

4-1-2013

LOVE KILLS: Exploring Young Women in Shakespeare

Malcolm X. Evans

Trinity College, malcolm.evans@trincoll.edu

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Recommended Citation

Evans, Malcolm X., "LOVE KILLS: Exploring Young Women in Shakespeare". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2013.
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Malcolm Evans

Senior Thesis

Prof. Farlow

17 December 2012

LOVE KILLS: Exploring Young Women in Shakespeare

Entertainment, for the theatre-goer (you will notice that I spell theatre with “re” and not an “er;” it makes more sense to me this way) who has been involved in the production of what occurs onstage, during a performance, is impossible. It was with this knowledge that I arrived in London Heathrow Airport in early September of 2011. I arrived to spend a semester abroad, honing my acting skills, while also seeing professional productions; the basis of all of this was to be classical theatre texts. In my time abroad, I witnessed a production of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* at the Young Vic that did seem to shatter my bulk and end my being; it was a fantastic approach to the work, which I had never seen before, directed by Ian Rickson (Jerusalem) and starring Michael Sheen as the Lord Hamlet, himself, it was set in an asylum, “Elsinore,” pushing the audience to question Hamlet’s sanity more than ever. However, Sally Dexter, as Gertrude, was truly what captivated me; in the instant of seeing her die, I began to question what it was like for women in Shakespeare’s plays, let alone his time, which I came to think of later on in my research. I could not help, but feel that Gertrude was defenseless against the men in her life and I felt sympathy for her, though I had not previously. This question continued to plague me, as I rounded out my semester, working on one of Shakespeare’s latest works, *Two Noble Kinsmen*, which has considerable amount of focus on gender issues, in particular.

Returning to Trinity College, it was time to begin drafting my thesis proposal; after weeks of drafting, submitting, revising, and editing, I finally pared it down to a project entitled “Leading Ladies?: Female Roles in the Works of William Shakespeare.” This project intended to focus on *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Hamlet*. I later dropped *Twelfth Night* from the list. My original concept was to research and discuss these plays, as both literature and performative texts, meaning that I would research Shakespeare, as a playwright, and also the performances of his work, especially with the Elizabethan theatre, the convention under which the plays were written (although Shakespeare also wrote into and for the Jacobean theatre).

Months later, I arrived at the University of California, Los Angeles to take summer courses over a six week period from June until August of 2012. One of the courses, which I took in my time at UCLA, was dedicated to Shakespeare in performance, which was a perfect gateway to working on my thesis in the upcoming term; the course was only three students, so it loaned itself to a more independent course of study, wherein I chose to focus on *Romeo and Juliet*. I studied several versions of the text, several film and stage productions, conceptualized my own production of the play, and landed at what I realized would be my thesis production; it would focus on the tug of war between several opposites or contradictions within the play and would be staged on a cross-shaped runway with the audience seated, as if watching a fashion show. This experience would draw upon my own ideas for theatre, but also from experiences I had had in the theatre, specifically at Trinity College with Professor Mitchell Polin, whose experimental theatre truly engaged me, as a student. For various reasons, this project

changed yet again, but the research that went into the whole piece should be addressed first.

Of particular interest to me throughout my research were two things: first, that my initial two sources referenced in many places what became my third and largest source and second, that most of the information that turned up in my research I disagree with; the second note truly did manifest itself, as a catalyst, which pushed me to create a piece of work that I did agree with and that I did stand for, ultimately—my research made my work as an artist more difficult, which enabled me to create true art, not just a piece that agreed with the thoughts of every other Shakespearean feminist. I believe that Shakespeare could never and never did write strong female characters, who were able to be completely strong, as women. In particular, Juliet and Ophelia die for love, two young women that are deemed as weak from the beginning of their respective plays and whose lovers die for a plethora of reasons besides love, but which are often misconstrued for love. Shakespeare's men and women are unequal and certainly no young woman in Shakespeare has any power, for she is susceptible to love and love kills.

I proceeded to delve into my research, which led me to *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, which is a compilation of essays, assembled by three editors, Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely. Within the first few pages of its "Introduction," I knew that this book would become a great resource for me in helping to express how I felt about feminism and Shakespeare and what that meant. The "Introduction," penned by the three editors opens with the acknowledgement that "[f]eminist criticism is more a matter of perspective than of subject matter or gender (Lenz; Greene; Neely 3)," which immediately lifted a weight off of my shoulder. In many

ways, I felt that I had gained permission to comment on Shakespeare because I had the point of view, the perspective, of a feminist. I wondered how, if anything, had changed in feminist criticism of Shakespeare in the thirty years, since the book's publishing.

Specifically, I wondered if any more men had become involved; I find that it is a strange thing to be a male feminist, for a man has the right to give a woman power, but yet should not have that right. How does a man give power to a woman, in modesty, without imposing privilege upon the act? Even after completing my thesis, I am still not sure and it brings me back to my first experience with Juliet Dusinberre, a quotation that I found in the "Introduction" to *The Woman's Part*: "the struggle for women is to be human in a world which declares them only female (Lenz; Greene; Neely 3)." This quotation comes from Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* and is the reason why I decided to conduct research within that text in the first place; that struggle is still real and so again, the concept of success as a man came to my mind immediately I read the quotation. Look at any basic business: if a man is tough on his employees and in doing so increases productivity, he's a good boss, but as soon as a woman does that she is a "bitch" or a "slut" or any number of offensive things; the woman in business knows, however, that this is the only way she can succeed—she has to act, as a man, and yet still be judged, as a woman. Even in this success, there is still a price that women must pay, which men do not.

The "Introduction" continues, noting that, "...despite the presence of matriarchal subtexts, patriarchy seems to prevail throughout the canon of Shakespeare's plays (Lenz; Greene; Neely 5)." One only has to read *Hamlet* to see that this is true: how often are Gertrude and Ophelia brought up when discussing the text, when in reality they say so

little and have so little influence on the plot; the play is designed to be about patriarchal lineage and while there are many strong feminist ideals represented in the subtext, mainly in Gertrude, they are not enough to outweigh the presence of Claudius, Hamlet, or even Hamlet's father. Similarly, *Romeo and Juliet*, in truth has little to do with the title characters, but more to do with the Montague and Capulet families, of men, feuding with each other. Both these texts are also proof to the following: "[m]any...plays...reveal the high cost of patriarchal values; the men who uphold them atrophy, and the women, whether resistant or acquiescent, die (Lenz; Greene; Neely 6)." The death toll across the two plays borders on disgusting and those few men who remain alive have near naught to show for it.

Furthering the points made in the "Introduction" Paula S. Berggren leads the compilation with the title essay, "The Woman's Part: Female Sexuality as Power in Shakespeare's Plays." One of her beginning points immediately rang true to me: "The women in Shakespeare remain the Other...(Berggren 18)." This harkened back to DusiBerre's notion that women stand separate from the human race because they are deemed to be lesser by men. This can easily be seen in Capulet's treatment of virtually every woman in his household. Because of this, Juliet cannot possibly escape the fact that "...young women in these plays must be desexualized (Berggren 24)." Women get undercut in the Elizabethan theatre because they are being played by boys and there is not only taboo on women, but also on homosexuality, so the best way to deal with it is to avoid it, which means that women in the Elizabethan theatre become nearly asexual. This idea is what then fosters the idea that "...evil in Shakespearean women seems to grow from a sexuality so out of tune with its procreative potential that it breeds villainy rather

than children (Berggren 24).” There is now way for this not to be so; men cannot have possibly understood how to act as women because they had no interest in ever understanding women themselves in sixteenth century London. From this confusion, is born a confusion of identity in women, who are presented to be “...sometimes witch, sometimes saint, sometimes mother...(Berggren 34).” Men create women in whatever image they need them to be, in order to satisfy their own needs as men—Shakespeare was not immune to this phenomenon.

Madelon Gohlke, brings the reality of the plays home in her essay, “ ‘I wooed thee with my sword’: Shakespeare’s Tragic Paradigms,” lest we forget about “...the possibility that certain cultural fictions may be read metaphorically, that is, as expression of unconsciously held cultural beliefs (Gohlke 152).” In short, the lady doth protest Oscar Wilde; art, indeed, imitates life far more than life imitates art. It can then be said that the condition of gender relations was not nearly ideal in sixteenth century London. Gohlke notes from the beginning of her essay that “[w]hat is striking about the relationship between Romeo and Juliet...is the extent to which it anticipates and ultimately incorporates violence (152);” by her argument, Shakespeare’s audience would have understood, as we do now, that the violence in *Romeo and Juliet* is reflective of Elizabethan society. She says, “[r]ead metaphorically, the plot validates the perception expressed variously in the play that love kills (Gohlke 153).” This idea could be held true, then, for the real lives of Shakespeare and his peers (little did I know that this would become my thesis title, when I read this). Similarly, there is, in addition to general violence, a specific violence against women, which Gohlke speaks of, in relation to *Hamlet*: “Hamlet’s anger against women, based on his perception of his mother’s

conduct, finds expression in the language of prostitution in his violent outburst against Ophelia...(Gohlke 153).” Factually, there is a physical and verbal violence that is spoken of by Gohlke, who continues on to state that,

[t]his single act of displaced violence, moreover, has further ramifications in terms of Hamlet’s relation to Ophelia, whose conflicted responses to the killing of her father by her lover increase the burden of double messages she has already received from the men in the play and culminate in her madness and death. It is not his mother whom Hamlet kills (Claudius takes care of that) but Ophelia. Only when she is dead, moreover, is he clearly free to say that her loved her (Gohlke 154).

She makes the point again that love kills. Gohlke also facilitates the argument that, while love kills women, the death of women frees men (as if they were not already free).

The next essay, in the compilation, extends Gohlke’s argument. Coppélia Kahn argues in “Coming of Age in Verona” that the world of the play has violence, as its primary basis. Not only, is it seen literally in the feud, but it is seen in the interactions of various kinds between men and women. Specifically, Kahn believes that, “[i]t fosters in the sons fear and scorn of women, associating women with effeminacy and emasculation, while it links sexual intercourse with aggression and violence against women, rather than with pleasure and love (Kahn 173).” Kahn extrapolates further, restating what has already been said, that violence towards women is created out of an effort to prove oneself manly: “[I]ove is only manly...if it is aggressive and violent and consists of subjugating women, rather than being subjugated by them... (Kahn 176).” Effectively, Verona is such a place where there is no balance in the two genders, no sense of equality; it is rather perceived to be true in Verona that: either men are above women or women are above men and so the men, decidedly want to be on top. Kahn also goes as far as to bring forth an echo of Gohlke’s argument that love kills: “Mercutio considers love more folly unworthy of a real man and respects only the wounds suffered in combat. Ironically,

Mercutio will die of a real wound occasioned partly by Romeo's love, while Romeo, no less a man, will die not of a wound but of the poison he voluntarily takes for love (Kahn 176-177)." In effect, love kills both of the boys; it would appear that more than just women are susceptible to love after all. Finally, Kahn discusses the fact that Juliet is forced to be more manly than Romeo in her death, so the point remains that, even if Juliet is deemed strong (as false as I think that sentiment is), she is strong in terms of a man and does not succeed as a woman: "...it is Juliet, not Romeo, who boldly uses his dagger, against herself (Kahn 190)." Reading the phallic imagery in that statement, Juliet must become a man to kill herself; there is nothing womanly about Juliet in the end, except her weakness in that state. Her disobedience, in and of itself, is a manly feat, which is a striking comparison to Ophelia who is also weak as a woman, although she remains in her role.

Rebecca Smith's essay, "A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude," admittedly focuses more on the queen herself, but does speak to the world of the play, as a whole. Something that I took as a large note, when eventually compiling my script, was the following: "Laertes advises Ophelia that 'best safety lies in fear' (I.iii.43), and Polonius, in a mean-minded speech, demands her immediate rejection of Hamlet's apparently 'honorable' (111) espousals of love. To all of this, Ophelia replies, 'I shall obey, my lord' (136) (Smith 198)." Ophelia's compliancy with these men may seem to a contemporary audience to be completely ridiculous--but not in the world of the play because a young woman in court, at any time in European history, would not have had the authority to defy her father or the Prince Hamlet. Her length of response is also of mention; Smith speaks about the fact that "Gertrude appears in only ten of the twenty

scenes that comprise; furthermore, she speaks very little, having less dialogue than any other major character in *Hamlet*—a mere 157 lines out of 4,042 (3.8 percent) (Smith 199).” And those are nice figures, but according with the time, women, as some would say children are now, are to be seen and not heard. At the very least, Gertrude is allowed to be seen by the audience and by the people in the play. Ophelia, on the other hand is practically kept in captivity and one is unsure how she becomes so integral to the plot in the span of her five scenes. I next went on to read Juliet’s Dusinberre’s text, which was referenced without end throughout the essay compilation.

“The central thesis of *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* is that the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries are not just agents in the emancipation of women in our own time, but that they dramatize worlds in which women are and were freer beings than the misogyny and disempowerment narrative suggests (Dusinberre xii).” Juliet and I were off to a rough start; she claims exactly what I am trying to argue against, what most of the authors from my other source agree with. Why were they citing her as someone who supported their argument? I was lost. I pushed on. Dusinberre notes in her “Preface to the Third Edition: Into the Twenty-first Century” that “[t]he Elizabethan theatre had to please women (Dusinberre xvi)” and that “...theatre, its pleasures, its practitioners, its dramatists and its patrons, received the support of the highest in the land: the queen herself (Dusinberre xxiii).” To summarize, because a queen was in power and not a king, women had to be pleased, during the portion of Shakespeare’s career that was under Elizabethan rule. On paper, this makes logical sense, but for my better part I would argue that even though Elizabeth was queen she would want to maintain the previously established societal order; just because she was queen should not have and did not mean

that women were going to be raised to a higher status in society for the duration of her term in office. However, Dusinger did also note two other things in this section of writing that did make sense to me: firstly, “[r]eviewers, an almost entirely male body, also exercise a profound influence on how the plays are performed (Dusinger xxii) and secondly she cites Bernard Capp’s notion that “ ‘Queen Elizabeth I, like Margaret Thatcher, liked to present herself as a unique phenomenon, not as a model for others to emulate. (Dusinger xxiv).’ ” So, my argument become re-validated by Dusinger; men still had a considerable amount of control over the world of Elizabethan theatre and Elizabeth herself, to a degree, did not want other women to have the liberties and mobility that she retained in her office. Women, during Shakespeare’s time, were no stronger than I had perceived in his texts, despite Dusinger’s comments.

Towards the end of her thoughts in the preface she states a sentiment, which I echo in my thesis performance’s director’s note: “[f]or me, feminism is about having a voice; it is about women’s voices, but also about voices with whom women have always been able to claim allegiance across the divide of gender: the voices of the dispossessed, many of the whom are mal artists, often homosexual, often working-class (Dusinger lviii).” I think this point is well-made and still rings true, but the question arises for me still: whose responsibility is it to award power? It is absolutely in my mind that this particular power is inherent, but at this juncture in time someone must advocate for women, effectively giving them back the power, which is theirs by nature. Before delving into Dusinger’s text proper, I would like to share a quotation from her second edition’s preface that sparks a curiosity in me: “[w]as Eve inferior to Adam because she was

created second or was she superior to him because she was God's final effort (Dusinberre xxxviii)?"

"The Problem of Equality," is the title of Dusinberre's second chapter. She cites from this point the inequality presence in *Hamlet*: "Ophelia has no chance to develop an independent conscience of her own, so stifled is she by the authority of the male world (Dusinberre 94)." According to her, and as is evidenced in the text of the play, Ophelia never stands a chance against the wrath of the several men she serves in the play. Equality is never an option for her, as a character; one may say that it is more of an option to Gertrude, as queen, but she has already lived a good bulk of her life, so in fact, if anyone were to have equality it would be Ophelia—if she doesn't get equality, nobody in Elsinore will. On a side note, Dusinberre adds that, "[I]ack of liberty classes women not with men, but with boys (Dusinberre 95)," which is something she discusses in her later chapter "Femininity and Masculinity." As far as it pertains to the discussion of equality, it should be noted that, as Dusinberre alludes, boys are seen as equal to women until their voice changes and they become men; in many ways age factors into equality as well. Make no mistake, however, boys still have certain luxuries, which girls do not, though perhaps women do; Polonius points this out to Ophelia: "For Lord Hamlet,/ Believe so much in him, that he is young/ And with a larger tether may he walk/ Than may be given you...(Shakespeare I.iii.123-126)" What's maybe even worse, to return briefly to the idea of chastity, is that "[t]he position of the unmarried woman was only different from the position of the whore in being labelled respectable (Dusinberre 123)." Truly, women in Elizabethan time were damned if they did, damned if they didn't; it almost makes sense that Juliet and Ophelia off themselves—being lesbian wasn't even an

opportunity for happiness to them, despite all of Emilia's talk to Hippolyta "[t]ha the true love 'tween maid and maid may be/ More than in sex dividial (Shakespeare I.iii.81-82)." In fact, there was no hope for women because, as according to DusiBerre, "Elizabethan and Jacobean feminism was a movement of minds but not facts. Puritanism failed to give its ideas on women any permanent form, unless that form might be said to be the plays of Shakespeare (DusiBerre 136)," which it cannot, in my reading of the plays.

This is where my research ended, in a rage. A rage against the concept that women have ever been treated equally and in a rage against a woman, Juliet DusiBerre, who mustered the energy to write an entire book, arguing that Shakespeare's women are progressive, considering their position in the Elizabethan theatre convention, despite the fact that she will go through life being treated as no more than a woman because of the way Juliet Capulet was treated in Shakespeare's play and how she is still treated today, as a literary character. My research left me feeling dissatisfied with Shakespeare, as a writer of women. He may have taken older narratives to make his own, but he did not question the preexisting treatment of women in these narratives. I needed to question Shakespeare in my thesis because he and his contemporaries alike did not question the role of women in their work. All his women seemed to be the same to me. I realized that the way to highlight this was to juxtapose two of his plays somehow to show the similarities in his women. I became obsessed with showing that, not only are his women similarly weak, but also, similarly, love kills these women. There is a pattern in his stories (or, if you like, the narratives he chooses to write from) where women are treated poorly, fall in love with their oppressor(s), and are subsequently killed by that love.

These thoughts in mind, I proceeded to begin my project and assemble my script. After initial meetings with my thesis advisor, Professor Lesley Farlow, I set out a semester long schedule for my thesis. I knew my play would be focusing on the stories of Juliet and Ophelia, the female lovers in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, respectively. With that in mind, I made lists of scenes, in which they appeared. I wanted to tell the story of a young woman who falls in love with a young man who does not reciprocate her love with the same level of dependence; for the women, love can either save or kill them, but for the men it does not matter and it is this conflict of intensity that loans itself to love killing the women. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet appears in I.iii, I.v, II.ii, II.v, II.vi, III.ii, III.v, IV.i, IV.ii, IV.iii, and V.iii; of note, she never has a truly private dialogue with anyone, except the Nurse or Lady Capulet (II.ii with Romeo may be considered, but the Nurse calls from within the mansion. So, Juliet is never actually alone onstage with her lover, Romeo. In contrast to Juliet, Ophelia, appears on stage in *Hamlet* far less; she is in I.iii, II.i, III.i, III.ii, and IV.v and, similarly to Juliet, never has a truly private dialogue with any other character. I decided to create a new play out of the scenes, to tell the story of the two ladies, as one lady; I sought to draw a parallel between Shakespeare's women and the best way to do this was to make them a singular character. I wove together a story, alternating between scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. I entitled my preliminary script: **LOVE KILLS: Exploring (Young?) Women in Shakespeare**. Ultimately, it was just a working title that stuck. The scene order was:

Act I, Prologue – *Romeo and Juliet* The Lovers Meet

Act I, Scene iii – *Hamlet* Father/Daughter Advice Part I

Act I, Scene v – *Romeo and Juliet* (only Capulet's speech)

Act II, Prologue – *Romeo and Juliet*

- Act II, Scene ii – *Romeo and Juliet* Balcony Scene
- Act II, Scene i – *Hamlet* Father/Daughter Advice Part II
- Act II, Scene v – *Romeo and Juliet* Preparing for the Wedding
- Act II, Scene vi – *Romeo and Juliet* Wedding Scene
- Act III, Scene i – *Hamlet* Male Love Rejects Female Lover
- Act IV, Scene v – *Hamlet* (only Ophelia's song)
- Act V, Scene iii – *Romeo and Juliet* Death Scene

In the plot of the story, the two lovers meet and fall in love, but the female lover must gain consent from parental figures first. She receives conflicting instructions to both go with and stay away from the male lover; she takes the one, which ultimately leads to her downfall, going to the male lover and marrying him, only for him to reject her, leaving love to kill her. Length was becoming an issue, so I made the decision that I would be okay with working only with the *Romeo and Juliet* scenes or only with the *Hamlet* scenes, as well. Double casting of the scenes would also be necessary, so settling on the fact that I wanted Juliet and Ophelia to be double cast, I decided that double casting Romeo and Hamlet only made sense. I was left with the characters of Laertes, Polonius, Capulet, Nurse, Friar Laurence, Prince, and Chorus. How would I narrow this down to a manageable cast? An idea that remained true to the end, was the idea of having the Prince and Chorus characters be spoken in voice over. I headed into another meeting, then with Professor Farlow. We discussed my issue with narrowing down the cast and the idea came forth to double Polonius, Capulet, and the Nurse, as advice figures to the women. Later on in the meeting, the idea to use voice over for Capulet, also came up, and was the ultimate decision in the production. We settled upon a new scene order:

- Act I, Prologue – *Romeo and Juliet* The Lovers Meet
- Act I, Scene iii – *Hamlet* Father/Daughter Advice Part I

Act I, Scene v – *Romeo and Juliet* (only Capulet’s speech)

Act II, Scene ii – *Romeo and Juliet* Balcony Scene

Act II, Scene i – *Hamlet* Father/Daughter Advice Part II

Act II, Prologue – *Romeo and Juliet* (moved)

Act II, Scene v – *Romeo and Juliet* Preparing for the Wedding

Act II, Scene vi – *Romeo and Juliet* Wedding Scene

Act III, Scene i – *Hamlet* Male Lover Rejects Female Lover

Act IV, Scene v – *Hamlet* (only Ophelia’s song)

Act V, Scene iii – *Romeo and Juliet* Death Scene

and a final cast:

Romeo/Hamlet

Juliet/Ophelia

Nurse/Polonius

Friar Laurence

Capulet (V.O.)

Prince (V.O.)

Chorus (V.O.)

I was working towards an audition date for sometime during the week of September 17, 2012. I drafted a poster, having taken a black and white picture on my phone of an image that I think truly embodied the work that was about to happen, a dagger covered in blood, running under water, alluding to both Juliet’s and Ophelia’s suicides, simultaneously. Auditions would be held on Wednesday, September 19. I thought I had a pretty successful ad campaign. Many people, according to my Facebook event, were planning on coming and I had heard much interest via word of mouth discussions. Two girls and one boy showed up to my audition and three girls and one boy

e-mailed me to meet, outside of the scheduled audition time. In the auditions, I sought to see individual work and also work with partners, opting for a hybrid between a formal, classical audition (where one speaks a monologue in front of a director) and a rehearsal. I required all candidates to work with Capulet's speech from I.v of *Romeo and Juliet* and then to work in several pairings on II.ii's exchange between the lovers themselves. For all candidates, I asked them to first perform Capulet's speech standing still, to focus solely on the language, and then to perform again, in any manner they wanted, with one note from me, which was always to use the lines to motivate their gestures.

Connor Sheridan was the first to audition. I noted that his projection was quite good, without him needing to yell and that he was a great risk taker, taking direction, trying, and committing to his various attempts. On his audition sheet, it was clear to me that he had some semblance of experience, despite the fact that he was first-year student; he had acted in *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, and Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*, which is a personal favorite of mine. Something that concerned me, from the beginning though, was the notion that he seemed very bland on paper, his schedule being free after noon on most days. He wasn't involved in living life, which is, I think, crucial to being an actor. He seemed to me to be two-dimensional. Also, he did not work well with scene partners. He was rigid and loathe to communicate with other people sharing the stage with him.

Up next was Caitlin Crombleholme, a personal friend of mine, whom I had solicited to come audition for LOVE KILLS. Because I knew her before hand, as a peer, the audition for her would be a space to see how well she could take direction. Immediately, she confirmed what I already knew in her, which was that she understood the text and its musicality enough to warrant a note of mine, "variation in tone," and to

take high risks. She was able to take my direction and surprised me with things I did not know about her, on her audition sheet. For example, she made me aware of the fact that her dog is named after Bilbo Baggins.

Leaving these auditions I was none too pleased, worrying that I only had one castable person to fill four roles. The next day, I met with Rachael Burke and Emily Jensen. Rachael pleased me very much and I heavily considered her in casting. Directly after working with Rachael, I had the opportunity to work with Emily Jensen, who came to me with many accolades; she was referred to me by Sarah Sandbach, who had already signed on to be my stage manager, and was also recommended by a peer major, Lindsay Walker. In the audition, the first impression I got from her was her nervousness. Despite, her nervousness, she did manage to give a quality audition, using vocal range and character development to demonstrate her understanding of the text. She took risks and was not afraid to speak to me about her ideas on Shakespeare, which impressive to me for someone who was so nervous.

I then proceeded to schedule several meetings with two other people interested in auditioning. They never followed through with the auditions. I was left to cast from my initial pool, consisting of Connor, Lara, Caitlin, Rachael, and Emily. As I began to make my decisions, Rachael e-mailed me, explaining to me that she had to withdraw her audition. I was faced with the task of somehow squeezing three people into four stage parts and three voiceover parts. So, I made an executive decision, which, in the end, served the work far better than the original casting would have: I merged the Friar Laurence role into the double cast role of the Nurse and Polonius.

I proceeded to cast Connor, as the only role requiring a male, Romeo/Hamlet. Caitlin became my obvious choice for Juliet/Ophelia; I knew she could carry the work and her vocal range was suited better to playing women, despite the fact that she had played men in two main stage productions at the College. Connor and Caitlin would each be tasked with playing a singular character, who would speak the lines written for two different characters, one each from *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. Finally, I cast Emily, as the Nurse, Polonius, and Friar Laurence; in deciding to cast her like this, instead of the idea of finding unity in the characters, she would have a unique challenge of playing three separate characters. Going into rehearsals, I mapped out a rehearsal schedule, ahead of time to give to the cast, based upon what they said their availability would be. It would begin with three weeks of one-on-one with rehearsals with each of the cast members and myself. I would have liked this period to be shorter, but I began rehearsals the week before Trinity Days and there would be no avoiding of pre-made plans, especially since two of my cast members were seniors. After these three weeks, we would have two weeks of full company, a tech weekend, and a show week

Before these one-on-one rehearsals, I had a meeting with everyone to discuss the action plan for the production, including the introduction of the schedule, with the show running on November 7, 2012, the day after the Presidential Election, no less. I explained that our job, as a group, would be to tell a great story, which would keep the audience's interest. I also told them about the goal of my thesis, to put it in their heads, but I told them that it was my job to make sure that it was translated from my mind to the stage, not theirs; again, their job, with my collaboration, was to tell an engaging story. I also shared with them, at this time, two concepts that came up in meetings with Professor Farlow: the

idea that these characters, despite the language barrier, must be relevant to today's society and also the idea that the rehearsal process was an open one—I told them repeatedly that whatever part of the script fell on the rehearsal room floor was okay with me, if something didn't work, there was no sense in keeping it.

The one-on-one rehearsals were designed to assist them with the language and perfect it before going into group rehearsals. I wanted them off-book by the first group rehearsal on October 24, 2012, but in the meantime to truly wrestle with the difficult language, especially since word perfection is a must, when playing verse. In these rehearsals, each of them had strengths and weaknesses. Connor, had an understanding of how to speak the language, but was not thinking, as he spoke, which was a problem that persisted throughout the entirety of the production. In addition to this, his knowledge, of the way in which to speak Shakespeare, turned from his biggest asset into his biggest detractor; he would assume he knew the progress of many of his speeches and, as a result, memorized many of them incorrectly, specifically the prose in the *Hamlet* scenes.

Caitlin's biggest problem was, ultimately, her knowledge of her importance in the project. She entered the one-on-one rehearsals with a superb understanding of the language and was clearly working towards memorization within the first rehearsal. However, she was loathe to react to her fellow actors, including myself in the one-on-ones, which admittedly were giving her minimal stimulus to work from; she would react far larger than any given impetus would suggest and this became a note, which was given to her and that she worked on and polished. Caitlin also brought great intellect to the work from day one. She understands my thought process very well and was easy to work

with and was also a true collaborator, not just an actor in my thesis; she is the reason why the final scene order is not either of the ones above, but rather:

Act I, Prologue – *Romeo and Juliet* Lovers Meet
 Act I, Scene v – *Romeo and Juliet* (only Capulet’s speech) (moved)
 Act II, Scene ii – *Romeo and Juliet* (moved) Balcony Scene Part I
 Act I, Scene iii – *Hamlet* (moved) Father/Daughter Advice Part I
 Act II, Scene ii – *Romeo and Juliet* (continued) Balcony Scene Part II
 Act II, Scene i – *Hamlet* Father/Daughter Advice Part II
 Act II, Prologue – *Romeo and Juliet* (moved)
 Act II, Scene v – *Romeo and Juliet* Preparing for the Wedding
 Act II, Scene vi – *Romeo and Juliet* Wedding Scene
 Act III, Scene i – *Hamlet* Male Lover Rejects Female Lover
 Act IV, Scene v – *Hamlet* (only Ophelia’s song)
 Act V, Scene iii – *Romeo and Juliet* Death Scene

This was a flow, which I had not previously seen or considered, but which served the work at great length. This allowed the relationship between the two lovers to be fleshed out more, before the advice scenes, which then brought a greater tension into the plot.

Emily’s nervousness proceeded to present itself in the one-on-one rehearsals. She, like Caitlin, was a great pool of intellect for me to tap into, but I cannot say whether or not she had any lasting impact on decisions made to serve the work. This being said, it was clear that she did the homework needed to contribute her fair share to the project. She was not, apparently, working on being off-book, since she was reading from the script in our one-on-ones, but somehow her speaking of the language would make leaps and bounds every meeting; I thought this was curious and noted it mentally.

In rehearsal, I stressed the importance of making the characters of the play relevant to today's audience. My first step was to use props and costumes, which were not period based and which the audience would be able to see and accept for exactly what they were. For the actors, I asked them merely to find the truth in each of the characters. For example, Juliet and Ophelia are just young women who want to be loved, but are conflicted by familial influence; I think most young women know what it is to "fall in love with a bad boy," who their parents do not think of fondly.

Subsequently, full company rehearsals began, which meant that Sarah Sandbach would also be joining us in rehearsals. Sarah doubled, as my sound designer, and Caitlin, as my lighting designer. After meeting with, the College's Production Supervisor, Ritz Ubides, it was clear that, for practical reasons, my original stage and lighting concept could not be carried out, during this production. I put this aside, and decided to work on it, during tech, but made Sarah and Caitlin aware of the impending work that would need to be conducted on that. In the group rehearsals, Caitlin was the only person working off-book, despite my request that everyone be memorized prior to full company rehearsals. I realized that this was partially on me, since I had not given the cast tools to help them memorize. Some actors, I remembered from various experience of my own, memorized better with blocking, to provide additional cues, so we came up with working blocking for the show in our first week of rehearsal, which could be tweaked based upon the final lighting design of the production.

As rehearsals progressed, though, several issues arose to confront our successes. Namely, Caitlin and Emily had several last minute conflicts between themselves, which I could not deny. For example, Caitlin had to leave the state to attend a performance for her

own thesis. I had to reconfigure the rehearsal schedule multiple times. These were easy setbacks to handle. What came next was Hurricane Sandy, which nobody anticipated. We lost two crucial rehearsals, which led up to our tech weekend and subsequent production week. I tried to make use of the time I had and proceeded to collect the props and costume needed for the projection, sending Connor out to retrieve the letters, which Hamlet gives to Ophelia; I maintain that Connor needed to pick out the letters, in order to give them more meaning to him, as they were his prop and he had to give them out of love.

Coming back from the Hurricane, everything was in good shape; everyone was off-book, the props were collected, and we had an opportunity to truly work into the script. In the previous week's meeting with my advisor, I discussed with her alternate stage concepts. We decided upon a quadrant system, which the play was, ultimately, performed in. The play would move in a counter-clockwise circle to represent the repression of women and the destruction of the women in the production. The downstage left quadrant was the world of advice, the realm of the Nurse and Polonius; the upstage left quadrant was the world of Romeo and Juliet, the balcony, in effect; the upstage right quadrant was the world of Hamlet, Elsinore; the downstage right quadrant was the world of birth and death; the wedding and death scenes. So, heading into the tech weekend, I imposed the quadrant system upon the rehearsals, to get the actors accustomed to performing the blocking within the constraints of the system. Something that arose from this imposition was the concept of having the Juliet/Ophelia characters always on the periphery of the stage. The actors were doing this naturally in about half the scenes and I

asked them to try doing it in all of them and liked what we had found together. I thought that it helped to suggest the weakness of women in Shakespeare's works.

Tech weekend itself was much of a blur. Sarah Sandbach supported me greatly, as Stage Manager; she was able to stay on top of lines and run cues, with ease, which made my job of looking at the big picture, more easily done. There was one piece missing, however: the voice over roles. I had attempted recording the voice over roles myself with Sarah, but it didn't feel right; if I had done that, it would have had a sense of narcissism and self-indulgence and that made me largely uncomfortable. Luckily, Sarah's boyfriend, Will Patterson, had taken refuge from Hurricane Sandy's attack on New York at Trinity. Sarah made the suggestion that he do the voice over roles, since he had been attending rehearsals for fun. Since he had had a background in theatre, I felt that this would be an advantageous choice on my part. Also, in the world of sound, I decided that I would use music from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* ballet to stage the ball in the beginning of the show. The piece suited the production well, but a dance piece for Connor was a challenge. Getting him to move in time, without being rigid, proved to be an uphill battle.

During the tech weekend, the only thing left to be figured out was the lighting; Caitlin and I tinkered around with the lights, the nights before tech weekend began and, out of sheer luck (in retrospect), the magic sheet was incorrect. (Ultimately, Ritz brought the right one to the Performance Lab, where the show was being performed, before tech weekend commenced.) In our tinkering, many spotlights came up at once and I came around to the idea of having all nine spots up at once, meaning that the quadrants would overlap. My new concept was in front of me. The quadrants would overlap and, as the play climaxed, the stage would divide rather into an upstage and downstage half. I

wanted the stage to end in a wash of red, but that was the only place where the lights let me down. There was no red wash, but rather a pinkish tone, which I thought was inappropriate, so Caitlin and I settled on a dark blue wash, which represented the deaths, at the end of the show. I still think, though, that red would have demonstrated the truly destructive power of both plays better, but I made what I had work.

On Sunday, November 4, 2012, we began final runs of the show. We started runs with interjections by me and on Monday, November 5, 2012, began to run the show without stopping. At this time, I proceeded to observe the show from the rear of the Performance Lab and take extensive notes. Many of the notes went to Connor and Emily, but the largely the notes became notes on performance, rather than lines, which I was pleased to discover. I can say that Emily took many notes, but, as had proven in the one-on-one rehearsals, Connor found it difficult to take and retain notes from one run to the next.

Finally, the night of the production came and I sat back and watched with pleasure. My vision had come to life and, while it was imperfect, it was what it needed to be. Looking back on it, I can see where the production had issues, namely the demonstration of the relationship between Connor and Caitlin on stage; there was simply a lack of chemistry that the audience played witness to. I think that this problem was founded in where Connor is in his acting training, which is not nearly as far along as Caitlin is. That in combination with my minimal training, as a director, led to the lack of chemistry not being able to be fixed, as it was something that was present from the start, not just something that developed.

However, I also believe that the work I wanted to achieve was achieved. I sought out to call out Shakespeare on his lack of feminism, but ultimately created a piece, which sought to empower women, regardless of Shakespeare's intent. I did this by creating a world in which the plight of the woman is intensified and becomes the main plot of the story being told on stage; this is mainly seen in the pushing of Caitlin's character to the periphery of every scene, literally. I wanted to show people in the audience that Shakespeare's women are treated poorly and are weak, so that women in the audience would feel empowered in wanting to be nothing like Shakespeare's women and men in the audience could empower women by not objectifying them like Shakespeare's men do. The merging of the plays, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, strengthened this concept; showing the audience that it is not just one, but all of Shakespeare's young women who suffer the tragedy of love killing them, by creating a fluidity between two characters from separate works fueled the intention to empower women. I'm proud to say that I think this was achieved, since an audience member told me so, without any solicitation. The work I created with my collaborators was also important for me to create; I had to somehow rationalize in myself how I could be a man and be a feminist, despite the fact that my homosexuality is sometimes deemed to loan itself to bridging that gap. LOVE KILLS was also important for the audience to see because, as I say in my director's note: "It should be noted that the subject matter of this performance is not irrelevant to our present society. A woman's role in society is still being debated and it is important to remember, in these debates, that a woman does have her own voice, as well. In fact, this project would not have been possible without the voices of several women." As I finish writing

this thesis, I must say that this still holds true. The kind of theatre I needed to create in this project was one that demanded change and I think that LOVE KILLS did just that.

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