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Morgan Benson

Minnesota State University, Mankato

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CREATING THE ROLE OF MYRA ARUNDEL IN
HAY FEVER

by
MORGAN BENSON

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
IN
THEATRE ARTS

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO
MANKATO, MINNESOTA

FEBRUARY 2022

February 9, 2022

Creating the role of Myra Arundel in *Hay Fever*

Morgan Benson

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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ABSTRACT

Benson, Morgan, M.F.A. Creating the Role of Myra Arundel in *Hay Fever*. Mankato: Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2021.

This document is a thesis project submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts degree in theatre. It is a detailed account of author Morgan Benson's artistic process in creating the role Myra Arundel in Minnesota State University, Mankato's production of *Hay Fever* in Fall of 2021. The thesis project chronicles the actor's artistic process from pre-production through performance in five chapters: a pre-production analysis, a historical and critical perspective, a rehearsal and performance journal, a post-production analysis and a process development analysis. Appendices and works cited are included.

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CHAPTER I

PRE-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

This chapter contains an early production analysis of the character, Myra Arundel, portrayed by myself, Morgan Benson, in Minnesota State Mankato's production of *Hay Fever* by Noël Coward, directed by Matthew Caron. The design team includes John Paul as scenic designer, George Grubb as sound designer, Steven Smith as light designer, and David McCarl as costume designer. It will be performed in the Ted Paul Theatre on November 4-6 and 11-14, 2021.

Since about February 2020, news of the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread around the Mankato area, along with several other regions of the world. By March 2020, Minnesota State University, Mankato, closed its doors allowing only essential employees to work. Students and faculty were to work from home and attend classes online. Several businesses had to close, some permanently. Masks were mandatory indoors, and people were required to socially distance themselves by at least six feet. It felt like the world had come to a halt. The performing arts department cancelled its remaining productions for the 2019-2020 academic year. COVID-19 complications continued to delay some production dates into the following year and *Hay Fever* was postponed to this 2021-2022 academic year.

COVID-19 is still present today; however, we now have a vaccine that seems to help get the world functioning again. Regardless of our vaccination status, face masks are still mandatory indoors at the university, but we no longer have social distancing

guidelines. The university has made an exception to the mask rule for performers in the theatre and dance department. Patrons will have to wear a mask to our performances, but the performers can perform without a mask if they are vaccinated. I am grateful that I am allowed to perform without a mask. The following analysis will include what the play is about, a detailed character examination, and some ideas I plan to explore while developing the character, Myra Arundel.

There are nine characters in this play. The overall focus of the comedy seems to be on the Bliss family. This includes the mother, Judith Bliss, played by Ruby Carlson, the father, David Bliss, played by Jack Adams, the son, Simon Bliss, played by Joshua Lester, and the daughter, Sorel Bliss, played by Malea Hansen. Noël Coward also pays significant attention to the Bliss's housekeeper, Clara, played by Hannah Sayler, and their house guests. They include: Sandy Tyrell a boxer, played by Hunter Conrad, Richard Greatham a diplomat, played by Joaquin Warren, Jackie Coryton a flapper, played by Emma Inga, and my character, Myra, who is not given an occupation.

Each character has a specific purpose in the play. It seems the general purpose for all the house guests is to create conflict within the relationships in the Bliss family. The general purpose for the Bliss family is to delightfully engage in the conflict for their own attention-seeking purposes; they all seem to love drama and intrigue. A common motif throughout the play is that several of the characters are selfish and attention-seeking. This could be Coward's approach to the comedy of manners acting style innately woven into the script (Doughtry 11). *Hay Fever* is a mixture of farce comedy of manners.

A comedy of manners play pokes fun at the upper-class society. This style of comedy focuses on character behavior. Often, the main focus is on the sophisticated and

complex code of conduct in the middle and upper-class societies. In this style, there is more importance to appearance and outward behavior than true moral characteristics (Hase). *Hay Fever* is filled with wealthy, greedy, lustful, and selfish characters. Though comedies of manners often focus more toward witty languages, *Hay Fever* has many moments of physical, slapstick comedy that highlight the play's farcical elements.

A farce is an exaggerated style of comedy in which everything is absurd. Slapstick humor and physical comedy are frequent components. It is a type of style where "the characters make decisions that seem to make *some* sense given the circumstances, but at every turn things get more and more ridiculous" ("Farce"). An example of farce in *Hay Fever* is at the end of ACT II when the Bliss family reenact a scene from a play titled "Love's Whirlwind." The family is to throw their bodies around the room in a grandiose manner while the character, Richard, is accidentally slapped and the character, Judith, pretends she faints (Coward 75). Another farcical situation is when Richard accidentally breaks the barometer in ACT III and fails to fix it (80). All of this takes place in a wealthy home with the use of absurd and witty characters in an overall "plotless" story.

The main action of *Hay Fever* takes place in June of 1925 in Cookham, England at the Bliss's house (Coward 6-7). ACT I begins by introducing each member of the Bliss family. With some of the heightened language, it is evident right away this is a very theatrical family. The house guests are also introduced throughout the first act as well. Each house guest has their own purpose for visiting the family. The Bliss family did not, however, communicate with each other that everyone had invited a guest over for

the weekend. Chaos and tension immediately rise as the Bliss family scramble to figure out how to host so many people at such a short notice.

To keep their guests entertained, the Blisses decided to host a game night for all guests to participate in. The intent for a fun evening quickly turned into an awkward, angry, and tense night as they struggled to decide on a game, teach the rules of the game, and play the game. The game ends in a fight between the Bliss's in which they each split up and spend time with a guest that someone else had invited. Unexpected romantic affairs begin to appear, one being Myra and David. Judith walks in on the two characters kissing. This caused yet another fight among the family members while now roping Myra into the mix as well. The fight leads into the reenactment of the play "Love's Whirlwind" performed by the Bliss family leaving the guests confused and speechless (Coward 24).

ACT III is the next day at the Bliss's house (Coward 77). To end the play, the guests acknowledge the insanity of the Bliss family and plot their secret exit of the house. As they are off packing their belongings, David, decides he wants to read his latest novel to his family. As he is reading, the family begins to argue the meaning of what David has written. As the family fight ensues, the guests secretly find their way out the door. After hearing a slam of the front door, the family stops arguing and realizes that all their guests have left without saying goodbye. Judith responds to this with "How very rude" (93). The play ends with the family proceeding on, in their usual fashion, as if nothing had happened while listening to David read his novel.

To summarize, the main action of this play seems to be the Bliss family navigating their selfish desires resulting in relationship conflicts within the family and

their guests. Selfish personal agendas accomplished through exploitation are woven into the main action. Once the character achieves their goal, they lose interest and stop pursuing the character who no longer serves them. Many of the characters are too naïve or self-absorbed to realize they are being used by one another.

Another common theme in the script is the family's ability to frequently move on from family fights as if nothing happened. I believe this is a situation a lot of families can relate to, including myself. In my experience, family fights are much more personal than a fight with a friend or a stranger. In my family, it is expected that you still love each other after you fight; so you have to make up or move on at some point. This is not something expected after a fight with a stranger whom you may never see again. It seems Coward is using comedy to exaggerate the absurd relationship dynamics families can have. One of my favorite capabilities of theatre is its ability to shine a light on everyday situations that, in retrospect, are absurd; it seems to bring humility to humanity. This family fighting theme is seen mostly within the Bliss family. My character, along with all the other characters, seem to find their own way to support the themes within the show.

It is crucial to complete a detail-oriented character analysis immediately after being cast in any role. A character analysis will guide the actor into a deeper understanding of their role. It provides a solid base for the actor to build an authentic character. It also offers the actor the ability to start rehearsals prepared with many considerable character ideas. This character analysis will include Myra's given circumstance, her main objective, obstacles, and motivations.

The script gives great insight into Myra's given circumstance through its descriptive dialogue. Simon describes her as "awfully amusing" while Judith detests her, claiming she is, "straining freedom to its *utmost* limits" (Coward 19). The script does not provide a concrete age for Myra, but it does offer clues. Judith says, "I'm growing old now – men don't grow old like women, as you'll find to your cost, Myra, in a year or two" (70). Judith also tells Simon that Myra is "far too old" for him (19). It is stated that Sorel is 19 years old and Judith no longer considers her children "little" therefore I am assuming Simon is somewhere close to Sorel's age (17). The audition form from Caron claimed that Myra is in her 30s. Since the script does not provide an exact age, I have decided Myra is 35 years old, based upon Judith's description of her.

Judith also describes Myra as a "self-conscious vampire" who "goes about using sex as a sort of shrimping net" (Coward 19). Both Sorel and Judith hint that Myra is a flirt and that she is good at attracting men (19). After much flirting, David does mention that Myra is "a very interesting person, and extremely nice-looking" (66). He claims that she butters him up because she wants a "nice little intrigue" (68). He also describes her as "adorable," "magnificent," "alluring," "rude," "statuesque," "charming," and "tawny" (67-68). Simon describes Myra as "enchanted," "a devil," "callous," "like Medusa," and "heavenly" smelling (33-35). Simon says to Myra, "You're everything I want you to be – absolutely everything! Marvelous clothes, marvelous looks, marvelous brain" (33). Myra is a sophisticated, seductive, smart, and manipulative woman.

The script does not indicate Myra's occupation. I believe she could be some type of artist, perhaps an actress. Probably a good actress but not the best. Simon gives insight into her socioeconomic status when he gushes about how marvelous she thinks,

looks, and dresses. His description of her follows standards of a person in the upper-class. It is revealed that Myra is smart when Simon tells her she is “too intelligent” (Coward 33). David also mentions she is “an intelligent person” (66). I believe her intelligence also appears within Myra’s strategic use of manipulation throughout the entire play. Therefore, as an intelligent artist, she would know how to create and portray interesting characters. This also seems to be a fitting occupation because Judith is an actress as well. This could be part of the reason Judith is jealous of Myra. Perhaps Myra is getting more work than Judith.

Myra and Judith never get along, it seems they are in constant competition with each other. They are always trying to one-up another by putting the other down in the process. Since Myra feels the need to compare her career to Judith’s career that is no longer existent. The need for comparison suggests Myra is feeling insecure with her own talent and abilities. Insecurity could be a reason why she is a good actress, but not the best. Myra is also very interested in meeting David and learning about his new book “The Sinful Woman” (Coward 88). Perhaps she wants to be the lead character in it. Simon is also an artist, and he adores Myra (33). Perhaps he is adoring her talent as an actress and the fame that comes with it. Much like one of the play’s themes, Myra tends to use people for selfish reasons. She pursues Simon because she loves the attention he gives her.

The script does not include an explanation as to why Myra is the way she is. After some research, I cannot seem to find any resource of Coward describing Myra and her purpose within the play. I will go further into this topic in Chapter Two. Since there is no clear direction, I believe it is my duty as an actress to create an explanation for

Myra within her given circumstance. Perhaps Myra desires extra attention because growing up, Myra struggled with feeling accepted or wanted by her family and friends.

I have noticed the women in the script are not huge fans of Myra. Sorel is jealous of Myra's attractiveness and worries Richard will fall for Myra instead of her (Coward 19). Maybe it has always been easier for Myra to get along with men than women. It is possible that she could have desired female friends in the past, however, Myra seems to struggle with jealousy. This is apparent in her constant competition with Judith. Perhaps Myra could never get along with other females without feeling jealous of them. Her jealousy connects back to the previous mention of the insecurity discovered within Myra. Perhaps growing up, Myra's parents were negligent in helping her develop confidence resulting in her never feeling good enough. However, Myra is exceptional at disguising her insecurities as there is no established moment of vulnerability where Myra expresses them within the script.

Though she may have struggled to conceal her insecurities at a young age, as she has gotten older, she has gotten better at it. She seems to disguise them mostly through her outward presentation of confidence and carelessness, even if she is not truly feeling it. The main tactics used to portray this façade is intimidation, manipulation, and flirtation. We especially see Myra putting on a façade when trying to overcome obstacles keeping her from her main goal.

As stated before, Myra uses other people to get to her main goal. Myra uses Simon to get to David. This is where Myra's strategic manipulation comes into play. She uses manipulation to get to her main objective. Though she has several objectives, Myra's main goal is to meet David and make him like her. She loves the female

characters in the novels David has written. David's ability to write so eloquently about women is very attractive to Myra (Coward 64-65). Ultimately, Myra is a "gushing admirer" of David's (66). She even claims that she lost her heart to him (66). However, I do believe her perception of David is slightly blurred when she is with him. She swoons over him without knowing who he really is. I do not believe it is her goal to be a homewrecker; she just wants to be liked by one of her favorite authors.

Just as Myra does with all men, once she realizes David is attracted to her, she basks in the power that comes with her attraction. She has accomplished her goal of meeting and attracting David; therefore, it is no longer about him. It is about her and how she feels about accomplishing her goal. However, in this situation she is especially thrilled to have David attracted to her because she is such a huge fan of his. It is not until Judith catches David and Myra kissing that reality sets in. Myra's perception is no longer blurred, and she realizes she does not like who the true David is, a fake and arrogant man. Once this happens, there is a drastic shift in Myra. Now she wants the exact opposite of her goal. She no longer wants David attracted to her because she is no longer interested in him. It will be fun to explore how she pivots in rehearsals. It is rare that Myra is seen trying to make someone unattracted to her. There are many obstacles Myra faces in achieving all her objectives.

Two significant obstacles Myra seems to face involve Simon and Judith. Simon is probably Myra's biggest obstacle. He is keeping her from David. I will need to find a balance of enjoying Simon's attention, but also pushing him away so he does not get too attached to Myra. Judith being David's wife is another obstacle for Myra to hurdle as well. However, this is not a difficult obstacle for Myra; she knows how to handle Judith.

Myra and Judith are very similar, they have a good understanding of each other; they know what makes the other tick. Lastly, since Myra flirts with all the men at some point, she will need to be careful to not let David see her flirting with the others, it may discourage him from pursuing her.

To personalize the character, I started by creating a concept board for how I envision Myra¹. I plan to use my considerable height to my advantage by elongating my already long limbs and moving about the stage with a slow and flowy flair. When I think of Myra I think of a slinky and imagine she moves like one as well. Every movement comes after another in a very smooth and well-planned sequence; almost to a point where it seems calculated. This ties in with Myra's ability to manipulate. She is always secretly calculating her next move and does it with grace and confidence. This is a part of Myra that I feel I relate to the most, her ability to calculate her next move.

I always find myself in my head rehearsing exactly how even the most mundane situations will play out. I do this so I can try to understand the result before facing the result. However, sometimes it can increase anxiety because I can easily overthink it. I feel like I spend most of my days strategizing my next move. This can then take me out of the present moment. Myra does not ever seem to live in the moment; she is always thinking about the next step she needs to take to achieve her goal. A unique stamp I want to press upon Myra is her excitement towards insults. Whether it is, for example, her watching the Bliss family insult each other or Simon calling her "Medusa," I think insults turn Myra on (Coward 34). On the concept board I have included pictures of random wealthy women from the 1920s so I could see how they carry themselves and I can

¹ See APPENDIX C for concept board.

portray a historically accurate character. I have also included fashion she would enjoy, the food she would eat, and the type of contemporary house she would live in if she were alive today.

In relation to the overall spectacle of the show, the dialogue within the script suggests Myra is attractive and well-dressed (Coward 33). McCarl has shared his costume design for Myra². He sees all the characters as rich folks relaxing for a weekend in the country. He is going for an overall lighter look. He told me my character will be in green because he feels it is a color that will help illustrate Myra's vampish behavior. I agree with McCarl's vision and feel excited about his costuming ideas. It feels good to be able to create a character under the same vision as the costumer. I am not only bringing Myra to life for myself and the other actors and director, but for the designers as well. Myra should stand out from the set because the script describes her as a sophisticated woman in the Bliss's house which is described as "messy" (9). Paul has shared his design for the set. I am unsure how messy it will look or what the colors be, therefore, I am not sure how Myra will look with the rest of the set. Those details will come as Paul continues to develop his vision for the set.

No matter what, I can use my acting skill to keep Myra in the world of the play but also appropriately set her apart from the set. I believe if a character looks uncomfortable on stage they will immediately stand out. It would make sense that Myra looks uncomfortable in the Bliss's house because she has never been there before. However, Myra is not the type of person to get uncomfortable easily. I think it could be more interesting to play the extreme opposite and have Myra be overly comfortable in

² See APPENDIX B for costume and set designs.

this house she has never been in before. I believe by playing this opposite it could set her apart from the other characters and the set.

Caron has also shared his directorial vision. He wants this production to feel like a mixture of the two television shows, *Downton Abby* and *Schitt's Creek*. He wants a historical looking, high-brow style of comedy. He wants the cast to imagine that this chaotic weekend is just another ordinary weekend at the Bliss's. He also explains that there is no complex plot in this play and that the characters do not really evolve from beginning to end. He wants us to lean into the theatricality of the Bliss family. I am feeling ready to explore Caron's concept and ideas. I look forward to rehearsals and working with my fellow castmates to explore will contribute to this story.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

This chapter contains a historical and critical perspective for the character, Myra Arundel, played by myself, Morgan Benson. It is crucial to research the history of any play that one participates in. Historical research helps the actor establish a solid understanding of the script's purpose. It helps the actors better understand the playwright's ideas and intentions behind the story. It can also help the actor do just the opposite and challenge the playwright's original intentions by approaching the work from a different perspective.

This historical analysis includes research on life in the 1920s detailing *The Bright Young Things*, Women's Suffrage, the World Wars, and the need for escapism. There is an examination of Noël Coward including, who he was, his impact on culture, and his reason for writing *Hay Fever*. This is also information on *Hay Fever*'s production history including critical reviews and Coward's advice to actors.

A lot was going on in London during a period known as the "Roaring Twenties." It was a decade of contrasts (Johnson). The First World War had just ended in victory bringing peace and profitability to Great Britain. Author Ben Johnson stated that, "Manufacturers and suppliers of goods needed for the war effort had prospered throughout the war years and become very rich." The wealthier classes and aristocracy enjoyed the hedonistic lifestyle of jazz clubs, cocktail bars, and nightclubs. Researchers assume that because most of this generation were too young to fight in the First World

War, a sense of guilt overcame them for escaping the horrors of war. This guilt would empower them to live life to the fullest. They struggled to go back into the workforce and go on with life as if nothing ever happened. It is also suggested that it could have been a “reaction against the values of their parents and those of pre-war Britain” (Johnson). One group heavily associated with this bohemian lifestyle was the Bright Young Things.

Chased by paparazzi for their ostentatious behavior, the Bright Young Things were the sons and daughters of the upper-class society. They were “seeking to advance their career through association” (Johnson). They frequented bars and jazz clubs, partying from dusk until dawn indulging in drugs and alcohol. Obsessed with jazz because it was viewed as “modern, raw and anti-establishment” (Johnson). Men in this party were often seen wearing makeup and flamboyant clothing. Women were beginning to experience more independence and confidence (Johnson).

Following the war, modern young women influenced the start of the Bright Young Things as they went on “treasure hunts” around London (Johnson). Using the London transportation system, women in this society were found running and shouting through the streets making a spectacle of themselves. Men quickly joined in and “The Bright Young Things took to treasure hunting in fast cars, roaring around the countryside” (Johnson). Author D. J. Taylor says, "It's the idea of slightly depraved and debauched young people having a wonderful time while the economic recession is looming" (Patterson). People were escaping their hard everyday realities by living the bohemian lifestyle as a Bright Young Thing. As a liberated woman, it is likely the

character Myra Arundel would have associated herself with the Bright Young Things after growing up fighting for women's rights in the Women's Suffrage Movement.

In England, the Women's Suffrage Movement began in 1866 when nearly 1,500 signatures were gathered in a petition to Parliament requesting women the right to vote. "From 1870 to 1905, a period often referred to as 'the doldrums,' suffragists did not make significant headway in mobilizing either widespread support or popular enthusiasm for extending the suffrage" (Winslow). However, in an act of militancy and civil disobedience, by 1905 thousands of women were fighting for their rights. It is likely teenage Myra began as a member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) founded in 1903.

Emmeline Pankhursts and her daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, controlled WSPU and revitalized the suffrage campaign (Smith 34). "The tactics of the WSPU included shouting down speakers, hunger strikes, stone-throwing, window-smashing, and arson of unoccupied churches and country houses" (Kelly). Recent studies are showing the WSPU was an early form of radical feminism "that sought to liberate women from a male-centered gender system" (Smith 34). Myra shows many signs of being a radical feminist by always seeking control over men and by pushing against society's etiquette standards for women. For example, she presses away from standard etiquette with her promiscuous behavior and her general outspokenness. By 1918 a limited amount of English women won the right to vote. They had to be over 30 years old and be "householders, the wives of householders, occupiers of property with an annual rent of £5, or graduates of British universities" (Fawcett 170). By 1928 all English women over the age 21 had the right to vote (Winslow).

Women were now more confident in themselves and empowered to be whoever they wanted to be. During the First World War, women had been employed in factories. A wage gave women more independence which then influenced new fashions (Johnson). “Hair was shorter, dresses were shorter, and women started to smoke, drink and drive motorcars. The attractive, reckless, independent ‘flapper’ appeared on the scene, shocking society with her wild behavior” (Johnson). For women with children, such as the character Judith Bliss, life was nearly the same post-war as it was pre-war. “For example, the middle-class stay-at-home housewife still changed into her afternoon dress after lunch to receive guests, and many such households had either a live-in maid or a ‘daily’ to help with household duties” (Johnson).

Myra most likely would have been a member of the WSPU from 1905 to 1918 when the union was disbanded (“UK Parliament”). As a radical feminist and a member of the WSPU and the Bright Young Things, Myra at 35 years old would have been perceived as a bit of a flapper in the 1920s. Flappers were typically younger, F. Scott Fitzgerald described the ideal flapper as “lovely, expensive, and about nineteen” (Rosenburg). However, script details provided by Coward suggest Myra engaged in a similar life of a flapper. A specific example would be when Judith calls her a “self-conscious vampire” (Coward 19). She also mentions Myra is “straining freedom to its utmost limits” and that she “goes about using sex as a sort of shrimping net” (19). Flappers engaged in active city nightlife with alcohol and cigarettes while attending vaudeville shows and frequenting jazz clubs. They were also “less hesitant to experiment sexually than previous generations” (“Flappers”).

“The flapper attitude was characterized by stark truthfulness, fast living, and sexual behavior. Flappers seemed to cling to youth as if it were to leave them at any moment. They took risks and were reckless” (Rosenburg). Fashion designer, Coco Chanel, popularized the “garconne” look which meant “little boy” (Rosenburg). To achieve this look, women bound their chest with pieces of cloth to flatten it and wore knee-length dresses with the waistline dropped down to the hipline. Dancing to jazz music required women to move more freely. They got rid of the corsets and were now wearing dresses that would not restrict their movement (Rosenburg).

This new ability for women to move freely in their bodies influenced ordinary everyday manners such as standing and sitting. In previous traditions, a woman would cross their leg at the ankle and men at the knee when they sit. It was considered unladylike to cross their legs at the knee. It would also create somewhat of an “awkward tent” in their long skirts (Martin). However, as previously stated, in the 1920s women were influenced to look more like a boy. Therefore, progressive Myra would ignore this traditional etiquette and be found occasionally crossing her leg at the knee.

Myra is known for her sophisticated and stylish fashion. It is likely that as a wealthy woman she would have purchase ready-to-wear clothing instead of making it herself. Author, Debbie Sessions, goes on to say,

Between in the 1900s and 1920s, women’s dress went from seventeen layers down to four, and nineteen yards of fabric down to seven. You would think that the drastic reduction in material made clothing more affordable – and they did, except for one thing. Instead of three or four complete outfits for the typical middle class 1900s woman, 1920s young ladies were expected to wear a new

outfit every day with new clothes for new seasons, and only the best most current fashions could be seen. There was also the pressure to buy ready-made clothing rather than make your own at home. In the end, there were very little savings. The age of consumerism had begun . . . The typical person spent 13-15% of their income on clothing, or less if you were very poor. The very poor typically wore hand me down charity clothing, the working rural classes made their own clothes, middle classes made or purchased ready-made clothing, and the upper classes custom ordered clothing from Paris or New York.

Because of their wealth, it is likely Myra and the Bliss family not only purchase ready-to-wear clothing, but they would also custom order from Paris or New York as well.

Myra also drinks alcohol and smokes cigarettes which is another activity relatively new to women. “Up until 1982, it was perfectly legal to refuse to serve women in British pubs, which were traditionally ‘male environments’ (Biddlecombe). The drinking age in 1901 was 14 years old and went up to 18 years old by 1923 while still allowing 16-year old’s to drink with a meal (Poppleston). As a liberated woman, it is likely Myra started drinking at the age 14. She would also enjoy going to nightclubs or jazz clubs to drink, smoke, and flirt with the men she comes across.

From 1908 until 2007, the minimum age to purchase and consume tobacco products in public was 16 years of age (Poppleston). Most women did not smoke until it became more popular in the 1920s. Tobacco was largely a male habit until the mid-1920s (Eliot). For the first time, cigarette advertisements were explicitly directed towards women (Greaves). Women in Britain then begin to smoke on a large scale, almost exclusively in the form of manufactured cigarettes.

Also known for his flamboyant looks and behavior, Coward seemed to be significantly influenced by the roaring 20s while living in them himself. Born on December 16, 1899, in Teddington England, Coward is the son of Arthur and Violet Veitch Coward (“Noel Coward 101”). He had two brothers, Eric and Russell, both passing away at young ages. Described as having “little personal drive,” his father was an unsuccessful piano salesman leading the family with unstable finances (“Noel Coward 101”). Young Noël was a natural performer with intelligence and strong performance instincts. He made his first stage appearances in amateur concerts at age seven. “He loved to sing and dance at any excuse and threw frightful tantrums if he was not summoned to perform for guests” (“A Brief Biography”). With his mother's encouragement, he launched his professional acting career at the age of 12, making his London debut as Prince Mussel in a children's show called *The Goldfish* (“A Brief Biography”).

At around age 19, Coward sold his short stories to several magazines to help his family make ends meet and his mother turned their home into a boarding house. She worked tirelessly so Coward could pursue his theatrical dreams. His father was no longer attempting formal employment, he seemed content letting his wife take charge (“A Brief Biography”). His mother was a “doting, strong-willed stage mother who relentlessly putted their children forward in the theater” (Krebs). She remained the strongest influence in Coward's life until she died at the age of 91 in 1954. One friend said that Coward was “attached to his mother with an umbilical cord made of piano wire,” while another observed that “together they behaved like newlyweds” (Krebs). He was also influenced by well-known actor at the time, Charles Hawtrey. Twelve-year-old Coward

followed him around everywhere. He later said, he learned everything he ever knew about comedy from Hawtrey (Callow).

Coward wrote 47 plays as well as 16 concert and revue productions and over 300 original songs (Thomas). He completed his first attempt at playwriting in 1918 with his play, *The Rat Trap*. It was not performed until 1926 at the Everyman Theatre in London (Thomas). His career took off in 1924 with *The Vortex*, a play covering controversial topics such as “sexual vanity and drug abuse among the upper-class” (“A Brief Biography – Part II”).

Following his success in the 1930s he was called “The Master,” a nickname of honor that indicated the level of his talent and achievement in so many of the entertainment arts (“Noël Coward Society”). At Coward’s seventieth birthday in 1969, admirer Lord Mountbatten went on to say,

There are probably greater painters than Noël, greater novelists than Noël, greater librettists, greater composers of music, greater singers, greater dancers, greater comedians, greater tragedians, greater stage producers, greater film directors, greater cabaret artists, greater TV stars. If there are, they are fourteen different people. Only one man combined all fourteen different labels – The Master.
 (“Seventieth birthday”)

He is known as an all-rounder of the theatrical, literary and musical worlds of the 20th century. “He was the essence of chic in the Jazz Age of the 20s and 30s. His debonair looks and stylishly groomed appearance made him the icon of The Bright Young Things that inhabited the world of The Ivy, The Savoy and The Ritz” (“Noël Coward Society”).

In true Bright Young Things fashion, Coward and friend Esme Wynne would exchange clothes and stroll through the streets of London in reversed gender (“Noël Coward Society”). He was also spotted with the Queen’s uncle, George the Duke of Kent, walking through the West End streets in drag. They were once arrested under suspicion of prostitution. At this point, homosexuality was illegal in England (Brathwaite). Coward reportedly had a 19-year affair with George. “According to the 2005 documentary *The Queen’s Lost Uncle*, George met Coward through the actress Gertrude Lawrence, who found the young prince backstage trying on her wigs” (Brathwaite). Coward's first serious gay affair had also ended in tragedy. His relationship with Prince George began in 1923 and lasted nearly twenty years, until the Duke's death in an air crash in 1942 (Terry).

Coward was constantly risking scandal and exposure in his pursuit of young male lovers; often being half his age or younger. He had a face lift in 1966, hoping to be found more attractive. At age 60, Coward was recovering from a devastating nervous breakdown brought on by an obsession with 27-year-old American actor, William Traylor. Traylor was a straight man who played a supporting role opposite of Coward in the Broadway production of Coward's play, *Nude with Violin*. Coward, heartbroken by Traylor's rejection of him, suffered a complete breakdown, from which he took many months to recover (Terry). Unusual relationship age gaps are seen in *Hay Fever* between Myra and Simon, Judith and Sandy, and Richard and Sorel.

He was drafted in World War One in 1918. He suffered a mild head injury and was honorably discharged in the same year. Embarrassed with his non-involvement with the First War, he was determined to make up for in World War Two. For a brief time, he

served as a secret agent in Paris (“Brief Biography – Part II”). Winston Churchill also permitted him to entertain troops in Europe, Africa, and the Far East through song instead of direct combat. “Recording propaganda songs including ‘London Pride,’ he was able to work on newer productions for civilians back home, as well as keep soldiers morale high” (Thomas). His biggest wartime hit was *Blithe Spirit* in 1942 (“Brief Biography – Part II”). Coward spent the winters in Jamaica for 20 years and his constant companion was South African singer and actor, Graham Payn, who was 19 years younger than Coward. After World War Two, Coward fell in love with Payn, and the two were together until Coward's death from a stroke in his Jamaican home on March 26, 1973 (Terry).

Many find Coward to be a remarkable figure of the 20th Century, to whom no one could compare. He had no more than a few years of elementary school education and was the son of an unsuccessful piano salesman. A lifetime of voracious reading and a keen sense of observation made up for his lack of schooling. By early adulthood, “he was recognized on both sides of the Atlantic as the personification of wit and sophistication” (“Brief Biography – Part II”).

He was a “suntanned lizard of a man, cigarette permanently in hand, he seemed almost immobile apart from the quick precise movement of his thin lips and the flash of brilliant teeth; his distinctive, much-imitated, clipped tones and his sharply witty one-liners were legendary” (Callow). As a well-known artist, people chose to describe him in many ways. British dramatist, Terence Rattigan calls him "The best of his kind since W.S. Gilbert" (Callow). American composer, Richard Rodgers goes on to say,

Despite his ability to do so many things so superbly, he always had to endure the put-down that anyone so versatile could not possibly be a first-rate talent. What nonsense! Versatility on so high a level needs no excuse. Even one of his lesser known operettas, *Conversation Piece*, contains more charm, skill and originality than fifty plays put together by men specializing in particular fields. (“Coward Quotations”)

A prolific playwright and successful actor and director, Noël Coward has had a significant impact on society in the English-speaking world. *Time* magazine said that he had a unique "sense of personal style, a combination of cheek and chic, pose and poise" (“Noel Coward at 70”). *The Times* paper ranked his plays in "the classical tradition of Congreve, Sheridan, Wilde and Shaw" (“Sir Noel Coward”).

Queen Elizabeth II knighted Coward in 1970 in elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (Krebs). Coward said she took a sword and tapped on each shoulder “very lightly, thank goodness” (Krebs). There is also a statue of Coward that was unveiled by the Queen’s Mother in the foyer of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1998 (“Coward statue unveiled”). In 2006, the Albery Theatre, where he made his debut as a playwright in St. Martin’s Lane, London, was renamed to The Noël Coward Theatre in honor of his name (“COWARD THEATRE”). In 1970, he also received a Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement (Salvo).

It necessary to know the fine details of Coward’s life because it all greatly influenced his writing. It is possible that Coward's greatest contribution to stage comedy in the twentieth century is the technique of having a character say one thing while thinking and meaning something completely different. Compared to the carefully

orchestrated epigrams of Oscar Wilde, Coward created a style that was simpler and more spontaneous. A style where the audience can understand that what a character said is not necessarily what was truly meant for the audience to hear. For example, “The girl in *Shadow Play*, written 11 years after *Hay Fever*, says, ‘Small talk, a lot of small talk, with quite different thoughts going on behind’” (Morley).

Many of Coward’s plays, such as *Hay Fever*, poke fun at the upper-class in a sort of comedy of manners style. A dominant genre of comedy during the English restoration period, “Comedy of manners is well suited to expose the superficial values of the upper class society” with the use of witty language that is meant to “highlight the artificial values of the people concerned” (Sharma). The style is characterized by “A flamboyant display of witty, blunt sexual dialogue, boudoir or bedroom-based intrigues, sensual innuendos, and rakish behavior” (Eckersley). To perform this style, the voice was “brilliant and brittle, witty in language, often prose was used, and rapid repartee was the norm. . . Tone was used to convey emotional quality to the audience and precise pronunciation was encouraged” (Eckersley). Graceful and elegant movement was encouraged and while all actions should be precise and inventive. Gesticulation was also important along with a variety of facial expressions such as grimacing, winking and smiling (Eckersley).

Teenage Coward grew up poor and became more fascinated with the upper-class when he would visit wealthy socialite, Mrs. Astley Cooper, at her country house. In the early 1900s, “England was a very class-conscious society. As a boy actor born to poor parents, Coward would have been snubbed by the upper classes” (“Brief Biography –

Part I"). However, his determination and charm won him into the chicest circles. His professional and social ambitions were extraordinary.

He became a frequent guest at Cooper's country estate where he was exposed to butlers, maids, formal meals, horseback riding, and hunting. He thrived in the elegant and sophisticated environment that would later resemble his life and be a great influence in his comedies. ("Brief Biography"). While visiting Cooper, he would write down the conversations he heard. Many of the conversations finding their way into *Hay Fever*. Cooper later went to see the play and said, "It amused me to hear my remarks put into the mouths of actors" (Callow). "In large measure, Coward's life, experience, and career mirrored the birth of a century and the growing pains of a generation" (Horner).

Coward is said to have been a modern comedies of manners writer that highlighted the twentieth century instead of the seventeenth century during the Restoration. Most of his plays are set in drawing rooms and usually have a couple involved in a love relationship as the central characters. He draws heavily on his theatrical background and populates his plays with theatrical and artistic characters, much like all the members of the Bliss family in *Hay Fever*. These temperamental characters constantly bickering became a trademark for a Coward play. Like the characters, Myra and Judith, many of his characters try to one-up another.

Arguments are central to his work, and much of his humor relies on sophisticated insults. Coward's dialogue biting exposes hypocrites and the petty games played by the upper class; his plays parody Mayfair society mercilessly.

Unfortunately, his plays involve little else. There is little motivation of character, less development of theme, and what thin remnant of plot remains is swept along

in the incessant bantering of the characters. Robert Greacen, referring to *Fumed Oak*, remarked that “an observant foreigner might sit through the entire play . . . and simply hear people talking and believe that no action was taking place at all.”

Such statements apply to most of Coward’s plays. (Mambrol)

Criticism reveals that little happens in a Coward play that advances the plot which is the “strongest and the weakest aspects of Coward’s theater” (Mambrol).

Despite Coward’s talent for writing dialogue, most of his plays remain structurally flawed, “relying heavily on the use of *deus ex machina* and coincidence for plot resolutions” (Mambrol). Many of his characters are two-dimensional. Coward described *Private Lives* as a “reasonably well-constructed duologue for two performers with a couple of extra puppets thrown in to assist the plot and to provide contrast” (Mambrol). All the characters playing guests at the Bliss family house in *Hay Fever* are written as two-dimensional characters. Their purpose seems to be just as Coward describes, to assist the plot and provide contrast against the eccentric Bliss family.

There is minimal evidence of Coward detailing his reason and inspiration for the character, Myra. Therefore, it is the actor’s duty to create a background for the character based upon the context of the script and any insights within it that describe the character. One can also examine the life of the playwright and see how their life is seen in the characters as well. It is evident that Coward’s extravagant life has greatly influenced all his characters in *Hay Fever*.

Since Myra is 35 years old, she would have been born in 1890, London. Myra’s overall free, clever, and sophisticated personality closely resembles Coward’s. She could have lived a very similar life as him. Growing up poor, using her charm, intelligence, wit

and attraction to get involved with wealth and upper-class socialites. Her parents would not have been able to financially support another child, so Myra was their only one. She was born in a time where general education started to become much more accessible to poor people. There was no national system of education before the 19th century, and only a small section of the child population received any schooling. Opportunities for a formal education were restricted mainly to town grammar schools, charity schools and 'dame' schools ("UK Parliament"). The Forster Elementary Education Act was passed in England in 1870, making it required that both females and males get an elementary education, while secondary education in even upper-class families was not a consideration for females until the 1890s (Demir).

Women were also starting to become more educated during the shift into the twentieth century. It was previously believed by many doctors that if women studied too much education, it would stunt their ability to reproduce (Picard). However, as time went on and more and more women's colleges opened, more intelligent women attended to be educated in things other than "fashionable" subjects. In this way, knowledge is power and sparked the females right to vote movement and the creation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage in 1897 (Picard). Myra would not have gone to college, her family would not have been able to afford it. It is more likely Myra finished school at age 14. In 1900 education was made compulsory attendance between the ages of 5 and 14 (Connell 127).

The script does not give any information regarding Myra's parents. However, it does mention several times, that Myra is smart. Her intelligence could come from her upbringing. It is likely Myra's mother could have been a teacher. As a poor family,

Myra's mother could have started as a teacher in a dame school. "Dame Schools" were also set up by women who were most likely themselves poor and were more similar to babysitters than teachers. Oftentimes the school was run right out of the woman's home, and it was typical for these children to be given household chores to complete ("Education in Victorian England").

It is likely Myra's father was a factory worker or a farm hand. If he was a farm hand, their family would have taken a financial hit during the Long Depression of 1873-1896 (Fletcher 31). This was a worldwide price and economic depression. The United Kingdom is often considered to have been the hardest hit. During this period, it lost some of its large industrial lead over the economies of continental Europe. Consequently to the Long Depression, was the Great Depression of British Agriculture. This began in 1873 and did not recover until after World War Two (Cannadine 92). Britain's agricultural depression was caused by the dramatic fall in grain prices that followed the opening of the American prairies to cultivation in the 1870s and the advent of cheap transportation with the rise of steamships (Howkins 138).

David, Judith, and Clara would have lived during this economic depression during the late reign of Victoria. It mostly effected agriculture and skilled-labor jobs like Clara's. Coinciding with the depression was the inflation of prices and static paychecks. Salaried employees and upper-class citizens were not greatly affected by this great depression (Greiger). "The Age of Victoria was an age where humanity believed that all could be overcome through willpower and grit of determination" (Greiger). The depression, poverty, and Women's Suffrage is what ultimately shaped Myra into the person she is.

Similarly to Myra, Coward was born in December 1899 and grew up in the new century. He was an “avid observer of people, Coward developed the talent of picking up the eccentric nuances in people that made interesting characters who translated well to the stage and screen . . . he chose to orbit in social circles that were the epitome of glamour, many times frivolous with a tinge of cynicism” (Horner). His advanced observation skills granted him the ability to write *Hay Fever*.

In the summer of 1921, Coward was convinced that America would embrace his work, he got on a steamship passage to New York City. Coward said, "My faith in my own talents remained unwavering, but it did seem unduly optimistic to suppose that the Americans would be perceptive enough to see me immediately in the same light in which I saw myself. In this, I was perfectly right. They didn't." (Morley). Coward witnessed firsthand the American theatre's fast-paced performing style which was a refreshing change from the slower approach of most British productions (Morley).

That summer, he met the actress Laurette Taylor and was invited to stay with her, her husband Hartley Manners, and their children. Coward would only visit when he was in need of a meal because being a guest at their “Riverside Drive’ home was “a distinctly unnerving experience” (Morley). This family was his ultimate inspiration for *Hay Fever*. They were a high-strung family, who were theatrical and prone to elaborate after-dinner charades and word games which always ended in hysteria. The entire family would leave their guests to find their own coats and way home. Taylor’s behavior closely resembles the character Judith’s behavior. In Coward’s book, *Present Indicative*, he describes Taylor as,

. . . frequently blunt to the point of embarrassment. She was naïve, intolerant, lovable, and entirely devoid of tact. Her humor was quick as lightning, and she could pounce from a great height with all the swift accuracy of a pelican diving into the sea, seldom failing to spear some poor, wriggling fish, and disquieting considerably the other fish present. Her taste in dress was poor, and her loveliness triumphed over many inopportune bows and ostrich feathers, but her taste as an actress was unassailable. (135)

Judith seems to be a caricature of actress Laurette Taylor.

Their parties were known for the family's eccentric behavior, an atmosphere of flirtation, and for the obscure and outlandish games to which the guests had to participate in. There was usually a large number of authors and dramatists on Taylor's guest list (Callow). To Coward's fortune, he was first back to the typewriter. In *Present Indicative*, he goes on to say, "It was inevitable that someone should eventually utilize portions of this eccentricity in a play, and I am only grateful that no guest of the Hartley Manners thought of writing *Hay Fever* before I did." (136)

Originally wanting to title it *Oranges and Lemons*, Noël Coward wrote *Hay Fever* in three days in the year 1922. It is said he wrote *Hay Fever* somewhat depressed. Contemplating a photograph of himself from the time, he wrote,

At 24 I seem shadowy. I know how I looked, of course ... my face was plumper and less lined than it is now, and my figure was good but a little weedy. Of what was going on inside me, however, there is no indication. There seems an emptiness somewhere, a blandness of expression in the eyes. There is little aggressiveness in the arranged smiles and no impatience apparent at all, and in

this the cameras must have lied, for I have always been impatient. Nowadays there is more truth in my photographs. I hope there is more truth in me too.

(Callow).

This photograph would have been taken some time between 1923 and 1924. During this period, Coward was becoming very popular and was now in high-demand. He had just received great success with his play *The Vortex* and was spending two years performing the cocaine-snorting son, Nicky, in both London and American productions. He was also writing several plays including *Hay Fever*, *On With The Dances*, *Fallen Angels*, *Easy Virtue*, and *The Queen Was in the Parlour* (“Brief Biography – Part II”).

Hay Fever is filled with Coward’s American observations and impressions where he celebrates the “vitality of personality” (Callow). Thematically, Coward’s comedies examine true love, adulterous affairs, and domestic upheavals. Coward’s plays portray characters in complex situations. However, the characters are not as fully developed as the complex situations in which they find themselves. “Their motivations remain obscure. Even in the serious plays, his position on his subject is never clearly revealed. Most of his serious dramas fail because he never brings the moment to a crisis, and so his plays end anticlimactically” (Mambrol). In *Hay Fever*, Coward explores themes regarding relationships, conceit, comedy of manners, and family fights.

The Bright Young Things were accepting of promiscuous relationships. The bohemian flair instilled in the Bright Young Things seems to be a great influence in *Hay Fever*. The entire Bliss family is described as “bohemian” (Coward 39). Coward also had a history of messy and secretive relationships. This seems to influence the many

noncommittal relationships in *Hay Fever*. Many of the characters are also attention-seeking and conceited.

Coward believes “conceit is an outward manifestation of inferiority” (“Coward Quotations”). Many of the characters in *Hay Fever*, such as Myra, are self-absorbed and conceited. However, those characteristics are coming from a place of insecurity. In general, wealthy people are stereotyped as being greedy and arrogant. Part of this could be from the new jazz age with empowered women and societies such as the Bright Young Things. It seems common for progressive and empowered people to easily become self-absorbed if they are not aware of themselves. Each member of the Bliss family is self-absorbed and inconsiderate with one another. This eventually leads to the many family fights.

In *Hay Fever*, Coward emphasizes the ridiculousness of family fights. This theme is something that can be relatable for many families. Families in the 1920s were, on average, smaller than they were during the Victorian era. Families of 3 or 4 children was most common. After the 1921 Education Act, State primary education was now free for all children and started at age 5 and they were expected to attend for the full day from 9am to 4.30pm. Nature study, sewing, woodwork, country dancing and traditional folk songs were taught additionally to otherwise known as general education classes (“Roaring Twenties”). Because of Judith’s fame as an actress, her children Simon and Sorel would have had a private teacher at their home. Simon and Sorel have spent a lot of time together growing up. Not getting a break from one another could be a cause for their many fights. However, most of the family fights within *Hay Fever* seems tie in with

the theme of conceit. All of these arrogant characters fit well into the comedy of manners genre.

Many of Coward's plays poke fun at the upper-class in a comedy of manners style, especially *Hay Fever*. After the horrors of World War I, and going into the Great Depression, people wanted to escape from reality. A plotless play making fun of cynical and unrealistic wealthy people was funny to people of all social classes. Coward played a role in escapism within the society. For example, during World War II, Coward wrote and produced *Blithe Spirit* for a society that needed entertainment. He said, "I will ever be grateful for the almost psychic gift that enabled me to write *Blithe Spirit* in five days during one of the darkest years of the war" (Horner). Coward received varying degrees of criticism in the rapidly changing world that was in the twentieth century.

"This most English of Englishmen had far more than a 'talent to amuse.' From World War I through the 1970's, he expressed the hopes, fears and frustrations of people who saw their world hurtle through a series of wild changes" ("Noel Coward 101"). His plays were popular in the 1920s and 1930s because since World War I, and into the Great Depression, escaping with the comedy of manners style of theatre was most popular. "Coward recognized that the 'great public' for which he wrote his plays wanted, above all, to be entertained" (Mambrol).

At one point in 1925, three of London's biggest stage successes were Coward hits (Krebs). According to Milton Levin, a critic in the early twentieth century, Coward's plays "raise no questions, they provide few critical footholds, they simply ask to be praised for what they are, sparkling caprices" (Krebs). By the 1930s, his array of texts including *Hay Fever* and *This Was a Man* had ensured that Coward was a leading

playwright of his time, earning over £50,000 a year, equating to £2.2 million today (Thomas).

However, once World War II hit, attitudes changed, and people were more interested in escaping with realism theatre. Other than the London revue of *Sigh No More* in 1945, Coward's plays in the 1940s and 1950s were often dubbed as "frivolous... Coward's facile wit was dismissed as false and out of date" ("Brief Biography – Part III"). Coward knew instinctively that his writing was better than ever, but it seemed that the public's tastes had changed. His work was still being performed, just not as frequently. In 1950 his lack of success caused him to go into a considerable amount of debt. To recover from it, he chose to give up his residency in England and in 1955 became a resident of Jamaica and Switzerland because of England's high taxes. "He was severely criticized for 'deserting' his homeland, whose virtues he had patriotically praised over the years, in order to avoid its taxes" (Krebs).

By the 1960s, the climate of the theater and the temper of the times had changed. In 1964, Laurence Olivier invited Coward himself to direct a touring production of *Hay Fever*. This would then be the first comedy by a living English author to have the honor of a National Theater production. Coward was "thrilled", "flabbergasted", and "flattered" with the invitation (Morley). He was surprised they chose one of his early plays instead of his most recent work. *Hay Fever* is "at the same time a period piece and utterly timeless, and although it offers one tremendous star turn it also and more unusually offers seven other roles that are almost as good" (Morley). It was also good to have Coward direct the touring production. He also remembered the style of the early 1920s with accuracy that only a few other directors still in the business by the mid-60s

could recreate. Coward also understood the dialogue better than anyone and was able to provide precise and knowledgeable direction.

It was not until 1966 when he wrote and acted in his autobiographical play, *A Song at Twilight* that Coward became popular again. The play concerns an aging homosexual writer who has not been able to write truthfully about himself in his work. *A Song at Twilight* was produced as part of a trilogy of new Coward plays called, *Suite in Three Keys*. "The bill of plays touched off a 'Coward renaissance' in which several of his plays were revived in dozens of theaters on both sides of the Atlantic" (Krebs). Overall, Coward is a widely accepted playwright.

English lyricist and author, Tim Rice, says, "the wit and wisdom of Noel Coward's lyrics will be as lively and contemporary in 100 years' time as they are today" ("Coward Quotations"). American performer, Eddie Cantor, says "The British George M. Cohan. London or Las Vegas, Paris or New York, they've all applauded his (Coward's) revues, his dramas, his words and music. The most brilliant contribution England ever made to American show business" ("Coward Quotations"). *Hay Fever* opened at the Ambassadors Theatre on 8 June 1925, directed by Coward, and transferred to the larger Criterion Theatre on 7 September 1925. It ran to full houses for a year totaling 337 performances (Frezza). In Coward's own summary, he described *Hay Fever* as "dull, amusing, thin, slight, tedious, witty and brittle" (Callow).

During the 1925 *Hay Fever* run, Coward returned to New York to act in his play, *The Vortex*. While there, he also sold *Hay Fever* to a local management whose policy was to cast the play before reading the play. Actress Phyllis Joyce was hired in this way to play Myra. However, Joyce had a "heavy Brooklyn accent and a passion for chewing

gum” (Morley). When Coward suggested to her that she was not going to be everyone's idea of the role, she spat the gum at his shoe and remarked, "Accent hell, I gotta contract." The comedy flopped on Broadway at the Maxine Elliott Theatre after about six weeks running only 49 performances. It was more consistently revived in English productions than any other Coward comedy before *Blithe Spirit* (Morley).

While addressing criticism, Coward says, “Criticism and Bolshevism have one thing in common. They both seek to pull down that which they could never build” (“Coward Quotations”). He says he has always been fond of critics, “I think it is so frightfully clever of them to go night after night to the theatre and know so little about it” (“Coward Quotations”). He was supposedly written-off as unimportant after World War II and when asked about it, he remarked, “Well, in the first place, nobody of particular importance wrote me off. And in the second place, I didn't notice it.” (“Coward Quotations”).

Coward also shares insight into what he thinks makes good acting. In the book, *Play Parade*, Coward gives advice to those wanting to produce *Hay Fever*:

Hay Fever is considered by many to be my best comedy. Whether or not this assertion is true, posterity, if it gives it a glance, will be able to judge with more detachment than I. At any rate it has certainly proved to be a great joy to amateurs, owing, I suppose, to the smallness of cast, and the fact that it has only one set, which must lead them, poor dears, to imagine that it is easy to act. This species of delusion being common to amateurs all over the world, no word of mine shall be spoken, no warning finger of experience raised, to discourage them, beyond the timorous suggestion that from the professional standpoint, Hay Fever

is far and away one of the most difficult plays to perform that I have ever encountered. To begin with, it has no plot at all, and remarkably little action. Its general effectiveness therefore depends upon expert technique from each and every member of the cast. I am very much attached to *Hay Fever*. I enjoyed writing it and producing it, and I have frequently enjoyed watching it. (Eller 8)

Similarly to how Coward seemed to live as a celebrity and socialite, he tells actors to “Consider the public. Treat it with tact and courtesy. It will accept much from you if you are clever enough to win it to your side. Never fear it nor despise it. Coax it, charm it, interest it, stimulate it, shock it now and then if you must, make it laugh, make it cry, but above all, dear pioneers . . . never, never, never bore the living hell out of it” (Krebs). The success of Coward’s plays depended on the ability of the actors to carry his rapier-sharp dialogue. He freely admitted tailoring choice roles to his talents and those of his friends (Mambrol). He also suggests that, “In the first act, you get the audience's attention - once you have it, they will repay you in the second. Play through the laughs if you have to. It will only make the audience believe there are so many of them that they missed a few.” (“Coward Quotations”).

Coward did not want to produce political theatre like we see today, he believed theatre should be “respected...The theatre is a wonderful place, a house of strange enchantment, a temple of illusion. What it most emphatically is not and never will be is a scruffy, ill-lit, fumed-oak drill hall serving as a temporary soap box for political propaganda” (“Coward Quotations”). He says he “will accept anything in the theatre . . . provided it amuses or moves me. But if it does neither, I want to go home” (“Coward Quotations”). In his final years, Coward remarked,

The only thing that really saddens me over my demise is that I shall not be here to read the nonsense that will be written about me and my works and my motives.

There will be books proving conclusively that I was homosexual and books proving equally conclusively that I was not. There will be detailed and inaccurate analyses of my motives for writing this or that and of my character. There will be lists of apocryphal jokes I never made and gleeful misquotations of words I never said. *What a pity I shan't be here to enjoy them!* (“Coward Quotations”)

Coward was very influenced by the world around him while simultaneously being a great influence on the world. His mother’s encouragement, his visits with Mrs. Astley Cooper, and the Bright Young Things society seems to his greatest influencers. They were his starting point. Myra and the rest of the characters in *Hay Fever* are not only reflections of American Laurette Taylor and her family, but also of Coward’s extravagant life.

CHAPTER III

JOURNAL

September 27, 2021

Today was audition day for Minnesota State Mankato's production of *Hay Fever*. I, Morgan Benson, was hoping to be cast as Judith Bliss or Myra Arundel. Both roles are interests of mine because they would be challenging and fun. To my delight, I've been cast as Myra. It is a thrill to be cast in this role, Myra is a vampish type of character that I have never played before. Director Matthew Caron requested actors to audition with a 30-second comedic monologue in the comedy of manners style. I auditioned with a monologue from the play *Bedroom Farce* by Alan Ayckbourn. This felt like a suitable monologue to audition with because, much like *Hay Fever*, a common theme in *Bedroom Farce* is family relationship issues. The characters in *Bedroom Farce* can also be played in exaggerated ways that fit into the Comedy of Manners acting style and sort of mock the stereotypical upper-class behaviors. I was also sure to read the script before auditioning so I had an understanding of both the story and the characters. I felt proud of myself once the audition was over. I was prepared, relaxed, and did the best I could in the moment I was given. I am looking forward to working with a talented cast and crew.

September 28, 2020

Though we have not started rehearsals, I have plenty to prepare before rehearsals begin. Today I read through the script again to begin creating ideas for my character and

the relationships she has with the other characters. I also took time to look up pronunciations and meanings words that I was unfamiliar with. This is a necessary step for an actor to take because it would be challenging convince the audience that the character understands what they are saying if the actor does not understand what they are saying. Throughout the rest of the week, I plan to rehearse my lines each day to continue developing character ideas and simultaneously work on memorization. My goal is to be completely memorized by Friday, October 8th.

October 4, 2021

We had our first rehearsal today. Our rehearsals will be weekly, Sunday through Thursday, beginning at 6:30pm and can run as late as 10:30pm. We will have four weeks of rehearsal and will start performing halfway through week five. As I should in any production, it is important for me to keep up with my character development and line memorization so I do not become a detriment to the cast and crew.

At rehearsal we did tablework, and a full read-through of the play. Caron started by giving us our production schedule and a standard English dialect cheat sheet. Since we have an English dialect in this show, it will be important for me to warm up my articulators before rehearsal. I will try to arrive 15 minutes early to every rehearsal so I can warm up my dialect and get into character and start rehearsal feeling prepared.

Caron also took time to share his concept for the show. He said, “think Downton Abbey meets Schitt’s Creek.” Currently, these are two popular television shows. Caron mentioned that *Hay Fever* is a high brow comedy and that we should “think Oscar Wilde humor.” He wants it to “feel historical, not contemporary.” Caron does not believe this

is a farce but does see some farcical moments we can play with. He talked about how there is not a strong plot and the characters do not evolve throughout the play. He believes this play centers around the theatricality of the Bliss family. He wants the overall pace of the play to be quick and with high energy. He also wants us to keep in mind that the Bliss family is a family of artists who are all very tight-knit and that we should normalize that every weekend at the Bliss's is crazy. Lastly, Caron advised us to watch Noel Coward movies and observe the Comedy of Manners behavior and implement that acting style into our characters.

Production Costume Designer, David McCarl, also came in to show us the costume sketches for each character. Almost all characters will have two costumes, the Bliss's will have three. McCarl described the characters as "rich folks being lazy in a country cottage." It was helpful to see what my character is wearing so I have an idea of how to move and sit on stage. McCarl mentioned it would be wise to rehearse in character shoes and a knee-length skirt. Tomorrow we start blocking ACT I, so I will be sure to read through my part in ACT I and arrive to rehearsal with some thoughts and ideas.

October 5, 2021

We accomplished our goal of blocking ACT I. So far, my character is frequently sitting closely on the couch with another male character or leaning against the piano smoking a cigarette. Before rehearsal today I took time to come up with character ideas that I could try in rehearsal. My first idea was to make Myra's first entrance of the play a grand one because she sees herself as a grand person. I am going to play around with this

entrance each night until Caron and I figure out what looks best. I am also beginning to feel like Myra is there to make every woman jealous of her and every man attracted to her. Tonight, I experimented around with this idea and both Caron and my castmates seemed to enjoy it. I plan to keep playing into this behavior and track how it unfolds.

Rehearsal tonight was productive, fun, and focused. I found myself easily building upon what the other actors were giving me and really enjoying it. I believe I was able to do this easily and frequently because I felt comfortable in the environment and around the cast. Sometimes the first day working on the stage can be slightly daunting for me but today I felt relaxed and ready to create. I felt specifically comfortable working with Joshua Lester, playing Simon Bliss. At the beginning of rehearsal, I asked him what his physical touch boundaries were. It felt necessary to have this conversation with him because our characters do have moments of intimacy. I also had this conversation with Jack Adams, playing David Bliss, for the same reason. Both conversations felt respectful and made working together on stage much smoother now that we know each other's limits. I also felt Lester and I listened and responded to each other well on stage. As actors we both seemed to build off what the other was giving. I'm excited to see how our characters will develop together.

Caron mentioned that he liked how my movement as Myra was smooth and fluid. He also liked the tension and shifts in power between Simon and Myra. After receiving these notes from Caron, I began to feel like Myra could be a mix of Jordan Baker from *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sally Bowles from *I Am A Camera* by John Van Druten. Myra has an aloof and free attitude like both Sally and Jordan. Myra is always listening but tends to pretend she is not as a way of making others feel not as

important as her. Much like Sally, Myra also loves attention, especially if it is coming from men. I loved how actress, Elizabeth Debicki, physically played Jordan in the 2013 film of *The Great Gatsby*. She reminds me of both a snake and a slinky with her flowy, liquid-type movements. I also admire how she drapes her body in long and attractive ways as she sits and moves about the set. Her physicality is how I envision Myra's as well because Myra has a similarly smooth quality. I will continue to explore this physicality and see how it shapes my character.

October 6, 2021

We had another productive rehearsal tonight as we blocked all of ACT II. Caron said he loved our work and willingness to play and create. He also told us to continue working on our dialects. I do feel like the dialects are getting better each night, we are all struggling most with the terminal /ɪ/ sound on words that end with "y". It does help that most of the cast, including myself, have taken stage dialect classes and are trained in the standard English dialect.

Yesterday, Caron mentioned that all the female presenting characters should cross their legs at the ankle when they sit because that would have been standard etiquette for the time. I challenged his request by asking if Myra can cross her legs however, she feels comfortable because she is not the type to follow rules or standards. He was said he was open to the idea I just need to make sure I do my research. As stated in Chapter Two, in the 1920s, the goal for women was no longer to be feminine, it was to be free, especially from male authority. I believe Myra will cross her legs at the knee if she wishes to, so

far, Caron has not asked me again to cross at the ankle. I will respect his decision if he changes his mind.

The full cast seemed to really enjoy themselves at rehearsal today. I noticed everyone was making much bolder choices than they were yesterday. I wonder if they were nervous yesterday since it was the first day on stage. As we were working through my intimate scene with the character, David, I noticed my first instinct was to make Myra proper and timid. I am unsure if that was a character motive or an actor motive. I am becoming convinced that it was an actor motive because I was a little nervous to stage this intimate scene because it can sometimes be awkward. After more thought, I do not like that Myra becomes proper and timid in this intimate scene. I believe Myra would still be her saucy self because she does not fear intimacy. She demands all the male attention she can get. I am going to work against my initial instincts in this scene and keep the consist vampish Myra that I have been developing so far.

I have also made the discovery that Myra likes to keep moving so that she remains fluid and aloof. If she does stop, it is for a very specific reason. She could be trying to seduce someone or perhaps she is angry. Whatever it is, if Myra stops, it is her way of demanding extra attention.

October 7, 2021

As of tonight, the whole show is blocked. The staging may change as we continue but we at least have the skeleton to build upon. I believe the whole blocking process these past few days went well. Caron knows how to collaborate; he is really open to ideas and experimentation. Today marked our first week of rehearsals and the

process so far has been relaxed, positive, free, organized, playful, and creative. I am really enjoying the work we are doing.

As we were blocking ACT III, I suddenly felt my character energy was sort of flat and boring. I believe at this point in the play, Myra is fed-up with the Bliss family and just wants to leave. It seems that overall, Myra is annoyed throughout this whole act. I think the reason I felt Myra was falling flat tonight is because I only played annoyed. I need to explore the sub-categories of annoyance and maybe play a few opposites. She is upset that this visit with the Blisses has not gone well. I need to come up with ideas and objectives that enhance Myra's dynamics and allow her more emotional depth and complexity.

My initial thought is to bring back Myra's saucy side that we see throughout the entire show. Since I was so focused on expressing Myra's annoyance, I left out the signature flirty and seductive side of her. It does not make a lot of sense that she would try seducing anyone because she just wants to leave, but I do think it could make the scene more interesting. For the most part, Myra only flirts when she needs something; she also just really likes male attention. So in this final act, in typical Myra fashion, I am going to have her flirt with the two male characters that she has dialogue with. Myra needs Sandy Tyrell, played by Hunter Conrad, to give her a ride home, and Richard Greatham, played by Joaquin Warren to tip the Bliss's maid. These would be great moments to have Myra flirt with the men.

To me, annoyance comes from a base level expression of anger. While I continue to find way to give depth to my character in the third act, I can also consider the sub-categories of anger. Some of these expressions could be impatience, hostility, bitterness,

or perhaps defiance. I could also play an opposite, and maybe there are moments where instead of acting out with anger, Myra laughs at the ridiculousness. I will think more on this and experiment around in rehearsals.

October 10, 2021

Now that the show is blocked, we can start working the acts. Tonight, we worked ACT I. Some of my blocking changed but not much. I noticed the only time my blocking would change is if we were adding a bit; not because the original blocking was bad. This makes me feel like the scene is moving forward and that last week we established solid blocking to build upon. Caron seemed to enjoy some of the bits I was coming up with. I realized that I did not plan any of them, they were just naturally happening. I felt I was able to play off the other actors nicely tonight.

One bit that seemed to work well is that I got uncomfortably close to Judith as I was speaking to her; so close that our stomachs were touching. I think it could be funny if I got this close to Judith for as many exchanges with her as possible. I believe what is making it funny is that these women are constantly trying to outdo the other, so getting in each other's face could illustrate them trying to intimidate each other. There is also a considerable height difference between me and Carlson. I am not exactly sure why, but the height difference makes the situation look sillier.

In the script's stage directions, Simon is supposed to kiss Myra. Caron questioned whether we really need to do the kiss since my character's goal is to use Simon to get to David. Though Myra loves the attention from Simon, she does not have

feelings for him and certainly does not need to kiss him. We also thought it could be interesting to show Myra secretly juggling the two men. She does not want David to see her flirting with Simon and does not need Simon to see her flirting with David. So on the moments we are supposed to be kissing, I instead will turn Simon down with my hand for him to kiss, or by simply turning my body away from him.

I reached my memorization goal and was able to be off book tonight. I still had to call a few lines and my pick-up cues were a little slow at times, but I am proud of the progress I am making. However, I did notice that since I no longer have a book in my hands, I now have times where I do not know what to do with my hands. I often found them clasped behind my back. I think Myra would have her hands behind her back at times, especially when she is plotting her next move, however I do not think her hands will live there long. The overall flow of Myra's physicality has been slow and fluid. I am going to explore more open, elegant, and flowy gestures that match the rest of her physicality.

I am wanting to come up with as many comedic bits as possible. I want to give several options for Caron and the other actors work with. I feel it is better to bring more and have some ideas discarded than to not bring enough and have to waste time in rehearsal coming up with ideas. I have noticed it is easier to come up with comedic bits after rehearsal while reflecting on what did and did not work. I will continue to be playful and explorative in rehearsals so that I can come up with as many bits and quirks as I can.

Another observation I made tonight is that Myra can very easily become an unlikeable character to the audience. I do not want the audience to dislike Myra, I want

them to understand and recognize the person she is. To do this, I need to find moments of vulnerability where Myra can express her true self for the audience to see and perhaps relate to. I personally feel the best way to connect with someone is through vulnerability. Some moments of vulnerability could be found in her restraint from Simon as she juggles her relationship with Simon and David. She could also show vulnerability in the moments where she stands up for herself. One being when she is calling the entire Bliss family out for their absurd behavior. I am going to try these ideas tomorrow in rehearsal while also looking for other moments of vulnerability. Again, I am happy with my progress so far. I am looking forward to tomorrow's rehearsal so that I can try out my new ideas.

October 11, 2021

I went to rehearsal an hour early today to work on my ACT II line memorization. I have this act mostly memorized but I am not feeling solid with it. I did have to look at my script towards the end of the act because my pick-up cues were too slow and I felt I was dragging down the rehearsal. I will make sure I am more secure with these lines next time we run this act. During rehearsal, I tried the Myra and Judith bit that I came up with yesterday. This is where the two characters have a no special relation when talking to each other. Caron does not seem completely sold on the idea, but he has told us to stop yet so, I'll continue to play it.

Toward the end of ACT II Myra has an explosive rant about how ridiculous the Bliss's are. She is very frustrated at this point in the play and I realized that I only seemed to play that rant loud and aggressive. I need to break down each sentence of the

rant and be more specific with my vocal quality, and my vocal time, tone, tension, and volume. This will help to avoid an emotional wash and enhance my vocal dynamism.

We also worked the intimate scene between David and Myra tonight.

In this scene, Caron wants Adams and I to imagine the relationship between a cat and a mouse. Perhaps we are sometimes both the cat, both the mouse, or one is the cat and the other is the mouse. He wants to see drastic shifts in the power. I believe Myra is jealous of Judith and wishes she could also be dramatic and theatrical with David like Judith. Besides this scene, Myra does not really have a moment in the play where she can just be herself and be silly, relaxed, and have fun. She has finally reached her goal of meeting David, so she can now relax and enjoy herself with him. This is another great opportunity to show her vulnerable and lonely side. Maybe the first kiss is true, then she realizes it was bad of her to kiss a married man and a sense of guilt quickly washes over her. However, I do not think the guilt would last long, she likes attention too much and should still be very caught up in the moment. I am going to continue thinking about this scene so I can start establishing clear and specific tactics, objectives, and emotions.

October 12, 2021

Myra's line, "This is wonderful" meant something different tonight (Coward 66). It was not until I caught the character, Richard, calling Myra, "Mrs. Arundel," that I realized Myra is a married woman (83). I am disappointed that I did not catch this huge detail earlier in my process because this changes a lot. Now I am left wondering what her marriage is like and how it influences her vampish behavior at the Bliss's. I need to think more about this, but at this point I am thinking she is unhappy in her marriage

because it is too boring for her. She has become obsessed with David because of his steamy romance novels. She wishes to have a husband as romantic as David. I think Myra just wants to feel something, and that is why she craves so much male attention. I also no longer think she is an actress. She probably has a boring job as a telephone operator or something. I am going to continue thinking about all these new discoveries and figure out how to mesh with my Myra I have created so far.

While we have not actually kissed yet, Caron did take time tonight to choreograph the intimacy between Myra and David. This felt fun, comfortable, and collaborative. The three of us all seemed to come up with ideas that we will likely use. In this scene there is lots of kissing, a partner dip, and a slap in the face. We want it to look passionate. To do this, Caron suggests we use our breath and the moments in between the kisses to portray passion. For example, after a kiss we could breathe heavy suggesting we are trying to catch our breath. We can also use large and demonstrative gestures and postures that illustrate passion. Basically, we should not need to solely rely on the actual kiss to tell the story.

I also had a meeting with Caron before rehearsal today to discuss my process on the show so far. He is pleased to see that I am coming to rehearsals prepared with ideas and am mostly memorized. He also mentioned that he does not feel I am working hard on stage to come up with ideas. He admired how relaxed I look and my ability to come up with ideas on the fly. Doing versus being the character; Caron sees I am being the character. He also knows I have a past of overthinking too much on stage and in life. So far, he has not seen any overthinking and is happy to see this improvement. However, I normally feel more comfortable doing comedies because the general nature of the story is

more relaxed to me. I notice I tend to overthink when I am in serious plays that covers heavy material. Beyond that, Caron is happy with the work I have been doing so far and seems optimistic with what is to come next.

October 13, 2021

I have thought more about it, and I no longer think Myra has a job. I think she has a wealthy husband who gives her all the material things she wants but lacks emotional and physical connection with her. The idea of Myra living a boring life, with a boring job and a boring husband seemed too sad and did seem to support the vamp that Myra is. I think Myra should feel and look famous, even though she is not. She is used to a luxurious life and men naturally finding her dazzling. I am still pondering whether her husband is promiscuous like Myra. I think I have been focusing too much on showing vulnerability in Myra that I am starting to pull away from Myra's comedic value. I have to remind myself that I do not necessarily want the audience to feel bad for Myra, I just want them to recognize and understand the type of person she is, and not dislike her.

Today we worked through ACT I and unemployed Myra feels much better than telephone operator Myra. Tomorrow we work ACT II and ACT III and I will see how this next choice fits in those acts as well. At the end of rehearsal, Caron mentioned that he likes that we have started to listen and respond to each other more on stage. He wants us to make sure we are working together to tell the story. Therefore, we must react and respond in a way that is setting the other character up so you can build the scene together. Now that I am confident in my line memorization, I find it much easier to listen on stage and respond truthfully in the moment.

October 14, 2021

We worked through ACT II and three tonight and so far, the new choice of having Myra unemployed is still making sense and working. Caron is happy with the direction of the show so far, he loves the creativity and playfulness we all seem to have. He wants us all to continue working on the dialect. I have noticed the dialect notes he has been giving me have to do with the /Λou/ sound in a word like, “house.” I am hitting the correct sound, just not elongating it enough. I will be sure to put extra focus on this sound in my dialect warm-ups before rehearsal. Caron also mentioned he really wants us to take time to watch British television or films and pay attention to pitch and pattern. Sometimes our pitch and the pattern of our words sound a bit too American. I think I am going to watch “The Crown”; a Netflix series centered around the British royal family. I am choosing this show because they use the standard English dialect properly.

No noteworthy discovery was made in rehearsal today. The other actors are really struggling with their line memorization, so I was not given a lot to react and respond with. Caron wants everyone off-book by next week; hopefully most will be by our next rehearsal. One thing I did notice was that I do not think I am exploring as much as I would like to be. I feel I am starting to settle with the same choices every rehearsal and I think it is a little too early in the process for that. As an actress, it is my goal to bring a lot to the table. I am going to push myself to continue to make new and bold choices.

October 17, 2021

Today we worked through ACT I. Caron likes the comedic pacing of the show so far. He is still asking us to listen to each other more on stage and truthfully react and

respond. He reminded us that we are building the show together, not individually. He also talked about touch, a powerful storytelling element. He told us the characters need to acknowledge when they are touched by another character and ground the response. Myra has a significant amount of physical touch with other characters. I will work to be more specific with Myra's responses regarding touch. I think this has been especially hard for us to get into the habit of because for nearly two years now, COVID-19 has kept us distanced and contactless from each other.

Another interesting note Caron gave us is to recognize the need to communicate within the dialogue. I have thought about this rather deeply and will talk more about it in Chapter Five. It is important to acknowledge that the characters should never speak without some sort of purpose behind the words. I believe there is a reason and purpose behind everything we do and say, even the most mundane situations. It is our job as actors to recognize and communicate the need that is fueled by a purpose. Caron is wanting us to break down what are characters are saying and ask ourselves why they are saying what they are saying. I do feel this is a basic principle of acting, but it is always a good reminder.

October 18, 2021

It was a short rehearsal for me today. I was called for my part in ACT III which is a shorter part. I was dismissed once we were done working my part. I appreciate Caron honoring our time by calling us when we are needed and dismissing us when we are not. At the end of rehearsal, he gave me the note that he liked my stillness. I was happy he saw and liked the choice I had made. In ACT III, Myra just wants to go home. She is no

longer playing flirtatious games and at this point finds all the Blisses revolting. Her movement is no longer slow and flowy like in acts one and two. It is now still, grounded, and to the point.

I have all my lines memorized but I was disappointed to find myself stumbling over them quite a bit tonight. I think it was because I was not able to get to rehearsal 15 minutes early like I normally do, so that I can clear my mind and get into character. I also did not do a dialect warm-up. During rehearsal, I felt distracted by my thoughts from the busy day and the busy night ahead. I will be sure to arrive to rehearsals and performances early enough to check my thoughts from the day at the door and put all my focus on the show.

October 19, 2021

I arrived 15 minutes early to rehearsal today to warm up my dialect and get into character. However during rehearsal, I noticed I was struggling with my dialect in ways I have not before. At times, I was sounding very Minnesotan. I was also occasionally slipping into a Cockney dialect or dropping the English dialect completely. I am not exactly sure why I was struggling tonight. The only assumption I can make is that I am currently in a dialect class and we are working on the Brooklyn dialect. I had been practicing my that dialect for quite a while earlier today. Perhaps the muscle memory from the Brooklyn dialect was intruding my English dialect. I will be sure to put more focus on my dialect tomorrow.

Tonight we worked ACT II. Many of the actors still do not have their lines memorized which is making the process feel much slower than I imagined it to be. It is

difficult to collaborate and build a scene when line is being called so frequently. At the end of rehearsal, Caron did mention he wants me to play around with my vocal quality more in my explosive rant at the end of ACT II. I was a little upset to receive this note because it was something I have thought, and even journaled about, before. I wish I would have made bolder choices so I never had to receive the note in the first place. However, it will be okay, I will just bring out my vocal choices more, and perhaps play around with my use of pause. I have noticed that I rant rather quickly throughout the whole speech, I will considering my overall timing more as well.

October 20, 2021

We ran through the entire show today for the first time. Many of the actors were still struggling with line memorization. Similar to yesterday, it was challenging to create with the other actors because they were so focused on their lines. I do not feel we took a huge step forward from yesterday, but I was glad we were able to fumble our way through the whole show. I did not make too many significant discoveries today. As I reflect, I have decided to read through my previous journal entries and check in with the ideas and discoveries I have made so far.

One of the more significant discoveries I made was that Myra is married. She seems to crave male attention while at the Blissess which made me believe her marriage is broken and lonely. I have also decided that she is unemployed and relies on her husband for money. So far, those decisions are working, I still wish I discovered them earlier in the process, but it does not concern me much. I have also continued to arrive to rehearsals early.

I have learned that if I do not arrive early my dialect is not ready and I do not start rehearsals as strong as I wish to. I believe I have been taking Caron's dialect notes well. I have put extra focus on the /lou/ sound and worked to correct specific words Caron has mentioned to me. I am getting less dialect notes each day and some days do not receive any. Caron still seems to accept my physicality choices as well.

In ACT I and half way through ACT II, Myra is in full swing with her seductive, vampish, flowy physicality that drapes all over the stage. After she reaches her ultimate goal of meeting David and then discovers she wants nothing to do with him or his family, her entire physicality and behavior changes. For the rest of the show, she is more still, cold, grounded, and to the point. She just wants to go home. So far, I am happy with the character I have developed, and I am excited to see what else I discover.

October 21, 2021

We worked specific scenes tonight that we noticed needed work yesterday. I thought it was one of our more productive rehearsals. We were able to take time to come up with new ideas and workshop them until we found what works best. We also workshopped the scene with Myra and Simon. Simon kisses Myra's arms and hand in this scene. Since Simon is an odd character, we decided to make the kissing even more strange by having him kiss each of my fingers as well. We then had to workshop how to kiss each of my fingers. We all laughed as we realized how ridiculous theatre can be sometimes. We spend several minutes of our lives choreographing how Simon will kiss

each of my fingertips. I have also continued to play around with my explosive rant at the end of ACT II.

I was given the opportunity to try four different approaches to the ranting monologue and I liked my fourth attempt best. I was not shouting the whole time, I had moments of pause, and I was playing many tactics. Some of the tactics include the following action verbs: to threaten, to degrade, to chastise, and to blame. I played around with me volume, time, tone, and tension too. I had been struggling to make this monologue more dynamic and keep it from being a wash of emotion and tone. I am grateful I was able to workshop this moment and find an approach that is finally started to feel right.

October 24, 2021

While I was off-stage tonight, I realized that I frequently find myself looking forward to rehearsals. My favorite part of every day is rehearsal. Normally I get to a point where I am ready for them to be done so we can perform. However, I have found myself really enjoying this cast and crew. The rehearsal environment is always relaxed, silly, productive, and fun. I have a feeling it will be extra bittersweet when this show is over.

Tonight, I noticed we are starting to solidify our movement and acting choices. We open next week and need to start establishing final staging. We start technical rehearsals this week and the designers and crew will need a consistent show to successfully build and run their cues. We worked some of our trouble scenes tonight. Unfortunately, one of our leading actors was not able to come to rehearsal today so it did

not feel as productive as I wished for it to be. However, we were still able to work through the scenes with the Assistant Stage Manager, Emerald Clark, filling in for our missing person.

At the end of rehearsal, Caron mentioned that he wants us to really separate the guests from the Blisses. The Blisses should be wildly eccentric, while the guest should be a bit more normal. He said the guests can still have their quirks, but they should not be trying to fit in with the Bliss family. This is tricky for me to think about because I believe Myra is jealous of Judith and her relationship with David. Myra lives a lonely and boring life with her unromantic husband. She craves for the drama and attention at the Bliss house. To make sure I separate my character from the eccentricity of the Blisses, I will focus more on the fact that I love the idea of being with a person like David, but not actually being with him realistically.

Caron also mentioned to me that I am dropping the dialect at times. I was disappointed to hear that because I have been working at the dialect. I am going to start recording my lines and playing them back so I can hear when I am dropping the dialect without realizing it. Lastly, he told me that he is happy with the work I am doing so far; specially mentioning the game scene in ACT II. He enjoys seeing Myra lean in and get excited when she sees the Bliss family fighting with each other.

October 25, 2021

It felt I was working too hard on stage tonight. For the most part, I was only feeling this way at the beginning of rehearsal. I am not exactly sure why, but I think it was because we have the stage lights on, and the house lights were dark; we also had new

props and furniture. In previous shows I have discovered that once we had a new theatrical element, rehearsal feels slightly off. Tonight, I felt I was presentational, inauthentic, and trying too hard to be funny. However, I was able to get used to it rather quickly which makes me hopeful that I will not be feeling this way in tomorrow's rehearsal. We also did not have Adams with us again tonight. He plays the leading character, David. I think this could be a reason it felt off tonight too. It goes to show just how much we rely on each other to tell the story. This is such a collaborative art form. When one person is missing, it can really affect productivity. I will need to prepare myself to be extra focused as we continue to add new elements such as sounds and costumes. I do not want to be distracted in those upcoming rehearsals like I was tonight.

At the beginning of rehearsal, I also found myself frequently pausing before my lines. I need to tighten up my pickup cues. I felt I was dragging the scene down. By ACT II, I was at a quicker tempo and had more urgency in my voice hopefully making the scene livelier and more compelling. I was also forgetting or paraphrasing lines that I normally never miss. I usually review my lines before rehearsal and in-between scenes during rehearsal. Today I wanted to gauge my memorization and only review my lines at the beginning of rehearsal. I will not be able to look at my lines in-between scenes when I am actually performing so I am trying to get into a routine of not looking at them now. I will need to start reviewing them more extensively before rehearsals so I do not make mistakes like I did tonight.

As we were rehearsing tonight, I observed that almost all the actors in the cast have a sense of humor that is funny and very distinct to them. It made me wonder if we should all be working towards the same type of humor when creating a comedy play.

That way all the characters will be in the same “world”, and no one will stand out when they are not supposed to. However, I almost feel it would be best to have several shades of humor simply for the sake of the audience. Not only will it make the story and characters more interesting, but the sense of humor within the audience will vary and we should have characters that can relate to the varying types of humor. I think this probably depends on the show, but all the characters in *Hay Fever* are quirky and unique to themselves. It seems best to have varying senses of humor between each character. I am curious what Caron thinks of this, I will ask tomorrow.

In Caron’s notes at the end of rehearsal he told all of us to revisit the dialect work again. I have been working hard on the dialect and am still sometimes missing the /Λou/ sound. I am hitting it, but not elongating it enough. I have put extra focus on this sound in warm-ups but that has proven to not be enough to get it right. While we run the show tomorrow, I am going to focus more on the dialect and less on my acting and line memorization so this I can start building a strong muscle memory with the /Λou/ sound.

Caron also wants me to connect my physicality to my words in my long explosive rant at the end of ACT II. He mentioned I was using one gesture too much and it became distracting. I will take time to break that monologue down and connect my gestures more appropriately to the words and their meaning. I have also been using an airy vocal quality towards that middle of the monologue and Caron wants me to try another quality because this one is causing a drop in the energy. The monologue should be intense and have a strong dramatic build throughout. I will explore different vocal qualities within the monologue that help push the energy forward.

October 26, 2021

My staging is set, my lines are memorized, and I have solid character development. Based upon yesterday's rehearsal, my dialect is what I seem to be lacking the most. Therefore, I put extra focus on my dialect tonight so I can work out the English sounds that I continue to miss. I need to get the sounds more familiar in my mouth. With the extra focus tonight, I feel my dialect has improved. I will continue to do this each night until it becomes a muscle memory and I no longer have to think of it so intensely.

We also have Adams back in rehearsal which helps rehearsal run more smoothly. Last night's rehearsal felt off, tonight felt much better. It also felt extra energetic and playful. Almost all of us were trying new things. I think it is because everyone has their lines mostly memorized now. We are finally able to react and respond with each other. I wish we got to this point earlier, but better late than never. It was a fun rehearsal. I look forward to what we discover tomorrow.

I did not receive too many notes at the end of rehearsal. The biggest note was that we need to rework the perfume bit in my scene with Joshua Lester, playing Simon. Simon vigorously smells Myra in this scene and the chosen physicality between both of us is now reading to the audience well. I will come up with ideas and bring them to rehearsal tomorrow so we have options to explore and create with.

October 27, 2021

Yesterday, Caron stressed the significance of the line, "I love to see things as they are first, and then pretend they're what they're not" (Coward 68). This is David's line, and Caron believes it sums up the entire show well. I agree and have thought about it

throughout the day today. All the Blisses are playing their usual theatrical games behind the back of all their house guests. We have talked about how the Blisses play this game every weekend when they have guests over. An example of this is in the romantic scene between David and Myra. David takes time to get to know Myra for who she is. Once he figures her out, so that he knows what makes her tick, he starts to play the hidden theatrical game with Judith, leaving Myra confused and angry. I think the Blisses get a thrill from making their guests confused and angry.

My character smokes a cigarette in this show, tonight we practiced with herbal cigarettes. I do not smoke in real life, so it took me a moment to learn how to manage the smoke coming out of my mouth and from the cigarette. The cigarettes also distracted me to a point where I did not focus on my character and dialect as much as I wished to. I am glad we are starting to practice with these, I will need a few days to get comfortable with them. Adams was not feeling well tonight and was not able to come in for rehearsal. This is starting to concern me just because we open the show next week and most of my scenes are with him. When he is not here, the assistant stage manager reads his lines out loud and I do not have anyone on stage to act with. I feel I am not working to my full potential. His absence is making it challenging for me to develop the character relationship with him. Hopefully he starts feeling better soon.

October 28, 2021

As we were rehearsing tonight, I realized that I have made Myra's background quite sad. Growing up, her family did not have a lot of money. She is an intelligent woman and knew that she would need to marry a wealthy man to help support her and

her parents. To her advantage, Myra's intelligence and attractiveness helped her marry rich. Unfortunately, her husband only married her because she is good-looking and would not want society seeing him with someone unattractive. She only marries him to keep from poverty. Their unhealthy relationship is selfish on both sides and is what fuels Myra's behavior at the Blisses.

She craves male attention because her husband does not give her any. I also recognize that her vampish behavior is not only seen at the Blisses. I believe Myra flirts everywhere she goes with as many men as she wishes to. She does not sleep around with different men, but I do know she secretively flirts and occasionally kisses other men. I believe her husband is the same way with other women. The two know they should separate, but again, she needs his money, and he would not be able to handle society's judgment if they were to divorce.

I have noticed Myra's funniest moments all tie back to her sad life. I thought this was interesting because we see this same style of humor in present day stand-up comedians. They use self-deprecation to get a laugh out of people. I believe this also ties back to the power of vulnerability. Showing vulnerability on stage allows the audience to relate to the character. The audience responds well to characters they can understand or relate to. Myra's seductive behavior comes from the sad fact that she is lonely and in a terrible marriage.

October 29, 2021

I thought about Myra's upbringing quite a bit today. It is interesting that she is a feminist and has been a suffragette since 1900. It made me question my choice of her not

getting along with most women as well as her obsession with getting men to like her. I believe she is mostly just jealous of other women, especially women who grew up wealthy, or women in happy relationships. Her obsession with men seems to come from her frustration of the male dominating world. After years of fighting for gender equality, it makes sense she would desire power over the men.

We introduced food and drinks tonight so we could practice our timing of eating and drinking and determine how big of bites to take. We are also still practicing with cigarettes. I am getting more comfortable smoking them each night. I feel confident that when we open next Thursday, I will not have to think about it as much as I do now. Overall, tonight felt like the strongest rehearsal I have had in a while. I felt extra focused and engaged in my character. I had a great sense of confidence and control over myself on stage. We also had Adams back in rehearsal tonight. This made everything feel and run much smoother. At the end of rehearsal, the biggest note Caron gave us is to remain focused on stage. There have been a few instances where actors are breaking character, including myself. There is only one actor that tends make me want to laugh on stage. I will avoid breaking character by not looking at them when I do not need to. When I do look at him, I just need to remind myself that I am playing a character who does not find the experience humorous.

October 30, 2021

Yesterday Caron mentioned I should try responding to Judith's line, "I have presentiments" because I later say that Judith has "mentally chilled" me to the "marrow" (Coward 32). Caron wanted me to look slightly distraught when Judith says her line. I

thought about this throughout the day today to come up with an idea to try in rehearsal tonight. Myra has a bit of a reputation of being flirty with men as a married woman. I do not think she is proud of the reputation, but I do believe it has also become sort of an addiction of hers. She loves the feeling of controlling men and making the obsessed with her. When Judith says she has her “presentiments” about Myra, I think she is referring to Myra’s bad reputation. Myra wishes for a different life. She wants a happy marriage with children but was never given the privilege. She was so poor growing up, she just needed to marry into a wealthy family to survive. With a mixture of her jealousy for Judith, her bad reputation, and her male addiction, I believe that Myra will be sincerely hurt and feeling ashamed. I will think about all of this background information when I react to Judith’s line.

Overall tonight’s rehearsal went well. I felt I was focused and did not struggle to break character at funny moments. The scene between David and Myra felt stronger than it has ever felt. I thought Adams and I played off each other well and really took time to listen and respond authentically. I am also relieved to be feeling comfortable with the cigarettes. I am ready for dress rehearsals to begin tomorrow.

October 31, 2021

We had our first dress rehearsal today. I have previously mentioned that I get nervous when we add new theatrical elements. My work in rehearsal usually does not feel as strong as a wish for it to be on days like today. However, I thought tonight’s rehearsal was smooth and I did not feel nervous at all. I think it is because I mentally prepared myself to expect rehearsal to feel different. In the past, I have never taken time

to mentally prepare rehearsal to feel different. I am proud to see and feel these improvements in my work.

I really enjoyed wearing my costume tonight. I was able to get in character quicker than I normally do. I believe this is because I do not feel like myself in the costumes. It is clothing I would not regularly wear. Even accessories like Myra's rings helped me get into character more easily. Smoking a cigarette with large and gawdy rings is very unlike me. Every time I looked at my hands with the rings, I was reminded of who Myra is, a vampish woman. I love her costumes; they are unique, colorful, and sophisticated. They also fit me well and I feel comfortable wearing them. My green dress has a train on the back that I accidentally stepped on a few times. I will have to be more aware of it in the upcoming rehearsals and soon performances.

November 1, 2021

We had our second dress rehearsal today and even this late in the rehearsal process, I am still making discoveries about Myra. I feel I may still be making discoveries throughout the run of performances as well. I wish I would have made some of these discoveries earlier in the process, but I also recognize Noël Coward is known for his two-dimensional characters. I had to build Myra's backstory while also making sure she still fits in the world of the play. This process takes a bit longer than plays with character descriptions written into the script or plays with nonfictional characters.

Today, I discovered that Myra is excessively insecure. I think I have always known this but never fully recognized it and called it insecurity. I have just been calling her jealous. However, to me jealousy comes from insecurity. Myra is constantly

comparing herself to the other women by wanting to look more powerful and attractive than them. This all stems from her unstable marriage. Her husband makes her insecure by never complimenting her on her appearance. Therefore, she flirts with other men because she seeks male validation when it comes to her attractiveness. I want to find moments where I can privately express this insecurity more clearly on stage so that only the audience will notice. Myra is a very controlled woman and would not want the other characters witnessing her insecurity. She would never want to be perceived as weak. I will try to showcase this new discovery during the scene with David in ACT II, and in the scenes with Judith and Simon in ACT I.

November 2, 2021

We had our last dress rehearsal before student preview tomorrow night. Adams is still not feeling well so we have never made lip-on-lip on contact in our kissing scene together. Tonight, we decided since he is still not feeling well we are going to have him kiss the up stage cheek close to the side of my mouth to give the illusion of an actual kiss. We chose this option to protect my health. Since this is the last rehearsal before an audience, I wanted to try and focus on any last-minute touch ups. I also thought through my main character choices and analyzed their consistency. The main inconsistency I noticed is Myra's snake like quality. I feel I have remained within this quality throughout the whole show except for the scene between Myra and David.

I made the choice from Myra to relax and become more playful in this scene which I feel is working. However, I did not like that I completely lose her snake like quality in it. To me, she was feeling too playful that it almost became childlike. I want

her age and maturity to remain consist throughout the whole show. Today I focused on mixing her relaxed playfulness with her devious demeanor in the David and Myra scene and it felt more authentic to the character. I will continue to remind myself of her snake like quality before every performance so I can achieve consistency in my character.

At the end of rehearsal Caron told us to never forget our character's need to communicate. Unlike rehearsals we should not be trying new ideas once we start performances. Therefore, as we run our performances it could be easy to lose character spontaneity, purpose, and urgency when performing the same show every night. It is important to remain focused on stage. I will also be sure to look over the clarity of all my lines before each performance to help keep their purpose in mind. I am very excited to have our first audience tomorrow night. The audience is such a crucial element to theatre. I look forward to gauging audience laughter and participation.

November 3, 2021

Our student audience was small, but they still seemed to enjoy the show. They laughed in moments where it was both expected and unexpected. The unexpected laughter did not throw me off, I planned for it. Caron also did a nice job of reminding us to be aware of it. I am uncertain with how I am feeling about my personal performance tonight. I expected more laughter in the moments that have received laughter in rehearsals but often times did not get any laughter at all. I began to feel slightly discouraged but I also recognized it was a small audience and it could be completely different with a larger crowd.

I do not believe Myra is a kind, but I also do not think she is mean. I felt Myra was too mean and almost came off as a bully tonight. I think that is where she might have lost a lot of her comedic value. I think my adrenaline made me push Myra's personality out in an aggressive way that I have not done before. I need to regroup before I perform tomorrow and remind myself of her secretiveness and her slithery and controlled behavior. The audience did have a fun reaction to the David and Myra kissing scene. However, since I did not get much of an audience reaction in previous scenes, I chewed on this new attention I was getting and started to become a bit presentational. It did not feel authentic, I felt I was overdoing it towards the end of the scene.

To resolve this issue of being too presentational, Caron told all of us to trust the text. Coward did a nice job of creating witty and comedic dialogue. Caron noticed quite a few of us were trying too hard tonight to achieve comedy. He recommends we relax, listen actively on stage when another character is speaking, avoid filling space with non-verbals or gestures when the space does not need to be filled, remain spontaneous, and stay true to the character and trust their text. I am interested to see how tomorrow goes. I am expecting the audience laughter to come more frequently since we will have a larger audience than tonight. Hopefully the comedy will reach everyone at some point.

November 4, 2021

I am feeling significantly better about the show after today's performance. Last night I was feeling slightly concerned about the comedic value. However, Caron told us to not be discouraged and he was right. The audience seemed to really enjoy the show, there was a consistent amount of laughter throughout the entire performance. I am also

feeling more confident in my character choices. There was laughter in the moments where I expected and hoped for laughter.

One unsettling observation that I made tonight was that the audience would always laugh at the male characters more than the females. I am not sure why this is. Perhaps it is because the play is nearly 100 years old and the humor was, much like everything else back then, more male-centered. I think this could be an interesting topic to study. I do, however, find it all frustrating. If I were to behave that exact way as some of these male characters, I am convinced I would not get the same amount of laughs simply because I am female. This feels like a very complex concept regarding topics such as gender stereotypes and gender equality. There will be more research into this in my Chapter IV, post-production analysis.

November 5, 2021

We had another successful performance tonight. The audience was filled with laughter throughout the entire performance. We had a representative from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival attend the show tonight. She critiqued the production and gave us her feedback directly following the performance. She enjoyed the show and loved the comedy of manners style it is in. Her main critique was with the overall pacing of the show. There are many long awkward pauses built into the story and some were a bit too long. She believes this is something that will tighten up as we continue to perform and gain more control and awareness over the audience.

She gave me wonderful feedback that I feel proud of. She frequently used the word “phenomenal.” Overall, she thought I had a nice presence on stage. She liked the

consistency in my character and choices. She also liked how my character balanced well with the character, Judith. Both characters have a large stage presence. She liked that our characters were large and dramatic in their own way; it created a nice contrast between them. One specific moment she called out for its precise timing was the end of ACT I when Myra and Richard awkwardly speak to each other at the same time. She thought it was a wonderful way to end the act and guide the audience into intermission.

I was pleased with my personal performance tonight. It did however feel slightly off. I could tell some of the other actors were extra nervous tonight; perhaps because they knew the respondent was in the audience. My scenes with them seemed to lack focus. The active listening and the give and take between the character responses was then weakened. However, I do not think the audience noticed. They were still laughing throughout the entire show. I personally received more laughter on lines that I usually do not receive laughter on. I am not sure why this is, this audience seems to be better listeners compared to yesterday's audience because they were picking up on many lines and moments that the last two audiences have not. Though we are not supposed to take the respondents criticism and change anything, I am curious to see how tomorrow's performance goes. I have a feeling there will be some subtle changes especially with the overall pacing of the show, and with the level of eccentricity within the Bliss family.

November 6, 2021

We ran through the show tonight. The overall pace was much quicker. I feel like we shaved off several minutes of the run time. I think this was because yesterday, our respondent implied the show needs to tighten up quite a bit. The audience tonight was

also very quiet. We hardly had to pause for laughter. I wish I knew why they were so quiet but it is always hard to tell when you are not sitting there with them. I felt the entire performance was strong, minus one hiccup. That being an actor missing their entrance leaving my character and another on stage improvising until they came on. We ad-libbed for a moment, then we were left in silence as we waited for them. This was very frustrating because they were not focused. We are a team and they were pulling the entire production down.

Compared to other performances, the audience seemed to really enjoy Myra tonight. After I would complete a line or gesture beyond the regular laughter, I heard extra non-verbal responses after I would finish a line or gesture. I believe this is because I was extremely relaxed and confident today. It seems odd, normally I would feel inadequate or extra pressure to try and make the audience laugh and would come off presentational. However, I felt I was very in control of my nerves in this type of situation. I noticed they were a quiet audience from the start and I just accepted it. I think the acceptance made me see it for what it was and work with it by expecting minimal laughter. I think the audience responded to my character well because of my naturalness and authenticity with the character. We now have four days off before we perform again. I am curious what our next audiences will be like after the break. Word will have gotten around about this first weekend of performances. Hopefully we can get some fuller houses and more boisterous laughter in the upcoming performances. Until then, I will be sure to look over my script throughout the break to keep all my lines, blocking, and character motivations fresh in my head.

November 11, 2021

We are back after a much-needed break. The performance today was rocky. The overall pace dragged, and entrances were slow. Lines were also jumbled. No mistake was super noticeable, but it was a very inconsistent show compared to our previous performances. Despite that, the audience still seemed to love it. For this show, I am becoming convinced that audience laughter depends more on who is in the audience rather than how well we are performing. Last Saturday, we had a wonderful performance. It was perhaps one of our strongest so far, but the audience was extremely quiet.

Though they were quiet, I still felt Myra was well liked tonight. I focused on naturalizing and not pushing, or overdoing, the character. I've noticed with each performance Myra seems to get increasingly more audience reaction than the previous performance. The more I naturalize the more comfortable, and true, I feel to the character. Tonight, Myra felt like a real person. This feeling granted me more control over the audience and the events on stage. I have also learned from the previous performances what comedic bits are and are not working. I am now able to lean into the moments that I know will make the audience respond. I have to be careful and balance this because the show is already long, I do not want to self-indulge too much.

I did run my lines before the performance, but I still messed up a few. I recovered quickly and believe the audience would not have been able to tell. I am not exactly sure why I fumbled the line. I felt focused and prepared for the scene. I think it had to do with the overall pace of the show. Since it was dragging, everything felt off. Energy was low tonight, which surprised me because we have had a four-day break. I imagined we

would be more energized. Hopefully we get back into a quicker more up-beat tempo tomorrow.

November 12, 2021

Our performance today was much stronger than yesterday's. However, we added seven minutes since the start of our performance run last week. Yesterday's performance felt slower than today's. I do not even want to know how many minutes we added on yesterday. A lot of the extra time is lost in our pick-up cues between line. However, I think we are also losing a lot of time within the pacing of our phrases as well. I believe we are all speaking too slowly and elongating our words too much.

The pacing affected the audience in a way we have not seen before too. When we began, audience energy was high, and their laughter was noisy. As we performed, they became increasingly quiet. By ACT III, they were exceedingly quite compared to previous audiences. In my opinion, it was the worst way to lose the audience. We made the show much longer than it needed to be. It felt the audience wanted it to be over. We also took production pictures today³.

November 13, 2021

We have taken the pacing notes from the past two performances and run through our performances today at a much quicker rate. I was almost out of breath at times. It finally felt right. We had a wonderful audience with boisterous laughs from the start. It

³ See APPENDIX D for production pictures.

is fun to determine right away that it was going to be a great audience as long as we kept the energy and pacing up. I focused on my pacing today and was still able to produce the same laughs as I usually do. I condensed all my physical and vocal choices into a more concise and specific manner which then helped tighten the timing. This is a skill I was not able to do in my undergrad program.

We had two performances today, one at 2:00 pm and another at 7:30 pm. Normally the first show feels off because I am not used to performing it so early in the day. It is almost as if my brain is in a different place at that time of day. However, I felt the 2:00 pm was one of my strongest performances so far. Our 7:30 pm performance is what threw me off. I think it is because I often experience a sort of *déjà vu* when running the show twice in one day. A few times I found myself on stage wondering if I already said my line or not. I tried to prepare for this before the performance by reminding myself to be focused but I still seemed to have a few confusing moments on stage. However, it did not cause a significant distraction or pull my character out of the world. I do not believe the audience noticed. Today I observed some of the actors and noticed how free they look when performing.

I have been feeling tied down to choices because I created such a complex backstory for Myra. The complexity is good because I feel she was interesting and had a consistent demeanor. However, no matter how developed and stable someone is, real people, including myself, are not always consistent in who they are. I wonder what I could have done to feel a little freer on stage and with my choices. I examine this further in my Post-Production Analysis.

November 14, 2021

We had our final performance today. It is a little bittersweet because I am ready to move on to the next project, but I also really enjoyed working on this show. I got to know some of the actors that were only my acquaintances at the start of the show. I believe I was able to create a connection and friendship with all the actors. Not only was this a wonderful opportunity to make new friends, but it was also a great way to network. I feel once we graduate and begin working professionally, we will all be wonderful connections to each other within the industry.

Regarding the performance today, I thought overall it went well. The audience was engaged, we hear a steady laughter throughout the entire performance. There was a moment where another actor forgot their line on stage, I had to jump a line to get us back on track. Luckily, we did not skip a lot and the stage manager was able to follow the mistake and still call light and sound cues on time. I feel I have been married to my character, my character choices, and my lines for the last month since we started. As I was performing today, I frequently found myself thinking “that was the last time I will do or say that.” I was admiring my character lines and acting choices as a final goodbye to character. Developing Myra was a great challenge to me, and I am so grateful Caron trusted me to bring her to life.

CHAPTER IV

POST-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

This chapter contains a post-production analysis of the character, Myra Arundel, played by myself, Morgan Benson. One of my approaches to better myself as an actress is to take time and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses within my work. This analysis reflects on the unexpected hurdles discovered within my process of developing Myra Arundel including the strengths and weaknesses in my pre-production analysis. I also incorporate the general audience response from the show including the response from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) respondent. I conclude with what I learned about myself and acting, and how this new knowledge will improve my future acting endeavors. An observation I made in the pre-production that remained true throughout the entire production process was that the Blisses are a self-centered.

Throughout the rehearsal process, self-absorbed characters were frequently discussed. This helped the cast lean into the comedy of manners style of the play. I have recently taken an acting styles class and learned how to physicalize and vocalize the comedy of manners style of acting. I was slightly surprised that we did not dive into the comedy of manners acting technique in rehearsals. However, the play also incorporates farcical elements. The physicality that was farcical sometimes appeared contemporary while the comedy of manners style appeared more classical. This contemporary and classical juxtaposition was challenging to balance. Perhaps at least one rehearsal dedicated to a more in-depth practice or discussion regarding the comedy of manners

style could have been useful in this educational environment. However, I also recognize this is information I would want to study before beginning rehearsals. I felt grateful to have recently taken the acting styles class, the information was fresh, and I was able to apply my training.

Though we did not study the style as a cast, the comedy of manners is innate within the script. We were all able to lean into this acting style and make fun of the upper-class by flaunting wealth, greed, and selfishness. This ultimately served my first assumption of the plays main action. The action being, the Blisses navigating their selfish desires resulting in various relationship conflicts between all characters. In summary, I thought the comedy of manners style was woven into our production nicely. I only wish it was discussed more throughout the rehearsal process so we could have better avoided slipping into contemporary behaviors.

Myra is described in a variety of ways throughout the script. I noted most of her descriptions in the pre-production analysis. The descriptions were helpful in establishing the foundation to create Myra. The line that encapsulated and helped me understand Myra the best was the line where Judith Bliss describes her as a “self-conscious vampire” (Coward 19). This helped me get into character each night by simply saying the line out loud, reading it in the script, or just thinking about it. It reminded me that Myra is self-conscious because she is insecure. I feel my pre-production analysis lacked more detail regarding her insecurities.

It was not until a little over halfway through the rehearsal process that I discovered how intense Myra’s insecurities are. Her insecurity was her absolute main motivation. However, I believe parts of her background were missing in my pre-

production and that prolonged this significant discovery. I first decided Myra was an actress competing with Judith who was also an actress. It was not until nearly halfway through the rehearsal process that I heard one of the characters say “Mrs. Arundel” and I suddenly discovered that Myra is married. That changed a lot of who I originally thought Myra was. It was one of the hardest changes to navigate through. It did however help develop a more complex backstory that would still make sense with the character I had created so far. For example, she was no longer jealous of Judith as a competing actress. Instead, she was in a bad marriage and was jealous of Judith’s romantic relationship with David.

This marriage discovery also changed my decision on Myra’s occupation. It no longer made sense for her to be an actress. Instead, I decided she grew up poor and attended women’s rights movements at a young age. This developed her negative feelings toward men that resulted in her power complex over them. She only married rich so she could survive and provide for her family. These decisions quickly enhanced Myra’s complexity. Many of her lines had new meanings and some of her relationships with other characters had slightly changed.

Though I believe some of this could have been discovered in a more detailed pre-production analysis, I believe Coward also makes the character development process exceedingly difficult because most of his characters are two-dimensional, especially supporting characters. As previously stated in CHAPTER II, Coward would create “a reasonably constructed dialogue for two performers with a couple of extra puppets thrown in to assist the plot and to provide contrast” (Mambrol). The character development process was extended because Coward did not provide many details

regarding Myra's life. However, I never felt overwhelmed with the drastic character changes or discoveries. I almost enjoyed the thrill of the unknown because it was like a blank canvas for me to freely create on.

In my pre-production, I established that Myra would generally get along with men more than women. I believe this was partially true however her connection with the men was never genuine. She just knew how to manipulate them and find great joy in doing so. Early in the rehearsal process, I made the decision that it is always Myra goal to make every man in the room attracted to her, and every woman jealous of her. This was a choice that remained true from the production's start to end. I believe it ultimately made Myra much more interesting. The choice brought out nearly all of her characteristics. Because she has a specific purpose, Myra became more seductive, manipulative, calculated, mysterious, and bold. I am grateful I was able to establish this purpose as a main motivation from the start. It also helped shine a sensitive light to Myra's rarely seen vulnerability.

I believe no matter the villain or hero, every character needs a moment of vulnerability. It helps make the character likeable, relatable, or better understood from the audience perspective. I also believe it gives more for other actors to work with. Myra's vulnerability would be seen whenever her promiscuous life was mocked, or other characters would remind her of her failing marriage. These moments of vulnerability were not written into the script or character description therefore I struggled to show her vulnerability without turning this comedic character into a serious character. This was a choice I felt married to because it enhanced Myra's complexity. However, I needed to trust Coward's writing more because I often felt tied down to my choices.

The choice to express her vulnerability was my biggest challenge with the character. Coward allowed so much freedom that I am convinced I added more than necessary. The complex character layers were all so tightly intertwined that it made me feel stuck at times. I tried to outwardly express every layer of Myra that I had created while also trying to avoid inconsistency with the character. I sometimes failed to remind myself to just be the character instead of pushing every detail I had created. Though I believe it is always important to create complex, carefully considered, and dynamic characters, I now know it can be easy to overdo it, especially when working with a blank slate.

In rehearsals, I frequently stopped myself from making choices out of fear of character inconsistencies. I never wanted Myra to be contradictory in ways that were not purposeful to the story. However, I have now reminded myself that not all people are completely consistent with who they are. I most certainly am not. People can still relate to inconsistent characters. I wish I could go back to the start of rehearsals and remind myself that sometimes character inconsistencies can be good. The trick is to monitor the choices so the character does not become so inconsistent that they are no longer believable. This could have been a helpful step towards making me feel less tied down to the character I had created.

Another early choice that remained true throughout the entire production was that Myra's main goal was to meet her favorite romantic author, David Bliss. The meaning of the goal transformed as new discoveries evolved, but at its core, it remained the same. It transformed once I discovered Myra was married. It was no longer only about meeting one of her favorite romance authors. Though it was partially that, it also stimulated her

jealously of Judith. Myra wanted to be loved by a romantic man like Judith was. It also added to the layer of vulnerability and developed heavier feelings given the context that Myra's husband never gives her any attention. Overall, I am proud of myself for establishing this goal early on and allowing it to evolve and develop the character throughout all rehearsals.

My last choice created in the pre-production analysis that worked well was to have Myra overly comfortable in the Bliss family's house. Though director, Matthew Caron, wanted the guests to look uncomfortable in their home, I believe it worked to have Myra be the exact opposite. Myra rarely shows weakness and is always in control. It would not make sense for her to be overly uncomfortable. I believe my physical choices worked well with the character and served as a nice contrast with the Bliss family. Out of all my acting choices, my physical choices were my favorite. The choices highlighted Myra's sophistication and her progressive style and behavior.

Myra had been described as stylish and sophisticated since before I auditioned. Not only did Coward provide this information, but it was also mentioned in the character description on the audition form. Despite all the unexpected character discoveries previously mentioned, Myra's style and sophistication was a key element to the character foundation I had built from the start. Costume Designer, David McCarl, encapsulated Myra's style perfectly. I felt the shift from regular rehearsals to dress rehearsals was smooth because the costume matched the character I had created. I believe this was a pristine example of collaboration. I felt McCarl and I were on the same page about who Myra was. I could tell the audience liked our costumes too. I often heard them gasp

when we all entered onto the stage for the first time with our evening wear costumes in ACT II.

Overall, the audience responses from each performance were unpredictable. Some audiences were boisterous the entire performance and others were nearly silent. I believe the show's pace was part of the reason. Our KCACTF respondent mentioned it was slow. I also noticed the audience would laugh more at the male characters than the female characters. Humor has deep evolutionary roots that are as complicated and evolved as language. In 1872, Charles Darwin noticed that chimpanzees giggle when they play. Many researchers argue that "the laws of natural selection can help explain the complex senses of humor we have today" (Nicholson). A 1996 study by Robert R. Provine revealed that opposite sexes approached humor differently (Nicholson).

By 2006, researcher Rod A. Martin discovered that men prefer women who would laugh at their jokes and women prefer men who provide jokes to make them laugh (Nicholson). Some researchers suspect this humor gap may come from the basics of human reproduction. "From an evolutionary perspective, the sex that contributes more resources to the development of offspring will likely be the choosier of the two. In all mammals, that choosier sex is the female because of the burden of pregnancy. So the male must compete for female attention" (Nicholson). I was frustrated when the male characters were laughed at more than the female characters. It almost feels like women have to work harder at humor than men do. However, after researching the topic, it makes sense that the audience would look towards the male character to provide the jokes rather than the females. I am curious to see how humor will continue to evolve in the

current times as gender equality and neutrality are frequent topics of discussion. Perhaps humor will be perceived as an equal characteristic for both women and men.

I believe the inconsistencies within the audience laughter also could stem from *Hay Fever* being a British comedy. I am not sure that the 1920s comedy of manners British humor translates well in America. As previously stated in CHAPTER II, when Coward traveled to America for the first time, he experienced the difference in American humor compared to British humor. He felt it was more fast paced in America. *Hay Fever* also was not successful when it was first performed in America. When *Hay Fever* was performed in the 1930s it was a way for people to escape their everyday realities with the Great Depression. Now, nearly 100 years later, we are once again performing this play in a society where people want to escape from COVID-19 and tense political realities.

It is always interesting to see how history repeats itself. Perhaps this production of *Hay Fever* did not do as well as it could have because the audience needed a more upbeat, fast paced show that contrasts their life in these slow and isolating COVID-19 times. I do believe the audience was still engaged throughout each performance which helped avoid the feeling of discouragement. This production has taught me many lessons and avoiding the discouraging feelings was one of them. Anytime I felt unfunny I also felt my energy drop. The audience does not respond well to low energy. To avoid this negative feeling, I took Caron's advice to all the actors to trust ourselves more. I can still be funny and entertaining even if the audience is not laughing out loud.

Another lesson I learned is to not push or force the humor. The audience can tell when an actor is trying too hard to be funny and it can sometimes result in an

uncomfortable atmosphere. I focused on not self-indulging too much and naturalizing my acting and with each performance the audience became more responsive to my comedic choices. Naturalizing Myra taught me a lot about acting. It helped me feel in control over myself, the audience, and the events on stage. I felt I was following my impulses and listening and responding more. It also made me more relaxed and feel like I do not have to work at being the character, I can just be her. Natural acting is something I want to carry with me in all my characters. Another practice I want to continue doing is making concept boards for each character I play.

The concept board I created in my pre-production analysis helped establish a strong foundation to build the character upon⁴. Everything in my concept board worked its way into Myra's characteristics. I feel this was one of my strongest character development strategies. I have always created a mental concept board, but just recently started creating the visual representations. I also liked my early choice of Myra being a mix of Sally Bowles and Jordan Baker. It helped me lean into Myra's persona of open and free carelessness. It also helped create her elongated physicality where she lounges and drapes herself across the stage.

Inspiration from other actors is something I can consider doing for future characters but I do not want to rely on it too much. I like the idea of developing my own character based upon the habits and behaviors of real people instead of using ideas that other actors created for their own characters. Though I struggle with the idea of originality. I am always working to be more authentically original with my artistic choices, but it is challenging because I do not believe anything is completely original.

⁴ See APPENDIX C for concept board.

Ideas always seem to trace back to someone or something else. I am greatly influenced by Antonin Artaud, a European avant-garde dramatist. He once said, “All writing is garbage. People who come out of nowhere to try and put into words any part of what goes on in their minds are pigs” (Piepenbring). He believed no thought or idea is completely original to the person themselves. It is instead learned or inspired by outside forces. Perhaps “ownership” is a better word than “originality.” It is the idea of taking what inspires me and making it into my own, with knowledge, creativity, and compassion towards the original source.

The final lesson I learned throughout this process is the importance of taking care of my mind and body. I feel with COVID-19 persisting, the population in general is more hyper aware of their health. It was difficult to have actors missing rehearsals when they were ill. Theatre is such a collaborative art form and when one person is missing, it pulls everyone else down with them. To avoid illness, I tried to isolate myself more so I would not contract the virus and risk spreading it to other actors. It was important for me to have good nutrition, stay hydrated, and get enough sleep. I was surprised I never became ill from the other two actors that were sick for over half of the production. I was frequently in close contact with them on stage and in rehearsals. Staying healthy is something I always want to keep in mind not only for myself, but for the people I work with too.

One of my favorite aspects of theatre is that it is highly collaborative. I am grateful to have been cast in this production. The cast and crew worked well together. We all had the same goal. It was fulfilling to perform what we had created as an ensemble. Though I did not always get the audience response I was hoping for, I still

think this was a successful production and I am proud of the character I created. After analyzing the unexpected character hurdles, the strengths and weaknesses within my pre-production analysis, and reflecting on the audience response, I feel I came out of this process a better actor. I will use this new knowledge to continually advance myself as I pursue more acting endeavors.

CHAPTER V

PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

The Process Development is an evaluation that provides me, Morgan Benson, the opportunity to analyze my general methodology in creating art, both as an actress and theatre practitioner. Conclusions are drawn regarding my progress as an artist. I also discuss and set goals for my future artistic endeavors. I have grown as an artist and as a person in many indescribable ways since the start of my time at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU). Material from my classes have been put into practical use and have helped influence and guide my way of working and thinking.

I was provided many opportunities to practice what I was learning as an actress while pursuing my Master of Fine Arts. Whether I was in class or in a production on stage, my training was put to use. Two courses I took with Vladimir Rovinsky, were Acting Styles and Advanced Acting Techniques. The main lesson I learned from those acting courses was to find the essence of the character. There are many approaches and techniques to finding the essence such as establishing archetypal gestures or finding the character's driving force that influences all their choices. Another technique is to find where the character centers themselves within their body and establish how it feels and looks both emotionally and physically. Once the essence is established, the character can come to life starting from a strong foundation.

I also took Rovinsky's Topics in Theatre course where we learned about acting with masks. I enjoyed the many philosophic discussions in class. They helped me think

with more curiosity and creativity. The course also pushed me to move and use my body more. Previously, I had been rather modest with my physical choices in the characters I portray. I believe it hindered my chances at getting my preferred roles in many auditions. I am now more comfortable in my body and more confident in my choices to move and use my body. This course, along with my acting courses with Heather Hamilton, also helped me understand that actions often speak louder than words. I found it important to learn how to tell a story with my body and not rely solely on the voice and text.

In my Acting Scene Studies course, I remember Hamilton once saying, “some of the best acting happens in silences.” This helped strengthen the concept that the behavior is often believed before the words. I also took Hamilton’s Acting for Radio/TV course. In both of Hamilton’s acting courses, I learned that surface level text is not real. In acting and in real life, there is always a motivation behind words that are said. There is no such thing as purposeless speech. There is always a reason to speak. When developing characters, I began to analyze the subtext more and found it much easier to create complex characters that I had a deeper understanding of. Hamilton once told the class that, “anytime we are speaking from the heart, we are desperately communicating a need with words.” Hamilton’s acting courses helped me understand the need in communication and to find the purpose in every choice I make.

Hamilton’s acting courses also taught me that every character should be complex. This will help to create a dynamic and interesting character. Hamilton did many acting exercises that worked to intensify complexity. For example, one class discussion focused on a character that was supposed to cry in a scene. Hamilton taught us that it is sometimes more powerful to make the audience cry instead of the character. It could

show more character depth by trying to hold back the tear rather than letting all the emotion out. Hamilton gave me the tools to develop complex and purposeful characters. She accomplished this by teaching me to have empathy for every character I play. Characters are shadows of the actor. Whether they are the villain, the hero, or anything in-between, the actor should be able to understand and relate to the character on a personal level.

Along with empathy, Paul Hustoles taught me about the power of vulnerability in his Musical Theatre Acting course. I once asked him what makes a character likeable to the audience. His answer was “vulnerability.” I try to express vulnerability in every character I portray. It provides the audience an opportunity to connect and relate to the character. Hustoles also taught me about presentational acting. It is when an actor presents the character outwardly to the audience. If not done for a specific purpose, it can be perceived as amateur. Instead, the actor should submerge themselves in the world of the story and focus more on living in the character’s shoes than presenting the character to the audience. The Musical Theatre acting course taught me to naturalize my acting. Authentic, personable, believable, and natural acting is one of the biggest lessons in learned in graduate school.

I also learned it is easier and better to make large choices and whittle them down than to make modest choices that need enlargement. Bigger and bolder choices give more for the director and other actors to work with. Both Hustoles and Matthew Caron taught me that lesson. I took Advanced Theatre Speech and Stage Dialects from Caron and the students were always encouraged to make bold choices. Both classes expanded my vocabulary in theatre speech terminology. I also learned how to increase the

dynamism in my voice with different vocal qualities and dialects, along with the use of vocal time, tone, tension, and volume. The last class that changed me for the better as an actress is yoga.

Julie Kerr-Berry taught yoga and helped me improve my mind-body connection. Yoga is a mindful practice. It taught me how to think, breath, and be me. I also learned to be gentle with my thoughts and forgiving to my body if does not do what I want. I became a much calmer and happier person and it reflected in my work as an actress in many ways. I noticed a calm mind helped me quickly complete tasks with more efficiency. One example of how this behavior enhanced my work as an actress is in quick costume changes. The calmer I was, the more control I had. I am grateful to have been introduced to yoga. I continue to practice it and have no intentions to stop. It makes me a better person.

I have also become more defined as an artist. All the courses I took in graduate school changed me for the better in some way. Hamilton's Theatre Dramaturgy class gave me confidence to believe in myself more. When presenting the complete dramaturgical protocol I had to frequently remind myself that I know more than I think I do. When questions arose, I was able to synthesize my research and produce accurate, and original answers. Not only did Dramaturgy give me more confidence regarding my intelligence, but I also discovered a passion for research.

Hamilton's writing classes, such as Theatre Theory and Criticism, and Theatre Research, involved a considerable amount of research and philosophy. I discovered a deep interest in theory driven classes. I enjoyed engaging in the many intellectual conversations. I also discovered that most arguments or disputes come from a

misunderstanding within the communication. It was important to listen and try to understand. To listen more and speak less. Her writing classes also taught me that the best writing is rewriting. That lesson has improved my writing significantly.

The MSU theatre program provided me the opportunity to costume design a student production. During this project, David McCarl encouraged me to collaborate and persuade. Previously, I was unaware that the production team has power to persuade the director's vision. This opened my mind and gave me more authority in the work that I do. Another lesson I learned throughout my projects at MSU was that sometimes my meticulous work ethic can limit creativity. I ran into this problem in *Hay Fever*. Too much established detail made me feel stuck in the choices. I am continuing to learn how to balance my detail-oriented mindset.

The final course that helped shape me as an artist was Theatre History. What I enjoy about theatre history is that it gives light to what the general population of the time were thinking and doing. It reveals far more truth about what was happening at the time. Theatre History has expanded my knowledge of human behavior. All the discussed courses have helped me become a more thoughtful, confident, persuasive, determined, considerate, and purposeful artist.

My purpose as an artist used to be to entertain and make people happy. Though that is still a portion of my purpose, my artist goals have become much more specific since my start at MSU. Now, my goal as an artist is to create positive change in the world through storytelling. I believe it is the best way to influence change. I studied the benefits of storytelling in Hamilton's Theory and Criticism course. Albert Einstein once said, "If you want your children to be smart, tell them fairy tales. If you want them to be

brilliant, tell them more fairy tales” (Margulis 3). To change the world through storytelling, I have to consider my rhetoric.

With the use of rhetoric, I will always need to know who my audience is and how to communicate with them. I need to create art that relates to the people watching. People tend to surround themselves with likeminded people who they can relate to. They seem more willing to change when it is likeminded people who are persuading them. I observed an example of people being drawn to people like themselves in Rovinsky’s mask class. All the students were told to close their eyes while a mask was handed to them. Each mask had a different expression on it. The students were told to put their mask on without looking at what expression they were donning. Once all students were masked, they were then asked to silently move around the space and physically respond to how they were being treated by the others. They would also respond appropriately to whatever expression the other actor had donned. I quickly observed the masks that portrayed similar emotions would stay near each other. By the end of the exercise, the room had evolved into four cliques: one happy, one sad, one angry, and one scared. It was incredible to see how the actors connected based solely upon how others were treating them.

The mask exercise helped me realize that people are attracted to those they can relate to. Not only was this a life lesson, but it is also as recognized in art. Through my use of rhetoric, I will know how to get through to my audience. It requires versatility, knowledge, care, and compassion for the audience. It is important to frequently consider what the audience should be feeling. Another element of creating change through storytelling is understanding that the answer to division is unity. I learned this is yoga. It

is the hidden secret that everyone knows but not everyone pursues. I want to influence algorithms and create art that promotes unity. Theatre has the ability to open people's eyes in such a visceral way. Often, people do not believe something until they see it. Theatre can show them.

Along with my artistic goals, I also have goals to achieve in furthering myself as an actress. My main goal is to keep training, observing, and learning. I believe everyone is born with the tools to be an actor. Training helps develop compelling characters faster and with more texture and layers. I also want to push myself to prepare more and procrastinate less. Especially when auditioning for roles. I need to bring more to the table so I can get a stronger foot in the door. That being said, too much preparation can sometimes lead to narrow-mindedness. I like to follow the motto, "do not practice until it is perfect, practice until you do not have to think about it."

As an actress, I want to make sure I am connecting the truth in my character. It will help to create an emotionally charged performance. I have realized it is not about acting the text. Instead, it is speaking the text that I have taken the time to develop a deep understanding of. I also have goals that I must achieve to further myself in art. The first goal is to make art that is original to me.

I want to be able to ethically take ownership over what I do. Rovinsky once mentioned the quote, "you cannot break the rules until you know the rules." Through training, I learn the rules so I can then break them and ethically make them my own. I also never want to stop creating. I notice I am most creative when I am bored. I want to be able to be creative when I am busy too. If the societal halt from COVID-19 has taught me anything, it is to stop and smell the roses and appreciate the small joys of life.

I can stimulate creativity by living in the moment and experiencing more of what life has to offer. I want to live in more creativity and open-mindedness. I am not interesting unless I am an interesting person. I have to experience things or I will not have much to give as an artist. COVID-19 also taught me to approach life with reason. Today's political climate is intense. The truth is hard to find, therefore I will never chase a lie. Otherwise everyday becomes intolerable as I pursue something so uncertain. I want to approach art with patience and dignity. The last, and more practical, goal I want to achieve to further myself in art is to be pithy with my words. Concise language is something I have always struggled with and am constantly working to correct. I want to speak and write as if it were poetry.

As I draw to a conclusion, I want to discuss how I will practice my craft and art with integrity and discipline. First, it is important to know how to take criticism. Hustoles taught me how to take critiques and refrain from defending or making excuses. He also taught me to discard useless critiques that do not serve me or my art. I believe a good artist never fears criticism because they already know what the criticism will be. I am to a point where I want to be knit-picked because it makes me all the better. I never used to be like this before MSU. Graduate school also taught me to not make things harder than they need to be.

In a one-on-one meeting, Hustoles once said, "life is easy." Those three words changed me. Hustoles seemed to be one of the busiest people I had ever met. It was jarring for him specifically to tell me that life is easy. I had only ever heard people say, "life is hard." The main lesson is to not be too hard on myself and avoid living in fear. I need to do the things that both excite and terrify me and ask the questions I am afraid to

ask. In my fortunate experience, people often say yes before they say no. I am always surprised how often things work out for the best when I take that leap of faith. I want to practice my art with elements of simplicity and bravery.

I also want to never forget the benefit and importance of making the best out of unfortunate circumstances. One of my favorite stories is from “The Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood. Out of hundreds of kidnapped women, the main character was punished and forced to choose five kidnapped women to become Marthas⁵. The rest of the hundreds of women were to be murdered. Faced with the seemingly impossible decision, the main character chose a thief, an engineer, an IT technician, a lawyer, and a journalist. The group of women developed a plan and ended up saving all the hundreds of women that were going to be murdered. This is one example of making the best out of unfortunate circumstances.

Another example that I will more likely have to face is a lack of funds or resources to the art. I practice with integrity by using the misfortune to my advantage. If I need a certain prop but cannot obtain it, I will come up with a different solution instead of giving up on the idea completely. Part of this is also knowing how to make decisions. Before MSU, I struggled to make decisions based upon my own judgement. As I continue as an artist and human being, I will do my own research so I can develop my own opinions that I believe in and can stand by.

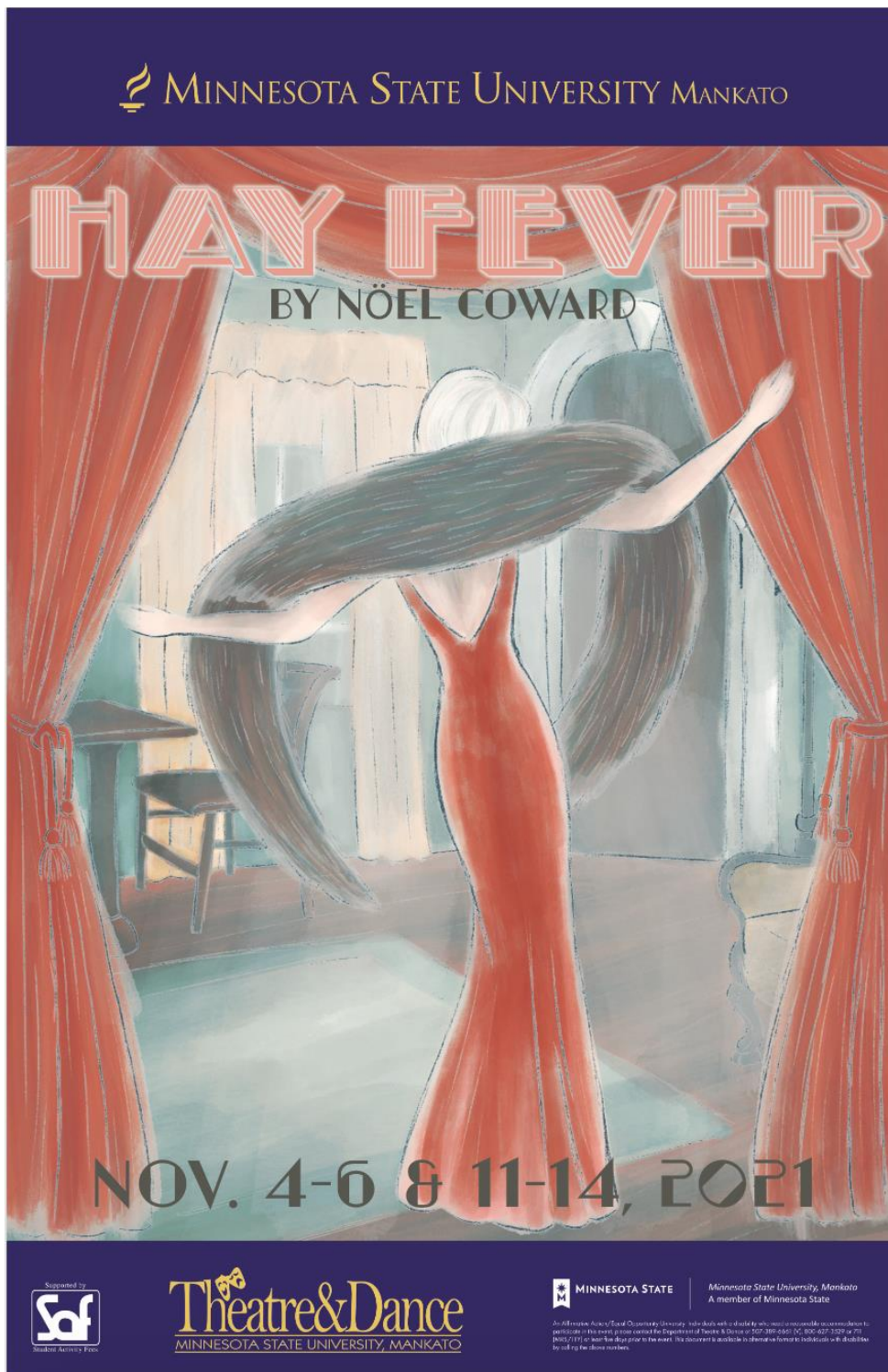
Another act of discipline and integrity that I practice is called, “The Ten Second Rule.” That is, to never point out something that a person cannot change in ten seconds. I never know what battles people are silently facing. As an artist I want to be able to

⁵ The Marthas are household servants.

respect all people, no matter what I see or know. This also goes along the lines of replacing judgement with curiosity. I will always ask why instead of assuming without aim. The last way I practice my art with integrity and discipline is knowing I am in control over my life and that I am always one decision away from a completely different life. There is beauty, danger, and power in that mindset and I need to manage my control with balance. Sometimes too much control and authority can become overwhelming. However, Hustoles once said, "How do we do so many things at once? Very carefully".

My experience at MSU has made me a better person. As an artist I feel much stronger, well-trained, more creative, and more purposeful. I have learned a lot and am grateful to have been able to cherish many life-changing moments in this reflection. Material from my classes have been put into practical use and have helped influence my way of working and thinking. I believe I can create art that leaves a positive imprint on the world and its people. I will never stop learning, creating, and pursuing what makes me happy.

APPENDIX A



Production poster designed by Jillian Jongbloedt

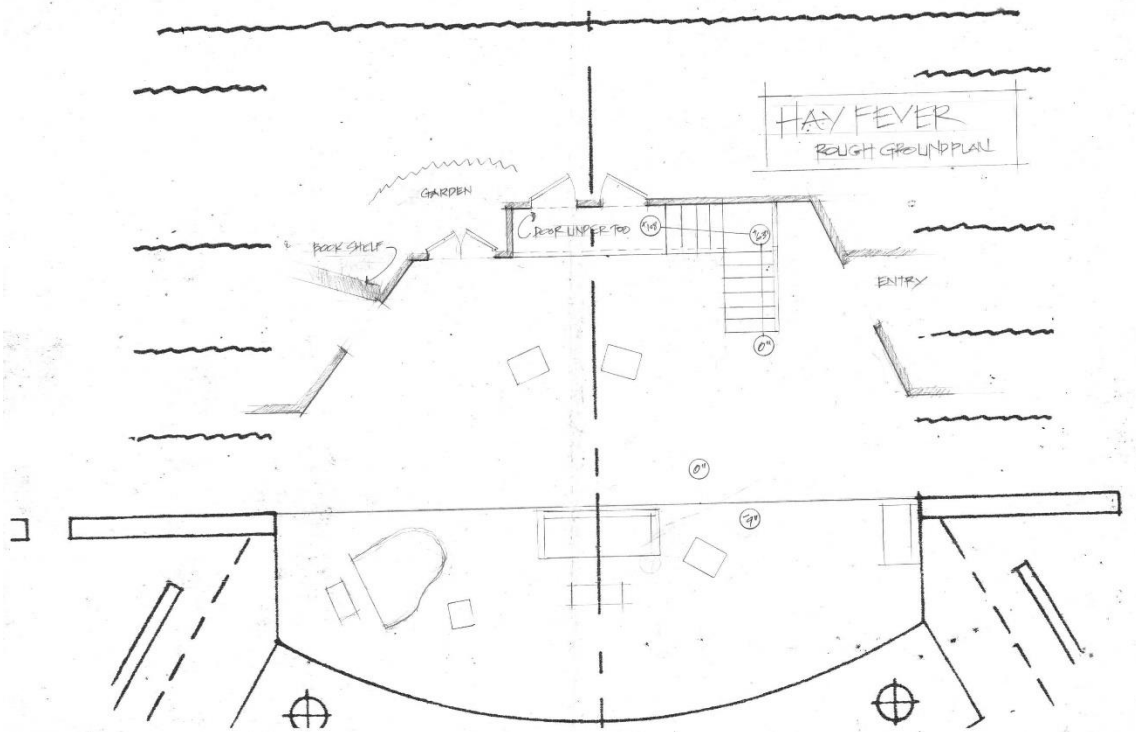
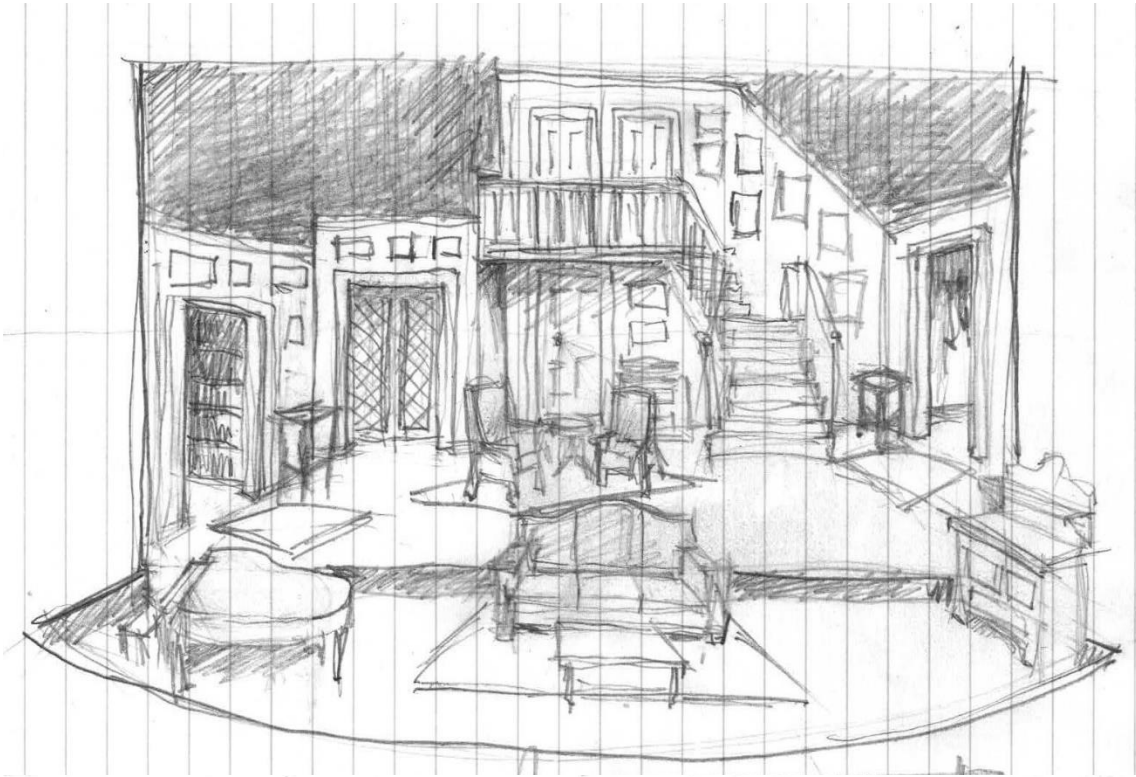
APPENDIX B



Myra Arundel costume design by David McCarl.



Myra Arundel costume design by David McCarl.



Hay Fever scenic designs by John Paul.

APPENDIX C



Myra Arundel concept board by Morgan Benson.

APPENDIX D









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