

On The Mathematical Analysis of An Ancient Greek Tragedy (A CURE AT TROY) Using Mathematical Set Theory To Analyze Patterns In Character And Story Structure; The Production And Direction Of That Greek Tragedy Using Vectors To Direct Action And Objectives In 2-Space; And The Research, Writing, And Production Of A Reading Of A New Play (A TREE DISAPPEARS) On The Analogies Of Forestry Management Practices To Family Relationships.

OR

Three Projects Of A Postmodern, Optimistic-Nihilist, Renegade, Theatre Artist

A Thesis By Ethan Fox

Part I – Preparation

I started this project with an idea to direct Martin McDonough’s THE PILLOWMAN. While visiting Ireland, I had been recommended the play by a bookstore owner, and found the play compelling. After a lot of pre-production planning, I decided ultimately not to direct that particular play. The main reason was that the play was extremely dark, and while I don’t find myself triggered by these things, I didn’t want to take an actor into that dark place who wasn’t prepared for it, or might get triggered by the content of the play.

I asked Dr. Lynch if there was a different Irish play I could direct, and he recommend to me BURIAL AT THEBES (Seamus Heaney’s version of ANTIGONE) and THE CURE AT TROY (Seamus Heaney’s version of PHILOCTETES). I wasn’t too interested in directing another version of ANTIGONE, as I believed that it was mostly overdone. I thought about possibly doing a version of AJAX, however after hearing ASU MainStage was putting on that show, I quickly abandoned that idea as well. THE CURE AT TROY remained the obvious option.

I first read the play while traveling out to Albuquerque and remember I didn’t really like it. I was really struggling to find a connection with the themes of suffering, abandonment, ethical dilemmas in war. I had two things that semester that really helped me connect a bit more with the play: *The Theater of War* by Bryan Dorries, and an outdoor survival course.

Dorries’s book helped me understand the idea of Greek theatre in a more intimate way. I replaced the idea of fatal flaw (hamartia) with the idea of error, or “to err.” This simple correction in the way I approached Greek tragedy was extremely influential in the way I looked

for patterns within the play. I looked more closely at how Greek tragedies were tied to war and veterans, especially PHILOCTETES. I think at first, having read Dorries, I imagined PHILOCTETES as a play about veteran suffering. It was somewhat difficult for me to do this, however, as I only vaguely saw the connection. As I kept on with reading different translations of PHILOCTETES, I was connecting more to the ideas of abandonment, revenge, and ethics.

The second item during the fall of 2017 semester was the outdoor survival course. I took the course more to get outdoors, and learn a bit more about the wilderness for A TREE DISAPPEARS, however I kept connecting stories and techniques to PHILOCTETES. For example, the professor, Scott Kozakiewicz, told us about search and rescue. If you're doing a search and rescue for a child, it's good to have some kind of candy or food available in case you find them, because a good number of children are taught the idea of "stranger danger," so chances are they may not trust you if you find them.

Having a piece of candy to offer can help the child understand that you're friendly, and there to rescue them.³ I thought this was very much like the moment in PHILOCTETES when Neoptolemus goes back to Philoctetes to return the bow. Philoctetes doesn't trust Neoptolemus until Neoptolemus offers a piece of candy (the bow) to Philoctetes, and the trust is restored.

Ultimately, the course taught me what it took to survive: by any means necessary.

I looked at books and stories of revenge, vengeance, abandonment. From each book I took a look more in depth at the condition of Philoctetes on his abandoned island of Lemnos, and the psychological mindset he was experiencing. A few books that really helped me develop my approach to directing this play were:

1. *Frankenstein* (1818 text) by Mary Shelley
 - a. From this text, I found the themes of extreme alienation, abandonment, and suffering. I connected the search-and-destroy mission of the Mr. Frankenstein with that of Odysseus, and the abject suffering and wretched state of being of his creation to that of Philoctetes.
2. *The Revenant* by Michael Punke
 - a. This helped me understand a bit of the psychology behind revenge from abandonment, which I directly associate with Philoctetes. The book literally opens with the line: "They were abandoning him" (1), and

describes his pain much as Philoctetes's pain is depicted within PHILOCTETES.

3. *The Iliad* by Homer

- a. I think the idea of rage (Achilles's) was a direct comparison with Philoctetes's. The idea of being left out and the feeling of disrespect from higher commanders, and how rage can resolve, also tied in with the play.

4. *American Assassin* by Vince Flynn

- a. While an odd choice, Flynn goes into the difference between revenge and retribution, and the idea of commanders in faraway places being disconnected with the tactical side of missions, and giving orders contrary to what might help individuals in the field, or altogether abandoning their agents. I found this to spark the military-based, and ethics-based analysis of PHILOCTETES.

In January of 2018, I went out to New York to visit my uncle again and take care of him for 10 days before I headed off to a study abroad in Manchester, England. John, my uncle, is a war veteran who lives alone, and has been fairly ostracized from his (and a good portion of my) family for being gay. His partner died about 8 years ago, and he's basically been living without too many people visiting. He has health issues: particularly his knees hurt him considerably, as he'll cite waking in the night to severe pain. He is restricted in how far he can travel from his apartment (which says something considering the excellent transportation system installed in NYC). Occasionally, a family member might visit him if only to use his apartment as sleeping quarters while they head off to explore the great city. He is, for all intents and purposes, the closest relative I have that reminds me of Philoctetes.

I think my personal understanding of the character comes from identifying with my uncle. Late into the night, I'd come home after theatre and bar to find him waiting like a lost dog might sit for its owner. I'd sit down and he'd start to talk, and I'd listen to his stories (many of which repeated due to old age and forgetfulness) for a good hour, munching on pizza from the joint across the 72nd street station. His stories were stories of the past: stories he could clearly see and remember and feel. Most importantly though, they were stories that made him suffer from loneliness.

I would observe his seemingly-random outbursts of anger when he felt like I was abandoning him for the other splendors of the city. It was like having a textbook case study of Philoctetes himself to observe. A great deal of understanding of character and story came from that visit.

I traveled on to Manchester, where I faced my own form of isolation. Mary Shelley once wrote “nothing contributes so much to tranquilize the mind as a steady purpose.” In Manchester, I found myself faced with only three courses (an equivalent to 9 credit hours) to focus on for the entire duration of a semester. For reference, I was used to taking upwards of 20 credits per semester, while working a job. It was puritan hell to say the least, and the 4-weeks of strikes (which meant all classes had been canceled) did not help.

I was so bored. The thought of what I could be doing back at home gnawed at me as I sat in boredom, going through books, thoughts, and shite TV shows. At one point, I became so bored I anthropomorphized apples to create a Snapchat Western. Interestingly, I believe the lack of production materials (I used cardboard to create the set, and move the apples) aided in the development of my ingenuity when directing with a lack of props and set.

I remember the lows were extremely low, and the highs (when I could be, and socialize with, friends) were extremely high. It was as if I had to make the best out of every interaction, for fear of going back to my room 10 feet by 10 feet and awaiting the dinner call.

At one point in my studies abroad, I found myself in Amsterdam. I had hoped to be there to see the Toneelgroep’s staging of *KINGS OF WAR*, or *OEDIPUS*, however I was quite disheartened to discover they were in Brussels. I was able to catch the Theatre De Bouffes Du Nord’s brilliant adaptation of *ORFEO*, where I sat front-row and subsequently found my clothes, hair, and face covered in egg and fruit particles (which delighted me, but made the old woman a seat away from me extremely cross).

What amazed me was how clearly the actors conveyed the story. Even though the play was in French, the libretto in Italian, and the surtitles in Dutch, and I could really only understand about 40 percent of the actual text; the entire story was extremely clear. The direction was so pure that I could see each decision, each moment’s effect on the characters, perfectly. I believe that this production was what helped me really develop the look of the show.

“Last night, the hotel keepers drove me out here in the dark, and said that here, on the island, you learned to wait. Islanders will stop up a street for minutes just to have conversations

with neighbors. When it's busy, you could wait 45 minutes just to order food, and another hour to get it." I wrote that in my journal on the first night landing on Lemnos Island. It was quiet and dark, all you could hear was the ocean calmly while the moon rose largely in the night. It was as if some switch had been flipped the moment I stepped onto the island: a great sense of peace and calm. Nothing was here, nothing was expected of me here, I had the entirety of the world to myself.

The island of Lemnos was larger than I had expected: and had a great deal of development. I learned that many of the inhabitants of the island knew the story of Philoctetes. The instant they heard I was a "director" conducting research, they were all over me: trying to see who this foreigner was who hadn't just come to the island to go wind surfing. I listened to very different versions of the story, and discovered that they considered Hephaestus the god of Lemnos. They said that it was because Hephaestus had his forge on this island, that Philoctetes's bow was so powerful: because its technology was created with the help of a god. I also learned that there were already islanders when Philoctetes had landed, and they helped take care of him during his years of abandonment.

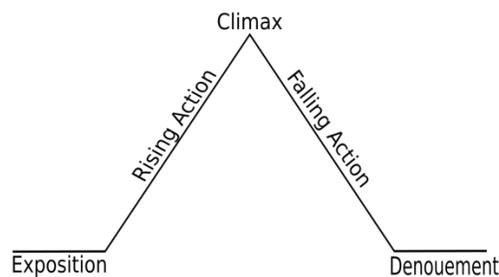
I decided that some creative authorship had taken place with Sophocles. One of the more valuable insights I gained was seeing the actual cave believed to have housed Philoctetes. You had to climb down to get to it, and squeeze through a fairly-narrow gap (apparently the other entrance had collapsed due to volcanic activity).

A kindly, elderly man who'd taken a particular fondness for me asked during a dinner if I thought the island was a comedy or a tragedy. I was uncertain. To me, the calm of life on an island with few people seemed like a comedy. He looked at me with eyes that still haunt me, and told me everyone's life here was a tragedy. He used to have a great-paying job as a mechanic until something happened (I think it got lost in translation) and now he's retired on the island of Lemnos with a pension of maybe 300 dollars a month: barely enough to live on. "And for a moment the entire mood changed, and I saw what I'd avoided my entire short trip here, stripped bare in front of my eyes: hopelessness, humans with potential washed up without direction anymore."

Part II – Set Theory

I've actively fought against the old notion of how a plot structure "needs" to be represented. Freytag's equilateral triangle is antiquated; too many writers attempt to obey this, and other, structures which in turn, creates mediocre stories. By mediocre, I don't mean that some of the stories created using these formulas aren't good stories, but their structure is a copy and paste, lacking originality. The larger problem is the attempt to analyze stories using the same methods, and trying to fit everything in a one-size-fits-all model.

Take Freytag's triangle, for example:



Now, while I understand that this is a generalized depiction, I believe that it is misleading. First: what do the axes represent? The X-axis is clearly time, but what about Y? Is that position in a story? If so, then why does the falling action exactly retrace the steps of the rising action? That would essentially be like walking from point A to point B and then back to point A. Is the Y axis story intensity? If so, then why does falling action go at the same pace as rising action? Are exposition and denouement always at the same level? Climax is defined as the point of greatest intensity: so is there an objective climax? How is that defined?

To further analyze the problems of this particular structure, I'll analyze Paddy Chayefsky's film: *Network*.

Exposition: Howard Beale has been fired from the UBS Evening news, and threatens to commit suicide on Tuesday's broadcast. This causes the network's ratings to spike. At the same time, Diana Christensen is seeking a hit show to save the network. (Minutes 0 to 16)

Rising Action: Christensen gets Beale's news segment in an attempt to turn it into sensationalizing entertainment. On the air, Beale's message resonates as the most highly-rated program on television with the famous quote: "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore." Eventually Christensen loses control of Beale and plots to have him killed on live TV. (minutes 16 to 117)

Climax: Beale is killed on TV. (minutes 117 to 118)

Denouement/Falling action: Various news pieces report Beale's death while the narrator closes out the film by asserting Beale as the first man to be killed due to lousy ratings. (minutes 118 to 119).

Ok, so what we see here is an uneven spacing of falling action to rising action. Where we have 101 minutes of rising action, we have 1 minute of falling action, which is tied in with the denouement. The triangle would not look equilateral at all in this case. And certainly, the falling action does not retrace any steps laid out in the rising action.

Furthermore, where is the actual climax? Is it objectively that Beale is killed on TV? Is that the moment of the greatest intensity? What if we were to place the climax during Beale's "Mad as Hell" speech? Could this not also be the point of the film with the greatest intensity. Intensity is defined as power, force, vigor, potency; then certainly the speech would be the climax. It was the marketing point in the National Theatre's production. But what if Chayefsky intended the climax to be Beale's meeting with the CCA chairman? This is arguably the most powerful deciding factor of Beale's ultimate fate. What about climaxes in the other characters' story arcs? What about...

All this is to say that the way we've been attempting to fit every story into the exact same model is flawed and extremely misleading. It takes a subjective experience and attempts to assign an objective truth. In this postmodern world, the author is dead.

In order to understand how I've analyzed THE CURE AT TROY's plot structure, I need to explain the idea of minimalism. In music, minimalism is a style defined by repeating patterns to create a hypnotic state. As the pattern repeats, it complicates itself. For example, Steve Reich's "It's Gonna Rain" takes one phrase: "It's gonna rain" and repeats it over and over for seven minutes. However, Reich plays the same phrase two times simultaneously, both at slightly different speeds and starting points. What results is gradual pattern changes in audio perception. "It's gonna rain" might later be heard as "it's gon" or "disco rain" by a listener.

I was first inspired by musical minimalism at an early age. Listening to Philip Glass and Steve Reich, I think I found something about repetitions that compelled me. When I was in New York over the summer of 2016, I saw Ivo Van Hove's revival of THE CRUCIBLE. Immediately I was taken with the repetitive structure of his Act work. It was the first time I'd experienced theatrical minimalism, and it inspired the next few years of work.

The acts all held a similar structure: a still opening (an image on stage that remains for a good period of time before the action starts, a calm before the storm), a slow rise of action leading to a climactic moment, a chaotic rise of action, and the curtain. For example, Act three starts with Giles sitting in the corner while a dog makes its way across stage. The action slowly rises while Governor Danforth conducts a trial until the climactic moment when Elizabeth lies to the court, and a chaotic rise of action as Abigail and the girls fall into a spell and the courtroom is littered with debris as Proctor is arrested.

When I discovered set theory in the Spring of 2017, I immediately made a connection with mathematical induction and the repetitive nature of minimalistic art. It's all about the repetition. Induction is a simple proof concept in mathematics. If someone "want[s] to prove that every natural number has some property P", they would use induction.

For example, here's a proof for a simple statement. For every natural number n , prove that $2^0+2^1+\dots+2^n = 2^{n+1}-1$. We start with a base case (say $n=0$); so $2^0 = 1$, which is equal to $2^{0+1}-1$, and we say that the statement is true for $n=0$. So, say n stands for an arbitrary, natural number, and assume $2^0+2^1+\dots+2^n$ is indeed equal to $2^{n+1}-1$. Then $2^0+2^1+\dots+2^n+2^{n+1}$ can be equal to $(2^0+2^1+\dots+2^n) + 2^{n+1}$. We can replace $2^0+2^1+\dots+2^n$ with $2^{n+1}-1$, and would then wind up with $(2^{n+1}-1)+2^{n+1}$; which we can simplify out to $2(2^{n+1}) - 1$, which is equal to $2^{n+2} - 1$. As we see, this was the goal of the proof and we can say the theorem has been proven true: that, for all natural numbers " n ," $2^0+2^1+\dots+2^n = 2^{n+1}-1$.

I recognize that this math will make a good portion of eyes glaze over, so in sum, what I just proved was that you can take 2, and raise it to any natural number, and it will be equal to 2 raised to that number plus 1, and then subtracted by one. And this goes on into infinity.

Imagine now the structure I just mentioned of Van Hove's THE CRUCIBLE revival: what I wanted to show was that you could present a play as a mathematical model. Using Act 1 as a base case, we have:

Still opening: Reverend Paris sits, staring intensely at his daughter, Betty.

Slow rise of action: Exposition to characters, what happened to Betty.

Climactic Moment: Hale accuses Abigail: "Did you call the Devil last night," which places Abigail in a fight or flight situation.

Chaotic Rise of Action: Abigail, to avoid being blamed, forces the other girls to list off names of people they saw with the devil as the curtain drops.

Since we have already proven another act's (Act III, or Act one plus two) structure follows Act 1, we can say that the rest of the play follows this structure; which indeed it does.

In looking at PHILOCTETES, I found three main acts, which I called attempts (as in, an attempt to get Philoctetes and his bow off the island). In all three attempts, I identified four elements: Strategy, Main Attempt, Interruption, Ultimate Failure. To prove this in Attempt one, we have:

Strategy: Odysseus tells Neoptolemus his plan to retrieve the bow.

Main Attempt: Neoptolemus goes about the attempt using Odysseus's method of deceit.

Interruption: The messenger arrives, and gives information that almost undermines Neoptolemus's attempt.

Ultimate Failure: Philoctetes is overcome by intense pain and falls into unconsciousness.

Ok, now attempt 1 plus 1 (attempt 2):

Strategy: Neoptolemus is tempted by a chorus member to steal the bow. He refuses, and decides to be truthful.

Main Attempt: Neoptolemus tries to tell Philoctetes the truth, and is about to hand back the bow when...

Interruption: Odysseus enters, and takes the bow with Neoptolemus.

Ultimate Failure: Philoctetes is left with chorus members who take him back to his cave bitter and without his bow.

As I've shown two cases, we can now assume that attempt 3 follows the same pattern, which indeed it does:

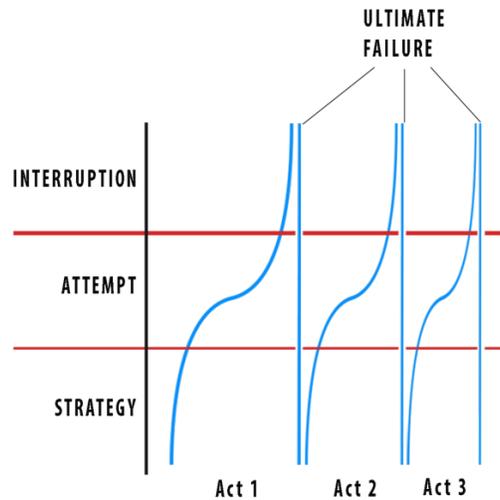
Strategy: Neoptolemus goes to give back the bow to Philoctetes, and try to convince him to come with the Greeks to conquer Troy.

Main Attempt: Neoptolemus gives the bow back to Philoctetes, and regains his trust.

Interruption: Odysseus tries to stop the handing over of the bow.

Ultimate Failure: Philoctetes convinces Neoptolemus to escape with him, and run away from Troy and Odysseus.

This, I believe, cannot be represented as a triangle with one climactic point. This play looks more like a tangent graph with asymptotes representing ultimate failure, like this:



What's interesting is that the end of the play is actually the start of another cycle of these elements, with Hercules preventing Philoctetes and Neoptolemus from running away, sending them back to conquer Troy with guidelines. Later in the war, Neoptolemus performs several acts of immoral conduct, going against Hercules' instructions (thus completing the Ultimate failure aspect). Thus, I saw this play as a repetition of failure, corroding good morals in a man. We don't need to see the events at Troy to know that Neoptolemus is going to fail at Hercules's strategy. Sophocles has already set his inevitable failure through the play's repetition.

I started then looking at how to take this idea one step further, by looking at actioning a script, and attempting to find patterns with other means of set theory techniques. Actioning a script is a director's technique where each line is given a sub-textual action verb. It is followed by a desired outcome, which contributes to the character's larger objective. For example, a line "mom said it's my turn on the x-box" would have the action phrase: "I want to intimidate you so that you'll let me use the x-box."

What might I be able to discover about a character? For example, does a character have specific action verbs that can give away specific traits?

I started by actioning ten pages from the beginning. At this point, I was looking for any patterns that would reveal character traits. For example, does a character use particular kinds of verbs as certain responses? I didn't find anything conclusive: there wasn't enough data. I then actioned ten pages in the middle, and ten pages at the end, to see if anything would come about. I found nothing conclusive.

Now I'm not claiming that mathematical models are the new analysis of story that needs to be followed from here on out. This is simply one way of understanding and analyzing a story using mathematics. It is, in my mind, a more logical method and representation than previous models, and allows for a more liberating approach to defining elements.

Part III – Vectors

Two inspirations come to mind when thinking about the idea of physicalized vectors on stage: the obvious, mathematical vectors; and wrestling/boxing/MMA. I started working on the idea of vectors in Calculus III. While Calc III applied vectors to topology, air pressure, torque, and other mechanical applications, I thought it resembled stage movement. Vectors looked extremely similar to how I'd draw out preliminary stage movement, and vector fields reminded me of dance movements.

During high school, I had a brief stint in wrestling. There was a constant push/pull to wrestling, and a lot of physics went into how I understood techniques. Attending matches, the push/pull would sometimes be so intense the uncertainty in conflict would be great, and you'd be unsure which wrestler was exerting more force than the other. The wrestlers' vectors would go back and forth.

Naturally, I thought I'd apply this idea to theatre. The main idea was that an objective could be physicalized as a vector. A vector has direction and magnitude (size/extent). Translating the idea of a mathematical vector into theatre terms: direction is an obvious idea. A character walks towards their objective: it's their path to accomplish their goal. I defined magnitude as a representation of a character's desire: how much does a particular character want to achieve their goal, and what extent are they going through in order to accomplish that goal?

For example, I'll analyze a snippet from CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF, by Tennessee Williams.

[Brick] drops his crutch.

BRICK:

Give me my crutch.

MARGARET:

Lean on me.

BRICK:

No, just give me my crutch

MARGARET:

Lean on my shoulder.

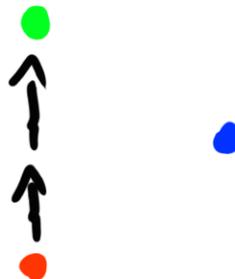
In this slice of dialogue, Brick's objective is to get his crutch. This would have a vector of Brick limping (or crawling) in the direction of his crutch. His magnitude would be how fast he's crawling/limping to get that crutch, or how determined he is to reach his goal. This might physically look something like this:

Vector

Crutch

Margaret

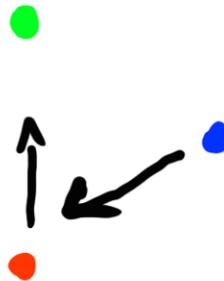
Brick



Of course, drama is all about conflict. Thus, a singular vector will be challenged by an opposing character's vector. This character has their own objective. In the case of Margaret, it would be to prevent Brick from getting to his crutch so that she can support him. Margaret wants to help Brick, and save their marriage, so her vector is going to have a direction in opposition to Brick's. But perhaps at first, Margaret's magnitude is only going to take her as far as Brick's

physical location. So during her first line “Lean on me,” we might see her travel to Brick, with only a very small attempt at preventing him from reaching his goal:

Vector
Crutch
Margaret
Brick



Brick’s magnitude increases during this initial confrontation, as his annoyance and frustration builds, he is now actively working against Margaret to get to his crutch. Similarly, Margaret’s desire to support Brick increases, which might look something like this on stage:

Vector
Crutch
Margaret
Brick



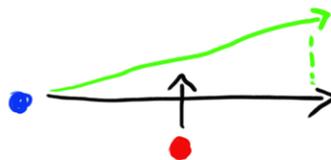
The question now becomes: which vector “wins?” The answer isn’t necessarily the larger vector. If Character A acts with a large vector magnitude, but allows themselves to be slightly influenced by Character B (even if Character B’s vector’s magnitude is slight) then you would see the sum of two vectors as such:

Resultant Vector

Character Vector

Character A

Character B



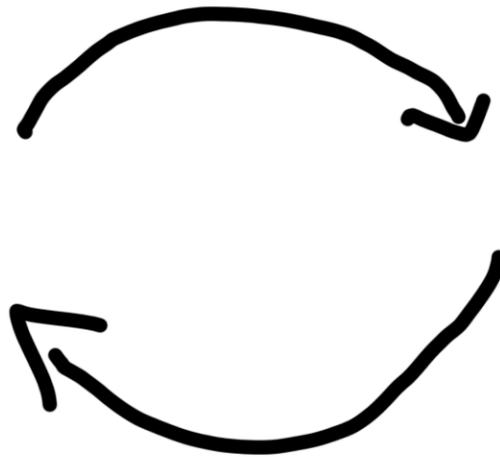
For Brick and Margaret, the answer is slightly different. What you see a few lines down the play is Margaret abandoning her goal to act as a martyr, completing Brick’s goal of getting his crutch.

In directing THE CURE AT TROY, I utilized these vectors, while also thinking about how they might be representing the story structure as well. I treated each ultimate failure element as a climax on its own: a reversal of vectors. These moments held a high intensity, and where something happens to change how characters behave around each other.

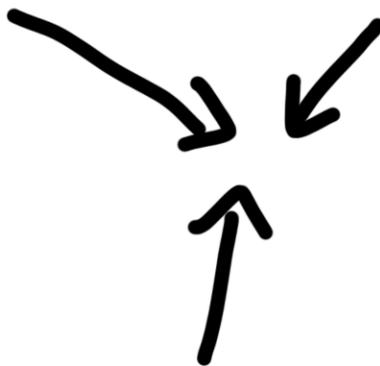
I established a convention for character vectors in each act which cease to function in the expected way. In the first act: vectors were mostly characterized as two people in a chase, circling each other to try and get the lead, while also trying to run away. The first ultimate failure sees a shift from characters attempting to distance each other from themselves to vectors that point to meet each other (this was the scene when Philoctetes’s foot paralyzes him with pain, and Neoptolemus dumps a bag of medical supplies on the stage). Similarly, action verbs chosen changed from maneuver, avoid, manipulate, mislead; to help, heal, and assure.

The second act break switches from vectors pointing inwards to a central point, to vectors pointing outwards from a central point. This was the scene when Neoptolemus and Odysseus struggle over the bow of Hercules. The third act break switches from tug-of-war vectors (a continuation of the second act break's vector pattern) to vectors in opposing x directions, with the same y direction. They look as follow:

Act I



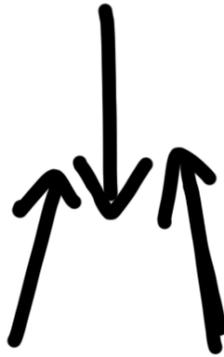
Act I break



Act II



Act II (cont)



(notice how these vectors are similar to the Act I break, however the two vectors pointing in the positive y direction are going past the vector pointing in the negative y direction)

Act II break/ Act III



Act III break



To add to the idea of vectors, I've also trained in boxing and martial arts, and the idea of two fighters circling each other has always intrigued me. There was a repetitious nature to it all: circle, throw punches, back to their corners, circle, throw punches, back to their corners... repeat.

I found that PHILOCTETES was kind of like a fight between two sides: ethically-good, and ethically-bad. What I staged was a fight. A controlled fight of vectors, between two sides. In a wrestling meet, you'll have the mat, where the wrestling takes place. On opposite sides, coaches and wrestlers sit, watching the match and supporting the current fighters. And on the adjacent sides, the spectators sit.

This was the set up I used for A CURE AT TROY. The main action happens on a square stage (the actual dimensions were 20 feet wide by 18 feet deep, thus it was more a rectangle). Odysseus acted like a coach, on the sidelines pacing. The actors would "exit" off stage to the sidelines, rather than disappear completely (excepting for when they exited into Philoctetes's cave). And the audience sat on either side of the stage.

Part IV - Production

When I got back to the states, I had a few more conversations with my mentors, and found myself discovering a new meaning to the piece. Not exactly a new meaning, but more a deeper look into one of the main themes I'd ignored: ethics in war.

What was pointed out to me was that Neoptolemus gets pulled in all directions during his time on Lemnos such that, by the time he leaves, he is no longer an innocent man with good

morals. Learning the history after the events of PHILOCTETES, I discovered a more ominous tone to the piece. I believe that the combination of seeing the stage littered with food in ORFEO, and the idea of the ethics getting more and more complex and messy as PHILOCTETES progresses, lead me to the idea of trashing the stage by the end of the show.

I thought of what would be a natural metaphor, and found medical supplies. I think there are several meanings to covering the stage with random medical supplies. I also had the idea of flooding the stage, which my mentors all advised me against. I thought the water acted as a kind of cleansing from Hercules at the end of the play, but the restart only gets messed up when Neoptolemus goes to Troy, and performs unethical war crimes.

I decided I needed to take a look at the modern military, and get into the mindset of a soldier. Luckily, an Evolution of Warfare course was being taught, and so I signed up to take that in the Spring of 2019. I started to learn a great deal of marine doctrine, as well as how a soldier is expected to think. I identified maneuver warfare (characterized by speed and surprise) as akin to Odysseus's tactics. Rather than going head-on (attrition warfare) Odysseus sought to use deception to get Philoctetes, planning on surprise to gain the upper hand.

While in Manchester, I met a sound designer who was interested in producing sound. We held several conversations about production and music, and after a while I found myself wanting to work with her. I told her about the project, and much to my surprise, she agreed to work with me to create the soundtrack. What was really nice about working with Kelsey was that we were both (she more than I) sound designers and musicians, so communicating with her was extremely easy. She understood exactly what I was asking, and I understood exactly what she explained to me (and also the questions she asked).

For example, I wrote her a note for the medical emergency asking for “an incredibly intense piece that rises dramatically in alarum. Blood pulse rising, medical emergency, a bit of chaos. High-note shavings of aluminum that peel out of the air.” What I got back was exactly what I had been imagining, but better.

Auditions for THE CURE AT TROY were held in the Fall of 2018. I had 6 people audition the first night, and 1 person audition the second night. I sent out character offers the next week, and received responses from everyone except the actor who had auditioned for Neoptolemus. I sent out another email a week after, and after hearing no response, moved on to looking for a different actor. The cast heading into winter break looked like this:

Philoctetes – Cormac Doebbeling

Odysseus – Andrew Wright

Chorus – Susan Xu, Ethan Buhrow, Ramey Moore

I sent out the script, and told everyone to start memorizing the play and we'd start rehearsals when I got back from New York after break. In the meanwhile, I had to cast Neoptolemus. I sent out to 4 people, and finally got a response from Jillian Walker, who agreed to perform, however was also doing a play so she wouldn't be able to start rehearsing until February 11. I cast her with the understanding that I might need to quickly find someone else if her schedule overwhelmed her.

Back from winter break, we went into rehearsals. It's extremely important for me to build an ensemble. A group of actors who are an ensemble work together more efficiently, and are more comfortable with each other. They will feel more empowered to speak up if something is wrong, and have a stronger connection as actors to treat each other as independent artists. In addition, I was working with two people who had done minimal stage work, two who hadn't been on stage since high school, and two who were experienced. In all cases, none of them had worked in an alleyway stage, or theatre in the round.

I went about using a polish flocking exercise I'd picked up in Manchester. The polish flocking exercise consists of the ensemble clumping together as close as possible. They all face the same direction, and whoever is in the front develops a walk. This can be anything from jumping to a normal walk, rolling to bizarre gestures. Everyone mimics the leader's walk as closely as possible, moving as one flock, until the leader turns in a different direction, and a new leader emerges. The new leader creates their own walk, etc.

The first rehearsal was a short, viewpoints walk session, followed by the polish flocking exercise. I had each actor pick a particular walk they identified with, and then had them walk across the stage using that walk, plus a few other actions (order determined with the roll of a dice). What they had created was an indeterminate composition, and they'd done it as an ensemble.

I used this exercise back in the Fall of 2018 when I directed Ayn Rand's ANTHEM. I remember the group of actors were gathered and looked at me like they didn't want to be there. I

really needed some way to bring them together, and say: hey, if you don't like the script, at least have some fun while making a shite piece of theatre, ok? It worked the first time, and I believe it worked this time as well.

I used the next two rehearsals to train the actors: now that they were friendly, they really needed to become solidified as an ensemble, and be able to understand what I was directing them to do in a more intimate way. We started with a meditative exercise.

I had the actors lie down and guided them on a journey 10 years into their past, into a memory. They then took that memory and turned it into a 3-minute retelling. I did this because the idea of story was extremely important to me. There are several monologues within PHILOCTETES, and I wanted to be sure they were prepared to deliver those monologues in such a way that an audience who might have no idea what the play was about would understand. I believe there's something primal and human about telling stories to each other, and I really wanted to tap into that for this performance.

The second thing I had them do was Suzuki exercises. Max Boot writes "When groups engage in choreographed movements such as marching or chanting, a feeling of fellowship rapidly develops... it creates a powerful esprit de corps" in his book *War Made New*. Suzuki exercises were the militaristic training that I introduced into my rehearsal room to bring the actors together more, as well as to remind them that they are soldiers and warriors.

I then moved on to introducing them to working with physicalized vectors. I gave them definitions, and we practiced exerting force against each other as opposing forces. What did it feel like for someone to have a stronger magnitude? A slightly different direction? The same direction?

I used a simple dialogue from Action Hero's SLAP TALK:

"are you ready i'm ready are you ready i'm ready we're both ready i'm so ready come on then lets hear it come on then i'm ready i was ready before you even sat down on your stool i was ready before you came in the room i was ready before you woke up this morning i was born ready i was ready before you were born i was ready before you were conceived i was ready before your parents even met..."

This is exactly how the text appears in the book (no punctuation, capitalization, or line breaks). The performance offers a clearer idea of how the text is split up between two actors, especially as the lines grow into minutes-long monologues. The actors (and I) split up the text between actors as such (character A in yellow, character B un-highlighted)

are you ready i'm ready are you ready i'm ready we're both ready i'm so ready come on then lets hear it come on then i'm ready i was ready before you even sat down on your stool i was ready before you came in the room i was ready before you woke up this morning i was born ready i was ready before you were born i was ready before you were conceived i was ready before your parents even met...

The actors improvised, and worked on exerting force against the other, while saying a line. They would then back off when the other actor said a line.

I hosted a dramaturgical session with Dr. Lynch in order to get the actors acquainted with the full story and history of their characters. I believe they found it helpful, and were more capable of asking questions later on down the road.

Our first full reading was on February 11, when Jillian was available. During the first reading, I assigned chorus lines. I split up the chorus into three parts: an advocate, a messenger, and Hercules. The advocate was always sympathetic to Philoctetes, the messenger less so, and the chorus member who portrayed Hercules started as an unsympathetic character (caring only about the mission) and found compassion as the play went on.

Our first read timed at 1 hour, 15 minutes, which I took to mean a full performance would be 1 hour, 30 minutes. During this read-through, I only spoke when doling out chorus lines. I gave zero notes on how the actors were reading however, I took several notes on areas that I thought we would need work on.

During the second reading, I interrupted during dialogue to hand out notes and insights into the script. One of the most common notes I gave out was to slow down the pace the actors were talking at. I asked them: if this was your story, would you be talking at this pace? If I asked you to perform your memory again for us, would you rush through it, or take more time?

The other notes I gave were on pronunciation, and on lines I thought the actors didn't quite understand (sometimes it was Heaney's translation, other times it was an odd line that we

needed to work on, or get rid of). At the end of rehearsal 4, I sat the actors down and read them a letter:

Dear actors,

I want to take a moment to describe what this story means to me, and what kind of house I'm giving you to decorate.

This is a deceptively calm play. The first time I read it, the words had this lull and I had to read it twice to pick up on the urgency. It is important to understand this play as a war drama. It is a war drama in the sense that it takes place during the Trojan war, but also a war drama in the sense that it is a war of ethics. War, as defined by the MCDP-1 is a violent clash of interest between or among organized groups characterized by the use of military force. The object of war is to impose our will on our enemy. We see several sides attempting to impose wills on each other: Odysseus and Neoptolemus against Philoctetes. Neoptolemus against Odysseus. The chorus against Neoptolemus, Odysseus, and Philoctetes. The most important, however, is the battle between Odysseus and Philoctetes as they attempt to gain Neoptolemus' favor.

This play is riddled with uncertainty and conflict. From internal to external, we see Neoptolemus, Philoctetes, and the Chorus struggle against ideology/morals, as well as their own personal objectives. In fact, the play ends with uncertainty (especially for those who don't know Greek history): we don't know what will happen. What will these events dictate for our characters' future? What exactly is justice in a time of war?

There are specific moments where something happens within this show. These moments must be explosive, and will be challenging to choreograph. The rest of the show must build up to these. Imagine shaking a bottle of soda, and then opening it.

I think that as the play unravels, the lines between right and wrong get ever more blurred, and Sophocles creates an ethical mess of this seemingly small situation. We see Neoptolemus get pulled in so many directions that by the end, he's no longer that innocent and morally-good soldier.

And the chorus. The chorus acts in many ways. We have it as an advocate, narrating events as if to a court. It acts as voices of opinion. And at the end, the deus ex machina. They provide a kind of vector field to guide the play along.

Now speaking of vector fields, as part of this project, I am going to be trying a new technique of directing using vectors. What I mean by that is that each character will have a specific vector tied in with their objective. They will need to act upon that vector, against other characters, who will also have their own vector. So when two vectors are directly in conflict is ideally the time when the most movement will happen.

I tell all my actors this, and you will be no different: when you move, move with purpose. Cut out extraneous pacing or twitching. If you are unsure of what action to do, ask and we can figure it out. Everything we do must be imbued with purpose.

The stage is going to be an empty square, with forty seats split evenly between two sides. It is important that this is blank, as I want to make the stage messier as the show goes on, in order to visibly show the ethical situation. At the end, we will flood the stage a bit. It's a blank space to represent this place and time outside of the conflict of the immediate war. It's a kind of limbo where nothing happens. And it is only with the arrival of conflict and war, that this peaceful limbo becomes trashed.

We've had two rehearsals now to build ensemble, I hope you're all comfortable with each other by now to make bold choices. If there is something that makes you uncomfortable, it will be your responsibility to speak up and let us know. We have a total of 14 rehearsals scheduled, so we cannot afford to waste time. We will do table work for two days, and then get straight into the thick of it.

So with all that in mind, let's create something dangerous and exciting, something urgent. Let's make something happen on stage that makes people want to see more, that baffles them and truly engages their minds. This is not theatre to entertain: this is theatre to make people think. Move with dignity: we're now soldiers in the war to push society into a better place.

Thank you.

I then went through how the stage was going to be set up, what kind of design elements were going to be used, and had them listen to the soundtrack.

Without any time to waste, we went straight into blocking. I found that the actors were fairly clueless in where to stand with an audience on two sides. I had run into this problem slightly while directing ANTHEM (the actors just needed to get out of the idea of a traditional

proscenium theatre). I started with a simple scene, and suggested a lot of choreography to the actors. I then choreographed Philoctetes's outburst at Odysseus.

This I hoped would get the actors to start really considering where they were positioned and how to move on this kind of stage. I backed off slowly as we went on with rehearsals, allowing the actors to find their own positions. I would only step in if I noticed they were blocking a side of the audience for too long, or if I thought the blocking needed to be cleaned up (usually due to the action in the scene prior or following).

The actors weren't memorized until just before Spring Break, and even then it was still shaky. I watched each rehearsal as the actors struggled on stage with scripts in hand, trying to remember blocking and their lines. It was particularly difficult during the scenes with intense action. I believe the next time I direct, I'd like to spend more time doing table work (we had one week due to time constraints). I would also place more emphasis on memorization of text, for that truly is the most important building block that we have to work off of.

The first minor setback started to happen during the sixth rehearsal. Andrew had told me he was going off to LA to work the Oscars, which I was fine with as he had a smaller part so I could work around his absence, and he'd notified me of his time conflict on his audition sheet. The rest of the conflicts that arose were sudden, and with little warning.

I learned that Ethan would be leaving on February 23 and getting back on the 26, which meant that two rehearsals would need to be blocked more-or-less without the chorus. Cormac notified me the following week he'd booked a flight on March 1, and wouldn't be able to attend that rehearsal. Jillian, Ethan, and Susan also subsequently forgot about that rehearsal. So what this meant was this: We had five rehearsals of working with the text before spring break, three of which saw limited cast members.

It was nice to be able to work more individually with the actors that were able to show up: I know that the blocking with Jillian and Cormac was particularly strong after working with them for three hours straight. The messenger scene was hardly worked on again as well. Find the potential to make a bad situation into a good one.

We then went on spring break. In the meanwhile, I'd gotten the production budget approved, and had purchased props:

1. Decorative hunting bow (to be unstrung for performance)
2. Two metal buckets for water

3. 24 gauze bandage rolls
4. 12 self-adhesive bandages

I discussed set building with Professors Andrew Steele, William Partlan, and Jacob Pinholster. The main concern was the water on stage. I knew I wanted some kind of mat on the floor, which would also prevent water damage to the performance space's floor. After deciding purchasing marley wasn't going to be feasible with a budget of my size, I looked at getting tarps. There was an agreement that the tarp would work, however if the water started to slide off onto the actual floor, a different solution would need to be developed. For the set, I purchased:

1. (6) 2"x12"x12' Douglas fir boards
2. A 20'x30' white heavy-duty poly tarp

I was able to use screws, drills, and glue from the scene shop at ASU.

Costumes were interesting. I had an idea that I wanted this to be more of a modern look. I think it's a timeless piece, but I thought that it would be more immediate to an audience if it looked "of-their-era." So I got stylized, modern, military-style clothes.

1. Cargo military tactical trousers (khaki)
2. Military lightweight jacket (army green)
 - a. I bought two of these for Odysseus and Neoptolemus to separate them visually as people of higher power. I didn't purchase one for Philoctetes because I thought it would have just gotten too torn up, or he'd lost it on the island.

On Wednesday, March 6, I got a call from Jillian explaining she needed to step out of the role due to medical issues. After a very brief panic attack, I started messaging actors. It was early (especially for spring break) so I went for a walk in the woods, and when I came back, I had a response from Maria Harris. It was a perfect fit, and the conflict resolved itself in roughly an hour, 30 minutes. I also got a stage manager on board that day (Kaitlyn Kief).

My concern now became how to introduce Maria into the play. I was fine with her having a script: the stage gets completely trashed by the end, so I would have her just toss the pages onto the sides of the stage to generate more litter. Incorporating her into blocking that was already there however gave me a bit of anxiety. I didn't want to step too much on her own artistic independence.

After talking with professor Partlan, my anxieties were calmed. The staging could remain the same, and in some ways this would help the actor step into the roll, rather than try and reinvent it. In such a short time, it was almost necessary to take Maria through every step of the blocking.

Tech week started on a Monday:

I woke up to a text from Ethan saying he'd dropped from the cast. I had planned for something like this, which was why I'd cast three chorus members. That evening's rehearsal saw the incorporation of Maria into the play. I restructured the chorus lines for two people (both women had to memorize an extra monologue).

We ran through the entire blocking, and then did an attempted run-through around 9:15 with sound. We got about ¼ of the way through due to time.

Tuesday:

I finally got the go-ahead from the lighting department saying I could use lights. Because I had to pay the lighting people however, I decided on using a simple lighting plot with only 4 cues: lights down after pre-show. Lights up for the show. Lights down at the end. Lights up for curtain call. We set a time for Friday to focus and program.

In rehearsal, we continued with the run. This time we had actual props to work with (because I was on bike, I had to slowly bring things into the FAC). We then worked more specifically on scenes. I think this was the day where people were kind of losing their way: the play had lost some of its freshness.

Wednesday:

I always say theatre brings people together. But never have I thought of it in the way that it brought me together with a stranger until now. Home Depot had notified me that my lumber was ready to be picked up. I borrowed my friend's car and drove out, only to find that it wouldn't fit into the car. I tried renting one of their trucks, but had left my car insurance back at home. So I sat in the parking lot, biting my nails and wondering what to do. At some point I had asked a stranger if he'd help, but he looked at me like I was crazy.

I only knew one person with a truck, and we weren't exactly friends. Two weeks prior, I was riding my bike along University when he hit me with his truck. We kind of talked for a few minutes and exchanged information, and then I went along my merry way. I knew it was a long shot, so I messaged him on Facebook quickly, before heading into a test. Miraculously, he texted

me back, and agreed to help me. So that's how I made a new friend, and got lumber to the Nelson Fine Arts Center.

I built the set that day, and it was ready for rehearsal that evening. What was interesting was that the boards (Douglas fir) were so fresh-cut that you could smell the lumber. I think that added to the production itself, the idea of transforming a space not just through sight, but also through smell.

During rehearsal, Partlan attended and we did a full run at the start. He gave me some very helpful notes that I started to incorporate that night. The cast morale was extremely low that night though: everyone seemed to be tired. I, myself, was also tired from moving massive pieces of lumber around all day. It was probably a good thing however, as the thesis director saw the worst run through we'd had, so all of the problems were exposed, which meant the feedback was better.

I ended rehearsal 30 minutes early.

Thursday:

I did a short welcome, and viewpoint exercise. It got the actors warmed up, and in some good spirits before rehearsal. I then strictly worked on individual scenes. I did not attempt a full run that night, for that would sacrifice time I could be working with actors to fine tune their work.

Friday:

No rehearsal, but I worked with the lighting department to focus and program lights. The entire process took 30 minutes. I also got the tarp from Amazon.

Saturday:

6-hour rehearsal. I spent the first 2 hours with specific scene work. I took a lot of time to work with the water (since we didn't have the tarp, we couldn't practice with actual water until Saturday). I also re-choreographed a fight scene with Andrew and Cormac. We took a dinner break for pizza, and waited for the light board operator to arrive. When we came back, we did a full run, which went very well. I was extremely impressed with how far everyone had taken this play. I was even more impressed (and quite frankly, relieved) that Maria Harris had memorized the entire script in the course of one week.

On Sunday and Monday, we performed to positive comments.

Part V – A TREE DISAPPEARS

In February of 2017, when I was walking down the piers of San Francisco on my day off from a mathematical conference on analytic number theory at the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute in Berkley, I passed by a café on the pier which stuck out to me. The authenticity of its look drew me in, and I could feel a story shaping. It wasn't until I found myself at Café Zoetrope that a kid (in truth, he was probably about my age) made a scene by searching in his pockets for his wallet, which he claimed he didn't have, when asked for his identification in ordering an adult beverage. I started writing, what at that point I thought of as, a novella right there.

It was about a writer who lived at home with his aging mother, when his old “friend” locates him at a bar and asks to crash for a few nights. It was written on a city lights journal with blank pages. It was written with sharpie, which was the only utensil I had at my disposal. It was a mess.

At this time, I was watching my family struggle with dementia: both of my grandmothers had it, so both sides of my family were attempting to deal with it in their own way. I wrote both of them into my play, but what I focused most on was the grandmother on my father's side. I was interested mainly in the relationship between my father (and his siblings) and my grandmother. They kept her at a distance, no one really wanted to be her caretaker because she refused to be taken care of. Of course, my father stepped in (being the only one in close proximity who was responsible enough to do so) and took over her estate, which lead to more family drama.

What he was doing was for her own good. But none of my family (excepting my aunt out in San Francisco) really understood that, one member even going so far as to deliver us daily death threats on behalf of our charitable disruption. I doubt my father ever really wanted to be in this position: I think he did it purely because it was his mother. That's where Charles and Anne's characters come from.

I think I knew I was writing an semi-biographical play from the moment I wrote the prologue. I changed the main character from a writer to a forester, which I had to stop myself because I knew nothing about forestry except from the stories my dad told me. Having a father that was a forester helped my research out, as he basically provided me endless resources on where and how to research the forestry industry. I started with the annual Society of American

Foresters convention, held each fall. I decided that the best way to learn about forestry, and get into the mindset of a forester was to go and be with a bunch of foresters for a weekend.

I spent that summer of 2017 developing research questions to ask forestry professionals:

1. What led you to be a forester
2. What challenges have you had to deal with/adapt to in order to keep modern and relevant
3. Do you have a specific childhood memory of being in the forest/nature?
4. What are problems/challenges you face in your community?
 - a. Political concerns?
5. What does a healthy forest look like?
6. How do you communicate your work?
7. Tell me a story from your job, or tell a joke.
8. Favourite color?

Before I went, I compiled a list of pre-conceived notions of a forester that I had, and believed the general public held as well. For example, I put “they cut down trees” as a job description. I put “male, tough, white” in terms of the images I conjured when thinking of a forester. “They drink IPA’s, whiskey, watch nature TV” for things they liked. I knew some of these were extremely generalized, and some were so generalized they were false. However I wanted to list them, so I could challenge the conventional ideas when writing the play.

I had an idea going in that I wanted to make an analogy between forest fires and relationships. I found the idea of fighting like prescribed burns. Thus, I went into the conference specifically looking to learn more about the role of fire within the forestry industry.

I found that each interview was different in structure from the others, meaning I’d tailored the questions to suit the interviewee and their responses. The most valuable insights came from the foresters telling me about their philosophy of forestry. For example, one interviewee told me that he saw the forests as God’s first temple; they’re sacred places.

Other valuable insights I gained on my first trip:

1. Forestry is somewhat generational (ie, many interviewees got into forestry because their parent was a forester).
2. Forestry is a “can-do” industry. Pull yourself up by the bootstraps kind of work.

3. Forestry is an industry of relationships; between foresters, as well as between foresters and the public. Trust is key.
4. Forestry (in America) went from preservation techniques to conservation techniques. Preservation is harmful (National forests have been preserved to the point where they are now tinderboxes), while conservation is simply protection (allowing for a variety of techniques to manage forests).
5. A healthy forest is a working forest
6. The industry suffers from lack of diversity amongst its peers
7. Fire is inevitable – intensity and duration of wildfires is increasing. The 10 am policy (policy enacted in 1935 to put out all fires by 10am the next morning) is ineffective.
8. Idea of something only becomes an issue when it goes on the front page, or starts to affect a large number of people (i.e. if one person doesn't have access to tacos, it's not a problem. But if an entire state doesn't have access to tacos, then it's a taco shortage).
9. Lengths of scientific studies are extremely long-term (40 to 50 years).
10. Foresters love the forest.

I started doing character work. I had Anne and Charles down as characters, and knew I wanted Jane, Tom, and the Barman as characters. I structured Jane after some of the women I interviewed during the conference in Albuquerque. She's a very independent person, who puts up with a lot of shit at work, and doesn't really have anyone to talk to (or feels like she doesn't). I think she does most of the things in the play because she wants to be with Charles. They're friends, but Charles makes it awkward and weird.

Tom was interesting to develop. I went back and forth on what he was supposed to do and what he represented. For me, he represents this feeling of anxiety that I watch a lot of my friends (gen x, millennials) struggle with. He lives a completely different life from the townsfolk of Oakport (fictional name) in New York: constantly busy with very little time to himself. He's the kind of person who doesn't really know what to do with himself when given time. I think the idea of burnout comes with that: of going so fast and hard, at such an unsustainable pace that everything collapses at some point.

I developed Tom quite a bit in Manchester. I think his feeling of wanting to do something, but not sure how to do it was similar to mine. Also: his escape from the rush of constantly moving every day, yet finding discomfort with a slower-paced life, really developed during my time in the UK.

I think Hunter was a constant in my play. He has mostly everything figured out, or seems to. He loves his routine, and the quiet life: he's a man who's found Zen. He doesn't change or have an arc: he's someone who people want to be around because he's a cool dude. You feel comfortable with him, and he has that rugged charm about him.

With research and development in hand, I went off to the UK on a study abroad (which was actually more of a relaxing sabbatical than anything due to having no job, very few classes, and the four-week strike that occurred during my stay) to write the play. I already had the prologue written, and had mapped out characters and a basic structure of a plot, so a good portion of my work was done.

I wrote the first act in a two-day span of time. I had to stop myself afterwards, and really consider what this play was going to be. Unintentionally, I had written a 50-page first act, which I believed (if staged correctly) would run about an hour-fifteen to an hour-and-a-half. This was an exceptionally long act, considering I had planned on four more acts.

I was due for an excursion to London, where I went to see three plays: *AMADEUS* (at the National Theatre), *JULIUS CAESAR* (at the Bridge Theatre), and *THE FERRYMAN* (at the Gielgud Theatre). All three had runtimes of approximately three and a half hours. I thought about other shows I'd seen with long runtimes. There was Eugene O'Neil's works: certainly, I'd sat through the Roundabout Theatre's 4-hour production of *LONG DAYS JOURNEY INTO NIGHT*. I was also slated to view Action Hero's 6-hour, no-intermission, durational piece, *SLAP TALK*, later that month. I was even putting on my own 14-hour performance in Flagstaff that summer. I came to the conclusion that it would be perfectly ok if my show happened to be three-and-a-half to four hours in length (which it didn't, much to my thesis mentors' relief).

When I got back to Manchester, I had a bit of a drought for what I was writing about. I put it aside for a later time, and promptly forgot about most of it for about two months. It was about when I came back from my time in Greece that I really actively picked up writing again. I knew roughly what I wanted to happen, but wasn't entirely sure how to write it.

I spent a good amount of time walking in the park next to the dorms, just thinking. I knew that I wanted to structure the entire play such that each aspect could be related metaphorically to forestry. For example, the dialogue can be described with the 10 am policy: short bursts of dialogue that get extinguished by silence. And eventually, there's an explosive moment of dialogue/monologuing.

I wrote the epilogue at a café, and sealed the ending. It helped me understand a bit more of the themes I was working on, and gave me an end piece to work towards. After that, it was just filling in the pieces, and discovering the rest of the story. I didn't have the entire thing planned out: I had a skeleton of what I thought might happen, plus characters and their motivations. When I write I find that I usually hold pieces of a puzzle, and then it's all about figuring out where they all fit, and discovering new pieces along the way.

On May 18, 2018 at 1:07 am Manchester time, I finished the first draft and sent it out for feedback to a few friends, and thesis mentors.

I compiled two circulation copies: an entire first draft, and then a draft with just the pieces where characters talk about forestry. The later one was sent out to a few foresters for an accuracy check.

Initial feedback was positive: I got a lot of good suggestions on how to make the information in the play clearer.

Revising for a second draft, I cleaned up, and corrected, the forestry information. While none of it was "incorrect," what I received in feedback was that there were better ways to phrase things. For example, Jane talks about her work in Act II, scene 2. In the first draft, she calls mis-managed land a "factor" in larger forest fires. While this was correct, I found the better term to be "risk" because (especially when talking about publicly-owned National Forests) the decision to not maintain our forests exposes our lands to the threat and danger of extreme forest fires, which could easily be avoided with proper maintenance.

I cleaned up a lot of the dialogue, and made things more concise and flow more naturally (for example, I used more colloquialisms in draft 2 than I did in draft 1). I consider the largest change, however, to be in the end monologue. In draft 1, Jane says "I suppose we could move to Washington." In the second draft, I replaced the "we" with "you;" so: "I suppose you could move to Washington." This changes the entire arc of Jane and Charles, and what their relationship meant. The first draft was extremely hopeful, whereas the second draft leaves

everyone on their own in an uncertain state. I wanted to leave everything unresolved; I didn't want the audience to leave happy.

The first production was a simple reading. I aimed for November 15, and decided I'd direct the reading. I searched a lot for cast members: I had two friends from Tucson who were willing to be in the production. I was taking a business course, and two of the students were actors, so I thought I'd ask them. I found another while working in the scene shop at ASU. Theoretically, I had an entire cast.

I remember I sent out an email asking for good times that everyone could meet up before the performance to rehearse once or twice, and got zero response. I waited a week, and sent out another email, and also got no response. After the second week passed, I cut the entire cast (excepting the two from Tucson) and went looking for new actors. Here was the final casting for the first reading:

Charles – Dylan LaRay Welker

Jane – Sadie Scheufler

Anne – Grace Otto

Tom – Bryan Hanlon

Hunter – Andrew Wright

Rehearsing was interesting. I remember I was extremely particular about the lengths of pauses and beats. It definitely drove the actors slightly crazy, but I wanted to hear it as I'd written it this first time around. It wound up being a 2-hour-15-minute performance; exactly what I had expected from a reading. I think that with staging it will wind up being about 3 hours in length (intermissions included).

Unfortunately, I didn't quite get the feedback I had hoped to get. There wasn't a session held afterwards, and the feedback cards never made it back to me. However I do think the audience responded positively, that they found the story compelling, or interesting, and could connect with the themes.

ASU MainStage is producing the work as a TheatreLAB this April, so I hope to get a bit more of an idea of how people respond. I have a different director for this one as well, which I believe will allow me to step back and analyze the play from a different perspective. This will help in moving forward with a third, and final draft.

Part VI – Conclusion

There are several things I'll be taking away from this project. The most important one is that I've improved on my people skills. As an introvert, I found it hard to talk to a lot of people. Having forced myself to interview foresters, talk with foreign sound designers, arrange lighting design, arrange for lumber transport from a complete stranger, and (of course) working with actors, I've become more extroverted. I'm quicker in saying what I need, and more direct and clear with my direction.

Another important thing I learned in this entire process was that coming prepared to rehearsal is absolutely necessary. I remember walking into my first class as a director in the fall of 2018 with zero plans on what I was doing, and felt completely foolish. I hence have always come to rehearsal prepared with some vague schedule in mind. I have answers: I know exactly what I think of the play and its characters.

Of course, having an idea of what I want and trying to push that version out doesn't really get anywhere. I recall the time in Partlan's directing course when I staged an open scene using live video feed. I found it so restricting to the actors: I was always telling them where to be and what to do at what specific time just so I could get the perfect camera shot for the projection. I recall being on the set of *Official Secrets*, and watching a similar thing, where the director choreographed every movement of the film. I find this method to be extremely limiting to the actor, and often stomps on their individuality and dignity as an artist.

Learning to be flexible has led to collaboration, which I believe creates a better piece of art. This isn't to say that we collectively decide on a direction. I had the design, tone, and direction decided already. It's more that I had a house, and had an idea of how it would be decorated, and invited all the actors in to decorate it. Flexibility also helped me remain calm when all of my crises occurred.

Most importantly, I've found my style to my craft. I've learned how to research, design, edit, direct... I know what kind of theatre I want to direct, and how I want to go about it for future projects.

For example, while I've become better at directing actors, and understanding structure and character, I would love to explore experimental ideas. For example, revisiting the 14-hour durational piece on video games. Or exploring directing/devising in more metaphorical ways of story-telling. Interactive pieces have always fascinated me as well, and I have a few ideas of

shows I'd like to pursue later in my career. I would also like to experiment more with technology: wave-field synthesis, Augmented Reality, digital media, live-feed . "THIS IS A WESTERN" was created explicitly by creating 5-to-10-second shots at a time, and uploading them to Snapchat.

I believe there is plenty of potential to explore the boundaries of theatre beyond my solid training in traditional methods of directing and producing. I've applied to a few literacy fellowships, however my plan (should those positions fall through) is to look at more experimental theatre companies to work with.

Thank You For Your Time,
eFox

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