. She didn't."

"She's on the brink:
I'll give a push"

"And why am I helping? I know how he feels..."

"So I'm helping out:
And why should I care?
I find him attractive"

"The minute I saw him I said to myself 'I hate that man.'"

"I have a heart..."

"I know the very medicine for this malady."

What do other characters say to or about Elicia?

Melibea: "Elicia!"

Melibea: Who are you talking to Elicia? I thought I warned you to keep the door shut."

Melibea: "DON'T YOU DARE!"

Calisto: "Your eyes are pretty when you laugh."

What do I, Lyse, say about myself?

"I'm sorry for you, sir. I am. And, I admit,
I had some hand in
Shaping her opinion of this man."

"You'll spare the bearer of bad news?"

"It's eerie. I'm worried."

"Handsomely. I'm all for you."

"By this betrayal I bait the trap"
"It's not for the love of a glittering stone
That I set the stage for this bloody deed...
I only seek justice, to punish a sinner."

"I'll be a cold fury in my fatal resolve."

"When I left your room, all of the linen
Was thoroughly mussed."

"I'm glad I helped you to a good night's sleep."

"I've discovered a new feeling, one that has no name.
My heart is full of it."

"If I could make a broth,
With my heart as the meat stock..."

"But I'm not angry."

"I'm a little taken aback myself."

"Her sparkling eyes, my dainty foot..."

"Your schemes make sense to me.
Marry money; I'd do the same..."

"God help me, I do."

"I've had your best, and you've had,
And used me up, and cast me off;"

"I'll tip him out, this serving man"

"As much as I'd love to spoil his plan
I'm still in love with this catlike man"

"I must recant my treason."

"Undo what I've done..."

"I cannot say it."

"I do."

"I pray that madness travels faster
Than the spirit of revenge."

"The murderer dies, my lover, her love--
I have a secret to confess:
I can play,
If I choose, Madam Liberty;
I can if I want to, set Clindor free.
I know a way to rescue him from death, but
I can't find a way to make myself want to."

"They riot in my gray and gloomy heart."

"I'm not in a laughing mood tonight."

"It's wearing hard on everyone;
We're all suddenly growing old."

"If you do learn, come back
And give me instruction..."

"I saw a moon-map once; there's a sea I remember called Tranquility..."

"More than remember: I'll worship you,
My patron saint; you catechize me;
To withdraw my poor heart from the lion's den,
To leave the blood sport of love to my betters."

"I see a way to a golden means,
By which I am revenged buy nobody dies..."

"I have preparations to make
For an earthbound journey. And yet I will rise
Sky-high, even higher
Than if I followed this man to the moon."

"For a mad mad moment I thought
'My God, she's scrubbing the floor!'"

"I've saved him."

"Meet me at the prison at midnight exactly.
I have the key to Clindor's cell."

"It's not your servitude I crave."

"We flee tonight; you with your love, no longer lonely;
I with the loot, no longer poor."

"I'll have a counting-house consolation.
I wish them every penniless joy-
I'll jingle money at their wedding."

What do other characters say to or about Lyse?

Isabelle: "I'll send my maid down with a letter"

Adraste: "That's more than you'd confess before."

Adraste: "Your loyalty's impressive, Lyse. Is it for sale?"

Adraste: "Yes. I promise you that."

Clindor: "Like a statue, Lyse."

Clindor: "But after you'd gone,...
And with your smell trapped
On my hands and my sheets..."

Clindor: "You have a letter. Is it for me?"

Clindor: "Are you angry?"

Clindor: "I haven't been untrue to you."

Clindor: "I love you both equally."

Clindor: "I do, Lyse, I do. Equally, but differently."

Clindor: "Your beauty, and her money."

Clindor: "I won't insult you by telling you stories.
I could easily spend a century or two in bed with you."

Clindor: "My desire's all for you.
But all you have to offer is desire."

Clindor: "You have nothing, I have less than that."

Clindor: "You understand."

Clindor: "I knew you would."

Clindor: "You're so beautiful it's dangerous to stay."

Pridamant: "They're all in league against him!"

Alcandre: "Allow me to make a small adjustment... (Stage Directions: Alcandre motions in the air, and Lyse is struck by a sudden change of heart)."

Matamore: "Her scullion, alone.
What's become of your mistress, scullion?"

Matamore: "Your reticence is commendable, jade. But speak. You must"

Matamore: "Tell me, poppet"

Matamore: "I beg your pardon?"

Matamore: "Do you mean to imply...?"

Matamore: "Affronterous pimple!
Presumptuous homuncula!"

Foul dustball, perfidious chamber pot,
Do you mean to imply that..."

Matamore: "Poodle, cease your yap!
Trullish chambermaid, do you think..."

Matamore: "Aaaahhhh!
The maid! Oh please,
Abuse me not, dread Medusa of the linen closet"

Matamore: "Your laugh might make to marbleize
My much-tormented soul."

Matamore: "I can't, mop-and-bucket;
I'm not coming back. But think of me up there,
My peaceable catechism, draw patient forbearance
From the silvery light."

Matamore: "I'll drink a cup of its water for you.
Adieu, adieu, remember me"

Isabelle: "Help me, Lyse."

Isabelle: "Assist me or else
Become my enemy."

Isabelle: "Tell me what to do."

Isabelle: "Lyse! How did you get it?"

Isabelle: "I swear to you, if he goes free,
You'll live your days a wealthy woman.
I will wait on you."

Isabelle: "I'll give you half of all I have."

Isabelle: "You shall have diamonds for setting him free!"

Isabelle: "It's you who deserve this ecstasy, not I.
I am your friend, Lyse, till the day I die."

Pridamant: "Well, if the maid is rich, my son's a fool not to choose her"

Pridamant: "On the other hand, the maid's too scheming, it'd be constant work
keeping up with her."

Isabelle: "As Lyse is right to say it will"

Isabelle: "Oh yes, Lyse, a story,
A story of love"

Isabelle: "And through a strange twist of fortune,
The ladies changed places"

What do I, Clarina, say about myself?

"I can't. It's you who should keep silent."

"I think there was once. He got older."

"No, this game's best played, I think,
By two, not three, a thing I realized
years ago. I leave you to your torture;
I've lost my appetite for injury"

"I'd rather live alone"

"Long ago this orphan lost his charm for me,
And I can't bear to watch the way
You beg for the wounds he inflicts."

"Oh, pity on my soul."

"Help me. Oh God, somebody help me!"

What do other characters say to or about Clarina?

Hippolyta: "I need the exercise and air, Clarina"

Pridamant: "I see they've changed the names again."

Pridamant: "It's pleasant to see they've become friends. I had a maid once come into some money, she packed and left without so much as a thank-you-goodbye."

Hippolyta: "Now you know why I'm here.
Keep silent."

Hippolyta: "Humiliation's all I have Clarina."

Hippolyta: "Talk to him, please, tell him"

Hippolyta: "Clarina was right"

Hippolyta: "Stop! Clarina! Help!"

Hippolyta: "Clarina, I'm suffocating."

JOURNAL

October 5, 2004

First day of rehearsal and the potential for this show is so excitingly overwhelming I cannot wait to get it on its feet. I remember first reading the play and thinking how beautiful the language was and the budding depth that each of the characters possessed, but I had no idea how damn funny this play was! We were only at the table today and we were all laughing hysterically. I have never been very good at seeing the comic possibilities of a play when just reading it, but God only knows why the characters in The Illusion did not jump off the page and smack me in the face. It is going to be such a blast to create Elicia, Lyse, and Clarina and their world.

Our director Steve Young is really excited about the play and his opportunity to direct in Baton Rouge. I think he is going to be a fulfilling director with whom to work. He has many specific ideas about the various themes and heightened moments of the show but also seems very open to our input. We had a terrific conversation about the play and listened to some of Steve's ideas on the play as a tool and the intangibility of love. Steve described the playing space, talked about how the cave represents our subconscious, and suggested Pridamant goes there to seek transformation. The cave is dark and drab in setting and lights but as we move into the vignettes the lighting becomes more beautiful and vivid. The vignettes are intellectually intriguing at this point. How we will create and act through three distinct worlds in contrast to the cave? They do not have to relate directly to the cave that is actually a stage setting in a theatre in Paris. I wonder what this opposition will create for the audience. The actual location of each vignette is never created.

One thing that will help distinguish between the characters is that as the vignettes in the play progress through time, from the 1600's up until the 1980's, they also become more cynical, more violent, and more modern. There are interesting layers in this piece that will be tedious to dissect between Sarah Jane the actor, playing the actor in Paris who is playing Elicia, Lyse and Clarina. It seems that Steve is interested in searching out how these layers affect the characters and the world of the play itself. I hope we really push the edges of this aspect because I think it could lend itself to a very funny, deep and human show.

October 6, 2004

This is the first chance I have had to play a funny, though not too bawdy, character at LSU. I was given this chance by a director who did not know my previous work and finally I was not cast as an ingénue. Though Elicia and Lyse are maids, they are still lovers and can be viewed as a type of ingénue. Being a leading lady is what I have worked on the most in class and been cast as previously, so I want to try and work against my habits and tendencies.

October 7, 2004

Some of the imagery I am using comes from my trip to Scotland this past summer. The gorgeous countryside and immaculate, old castles are what I picture Melibea and Isabelle's homes to look like. It is great that these memories are so fresh because we have no set to work with since it is an illusion in a cave. In regard to my position as a maid, I think of my Dad and Step-mom's house-keeper. She is very quiet and docile around my Dad, but when I am the only one in the house, we have the greatest conversations about anything. Even sex! Her contrast is one that I think about often in

the different personae Elicia and Lyse have to exude when certain family members or guests are in the house.

October 9, 2004

We are still in blocking rehearsals. It is getting a little frustrating working with Steve. I am trying to work out different ideas with him and I do not think we are connecting. He is trying to be open but is generally negative about my ideas. I wish that I did not have to explain them but that I could try different things on stage in the scene during rehearsal. I think if he let us play more he would be happy with what we create. I do not have all the answers. That is why we have rehearsal!

October 11, 2004

All three characters are blending together. We have only been doing blocking rehearsals but I certainly do not want to waste two weeks in developing these characters. Even Lady Macduff characteristics are finding their way into Lyse and Clarina. It is really exhausting doing two shows at the same time but it is a good thing for me to learn when I work professionally in a repertory schedule.

How does she differ in each vignette? If I say, “she” then I am agreeing that it is one person. I feel that this makes for a more dramatic arc but am I downgrading the individuality of who these characters are in their own time period? Is it more dramatic and more playable for me to create three totally different characters or do I attack this from the angle that this is one person who changes and matures dramatically because of the situations she goes through in her life? If I look at just Elicia, she grows from naïve but smart teenager (who wants to be lusted after the way Melibea is) causing her to work her way into Calisto’s life. Lyse is a young intelligent woman who is deeply in love with

Clindor. When he breaks her heart so deeply she manipulates those involved. Her destructive nature causes Clindor to go to jail. She destroys her trusting heart. She moves from love to hate. Clarina is past the follies and desire for love because of her complete resolve to be alone with money as her only companion. To combine all three characters creates a huge sweep from a young lustful girl with manipulative playfulness, to a destructive person coping with the loss of love, which leaves a broken woman who cannot stomach the thought of opening herself up to the potential for pain leaving her alone and empty the rest of her life. Of course with these questions, I cannot ignore the additional level that I am playing an actor playing these role(s). But I am not going there today.

October 12, 2004

I need to look for opposites and contradictions in the characters behavior. I do not have any of them figured out as yet and I am trying to force the characters into too neat a package. More inconsistencies! Range! Variety! Stop analyzing her from the outside and ask questions as Elicia. This world with love! This world without love! Illusion versus reality! Love versus money equals CONFLICT!!!

October 13, 2004

I still have not decided if it is one combined character or three separate characters within the layers of the play. Regardless, there are many changes (including aging and time period shifts for each vignette) that right now need to be physically and vocally addressed. How do I move for each character? Elicia is so full of life and adventure that there is a lot of bounce in her step. The social norms of the 1600's give a physical boundary that will be good to work with and against. The cut of the dress allows the tops

my breasts to be visible which helps show her personality. Elicia is certainly the type of person to put it all out there even if she is a maid. Shoulders back, quick springy steps but not sure about her gesture life yet. The dress will be of considerable weight with lots of length and fabric to deal with when running and sitting and will affect my general movement a great deal. Her physical life is definitely growing but is not at a point to settle on any specifics. When definite gestures are created I wonder how they will change from Elicia through Lyse and Clarina. Maybe the gestures will change slightly, become more refined or it is possible that there will be completely different gestures for each character.

Vocally when rehearsing Elicia scenes I tend to get a little high pitched. It works for the youthful quality in her but is a little false. If we were embracing the commedia roots of the show, which Steve does not encourage or connect with, I think that an exaggerated vocal quality would work. I have also been thinking about, if it is the same person throughout, that there is vowel changes that could be made to suggest maturity and status changes from servant to wealth and teenager to adult.

October 15, 2004

HEARTBREAKING!! How does Lyse survive what she goes through? Everyone in the world has had their heart broken, but being inside of someone who is so reactive to her sorrow and pain has started to make me think that her pain is unlike anything I have ever experienced. Desperation and bitterness almost dissolve Lyse completely. All the money and diamonds she gets is a thin band-aid for her gapping wound! It is so dramatic but I am trying to find the dramatic world she is living in at this moment. How much does the money heal her grief and for how long?

October 17, 2004

A writing exercise from Clarina's perspective:

“Why am I still friends with Hippolyta? The wonderful side is the amount of time and the quantity of experiences we have shared together. I took care of her and she has taken care of me. We taught each other things about life. Unlike me, she has experienced freedom. I gave up the chance to ever return to my father for her. I do not think she will ever realize what I have sacrificed for her. Granted, I tried to steal her boyfriend, but it was because we belonged together. I was doing her a favor. Instead she has never attained full commitment from him and is miserable. I have felt deep jealousy and anger towards her and I am sure she has had these feelings for me. I do not think I will ever be able to describe how our lives are entwined but she is truly the only friend I have ever had.”

October 22, 2004

Macbeth opens tonight. Feeling a little frazzled. I am definitely excited to know the audience's reaction. It is a crazy feeling to be working on two shows at the same time and for both of them to be a little off-track. I know both shows will straighten out, or straighten up as Mom would say. Painfully we have rehearsal at 10 in the morning tomorrow. Opening night party?

October 24, 2004

We had our first run through for the designers today. Having an audience makes it painfully obvious when the comedy doesn't work. Trying to be more specific...

Our note session today was very taxing. Thanks for the line reading Steve! He wants “body noises” and has to show what he means to everyone on every note instead of

us working it into the scene when we rehearse it again. He even showed Eric how to spasm today. Flopped down on the ground and spasmed all over the stage for a good thirty seconds, then was out of breath for the next few minutes of notes. He also told me, “You’re the Oprah of Paris.” I will try and work that in.

October 25, 2004

Steve is really pushing my monologues to be bigger and to move more flowingly in and out of my “spot” where I talk to the audience from. I have not quite found a way to do this with any finesse. Lyse’s monologues need a lot of work. The monologues are all so different from each other with such specific reasons for going to the audience but I am not hitting it. The stakes are too low right now. I am not fighting for anything! I have to convince the audience of my case, but am not giving enough of my viewpoint. I am just spitting out text. It needs to cost me something when I confess the struggle with my choice to save or damn Clindor. I am trying to find a way to convince myself to save him. I love him but he has killed me inside. How do I feel about what I have done? How is guilt affecting me and what is the struggle going on in my head and my heart?

October 26, 2004

How do I resolve myself, Lyse, to fate? I am already pained and hurt that I have to share Clindor with Isabelle, but if I had money, I could have him all to myself. The opportunity to hurt him back is given by Adraste to catch Clindor with Isabelle. I cannot truly imagine hurting him to the degree that Adraste would like. I give Clindor one more chance to pick me and only me. He does not. Since all I have to offer is a depository for his lust, I will deceive him. I give him the letter to set up Adraste's attack. After all of this, I still rescue him from jail, gain extreme fortune and he still goes to her! Steve has

changed this creating a far less harsh reality than Kushner intended and the storyline needs. Instead of Clindor running to Isabelle, Isabelle runs to him and Clindor looks longingly to me as they exit. It totally cheapens the heightened emotion that the entire vignette has created.

October 31, 2004

Today's rehearsal was all about getting back to basics. We ran and then reworked each scene after notes. Blocking and physical specificity had been getting a little too sloppy and generalized. Even little things like when I run in to take care of the suitor outside has been mutating into only being excited at the prospect of making Melibea's suitor mine. But going back today I brought back the reality that I do not expect to find anyone special, my annoyance with the task of getting rid of him and then discovering "he's cute!" The decision to flirt with him and win him over comes after all of that. It was good going back and realizing that there is no fear of love in Elicia like Lyse and Clarina, just the joy of getting into playful trouble, flirting, spying and mischief.

Working on the Elicia sections Steve wanted me to simplify her physically and bring out her real intentions. Have I been "play acting" too much because I have been enjoying discovering her physically and comically? Running the scene a couple of times allowed me to reconnect with the genuine and truthful moments.

November 1, 2004

The Lyse/Adraste scene is not happening. I know my agenda is not clear, but I cannot bring it to the surface without losing the subtlety that I want in the scene. I do not want the audience to know what Lyse is planning to get out of Adraste at the top of the

scene. It needs to creep up on them just like the success of her shaky plan continues to creep on.

November 3, 2004

This was the worst day in United States in history. “President” Bush was re-elected today. Everyone was really feeling it. The energy and drive in rehearsal were non-existent.

November 4, 2004

My main focus today from notes was the need for more period style. Also Clarina still pities Hippolyta too much. I have to get her to leave and not sacrifice herself for him any more. There is no pity, not because I am overcome with frustration or anger with her, but I have heard this a million times and have had enough. If she has not gotten it by now, she never will and there is nothing I can do. It definitely has to have more drive in the text and harsher tactics.

November 6, 2004

The designers were back today for a run through as well as some SITI company members. It created another hard realization that this show is not what it could be. There are no rules. We have created these boundaries and areas for certain actions of specific characters. Pridamant cannot be on the floor of the cave because that is the playing space for the illusions, yet he enters from there. Pridamant, Amanuensis and Alcandre should only be able to be on the tiers of the cave. Yet The Amanuensis also enters from the cave floor and at the end of Act I he has convulsions (controlled by Alcandre to get to the

other side of reality) on the cave floor. It is great to break the rules that have been created in order to create dramatic staging and increase the depth of the story. They have to be created convincingly and in a way that the audience understands when a character has crossed a boundary. Shawn and I have been having such a hard time with our scene when Matamore decides to go to the moon after being in the attic. We worked on the scene and specific blocking and tried to go up the stairs to show how far Matamore has crossed the line between illusion and reality. Of course Steve would not have it even though he had broken his own rule the minute he made it. There is nothing specific in which to build upon. Yes, the show will be fine, the audience will laugh because the eight of us are good at farce and can work together to create a show that will suffice. But it could be so much more.

November 7, 2004

Worked on transitions and a few moments from Act two. Chaney and Preston worked on the fight until 8:30. I guess it was semi-valuable, more for Steve and the fighters than the rest of us. I just worked on my monologues by myself. I am sad that Macbeth is over, because it was artistic and I was able to change and grow within the production every night. I hope our day off tomorrow will help me rest and give me the energy to care for this show. This rehearsal process really sucks.

November 8, 2004

Why am I the only one that can talk to the audience? Who am I talking to? The audience in Baton Rouge or the audience in Paris? What does it do to me if it is the Paris

audience? When we exit at the end we are in regular street clothes and Brace is in old French garb. Where are the layers of this show leading us? It is very inconsistent and almost stifled by Steve. It feels he talks more about the themes and layers of the play during production meetings than he does with his actors. Through working with Ellen and Leon I was excited to dive in creatively and intellectually in the process to analyze, create, and rip this play off the page. Steve thinks we are second-guessing him, that we are, in essence, saying he is wrong or his directing is insufficient. It is instead a clash of directing methods and rehearsal practices. Together we could create something together as artists that would continue to grow throughout the run in its potential but his micromanaging is deadening my characters, ideas, thoughts, and desires to be the best I can be at creating for this show. He does at least give specific blocking and tries to help inform the emotional journey. Why is this so stifling?

November 9, 2004

We did a work-through of Act One tonight. Nothing too eventful. In the scene where I convince Matamore to go interrupt Melibea and Calisto, he exits and I have an exasperated monologue, I added "Jesus God." I don't know where the hell it came from but the stage managers and Steve thought it was hysterical. I guess I will keep it and see if it works. I do not know how I feel about adding text to this show, or any show. Steve has changed and cut a few things and I have not agreed with the changes. I feel that Kushner is a better playwright than us both, so why do it? Maybe it is just one more step at personalizing and making this production our own.

November 10, 2004

BABY HALLIDAY IS HERE!!! It has been such an exciting day. We made it to the hospital and got to hold Shawn and Karli's beautiful baby girl. I cannot stop reflecting on how much we have been through as a group. From day one at LSU we have changed so much. We love and fight with each other like siblings. These guys are my family down South. This play would certainly not be as successful if it was not for the way we work together. Just last night, the last night of Shawn without a child, we spent with beers in my living room giving each other notes.

Rehearsal was unproductive. We were so distracted by our trip to the hospital and were low in energy. Derrick did a nice job filling in for Shawn but it certainly put a break in our already disrupted rhythm. Steve made it clear tonight during notes that it is a talky show and if the audience gets ahead of us we are dead.

November 13, 2004

I am trying to focus on the twists and turns of this person who changes with time and heartbreak. There is no collaboration and no sharing of ideas. I have to revel in these ideas with my classmates. I am doing my best for them.

November 14, 2004

This play is so heartbreaking!! And so is this fucking process!! How do you create when you are walked all over and creatively stifled, drowned, and destroyed? I know there are going to be other directors out there like Steve, who do not care about your process, or only have one vision, or want your hand placed on your knee in just the right way, but God not yet! I cannot create anything without Steve micromanaging it and

sucking all my original and artistic choices out of my poor soul. I am really searching for this character but am losing momentum.

November 19, 2004

Opening Night! Tonight was truly a blast. The audience was involved and vocal in their enjoyment of the show. Through all the struggles it will be so nice to have control of this show and revel in the fact that it is ours. It represents so much of who we are and what these two years have given us as a group.

CONCLUSION

Creating The Illusion will always be a memory that I look back on with great fondness. Not because of the rehearsal process, not because the audience laughed, but because it created an artist within myself that I admire. I had pride in my work that kept me going through all of the struggles I encountered. I hope that I will have the opportunity to work on this play again. It is a beautiful play with gorgeous characters who maintain their depth of love and pain and their innate human qualities through all of their uproarious moments.

REFERENCES

Kushner, Tony. Plays / by Tony Kushner: Broadway Play Publishing, New York. 1992.

VITA

Sarah Jane Johnson was born May 25, 1980 in Omaha, Nebraska to Mac and Ebba Johnson. She received her primary and secondary education in Bennington, Nebraska. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Colorado at Boulder in May, 2003. Sarah Jane wrote this thesis as a final requirement for her Masters of Fine Arts degree which will be rewarded May, 2005.