

The Anatomy of Satire: Recreating
Christopher Durang's
The Actor's Nightmare

Senior Project: Ramsey Kristian Heitmann

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Senior Advisor: Imani Douglas
Second Reader: Jordan Schildcrout

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Artistic Aims

This project has all the signs of being an enlightening experience for me. After reading the script and getting together with the rest of my cast and crew, I can confidently say I'm excited to get to work. Although our rendition of *The Actor's Nightmare*, by Christopher Durang, isn't the largest or most elaborate theater piece I've worked on to date, it will give me some opportunities and responsibilities I haven't had in years past. Considering I've worked mostly in theater outside of the university, I haven't had nearly the same amount of responsibility I will for my senior project. With that being said, I knew I had to set some goals for myself. Creating your own work is a unique experience, and with it I have two main artistic goals. The first is noticeable growth as an actor. This was always going to be a goal of mine and considering I haven't worked on many comedic pieces in the past, I have a lot of room to grow and learn. The second is more as a creator. As I mentioned earlier, I don't have much experience with actually creating my own work. Although I did not write or am not directing the play, as a senior I have a lot of say in how this play will be performed and received. Another smaller goal of mine to note is as a member of a team. I want to have solid chemistry with everyone in my cast and crew in hopes it will show on stage. I haven't had an issue with this in the past, but I really want to get close with my team.

My first and probably the more obvious goal is growth as an actor. With a concentration in acting, I really want to see and feel like I've grown. The intriguing thing about our piece is that I am going to be working in a meta-theatrical environment. In other words, I will be playing an actor playing another character. Not only is this theatrical element foreign to me, but it is not the only element I have little experience in.

The Actor's Nightmare is a comedy, through and through. Considering all my past classes and artistic endeavors, I cannot recall a single time I focused on solely comedic elements as an actor. I am really looking forward to stretching my acting chops and testing myself. To set myself up properly, I considered the late great Robin Williams quote, "comedy starts as a spew, a kind of explosion, and then you sculpt it from there, if at all. It comes out of a deeper, darker side." I've always been impressed by Robin Williams, and he still is an inspiration of mine. I plan on watching back some of his performances, with the hope of taking some of his brilliance with me to the stage.

I am currently in Andrea Thome's "Satire and Social Dialogue" class. I intend on using some of the comedic elements' satire provides. By studying satire and social dialogue, I can better understand parody. Parody, defined by Merriem-Webster as, "a literary or musical work in which the style of an author or work is closely imitated for comic effect or in ridicule" is at the heart of *The Actor's Nightmare*. This play is deceptively complicated, as it takes scenes from many different theatrical pieces and mends them together in a sort of dream-world mashup way. I am familiar with some of the pieces, but more careful readings are going to be imperative for me to understand some of the comedy in this play.

I play two characters in *The Actor's Nightmare*, Henry and The Executioner. Playing Henry, which is a reference to the once great actor Henry Irving, is going to be my biggest challenge. Considering the mashup of plays in this piece, I'm going to need to dive into how an actor would play certain characters. This meta element is where I intend on using my practice of parody the most. Considering how goofy and absurd this play is,

creating convincing and funny parody will be the catalyst to a successful run. This is easily my most important short-term goal.

As an athlete, I have always had to work exceptionally hard on staying in shape and keeping my body at peak fitness. Depending on what sport I was playing, I had to learn technique extensively. Every sport has its own technique, and each sport tests your body in different ways. This is no different when it comes to acting. One of the tools I do not fully utilize and focus on when diving into a role is movement and physicality.

Physicality is ubiquitous in theater and is even more prevalent in comedies. The body is an actor's canvas. Most helpful in unlocking and utilizing this tool will be working closely with "Advanced movement" teacher, Jill Echo. After meeting with her a few times, I intend on using some of her techniques to better understand the physicality that pairs so well with parody. I plan on focusing on warming up techniques, embodiment training, improvisational work, and emotional study. Each of these will make me better prepared to portray Henry and the Executioner and will certainly help me achieve my goal of sustained work post conservatory.

Another piece of the actor's puzzle I will need to obtain is voice training. I find this play to be a perfect gateway into mastering accents and dialogue. The meta element of *The Actor's Nightmare* is what first really drew me to it, and playing an actor playing multiple characters in one play is a massive challenge for me. It is imperative to the success of the piece that I play a large role in helping to immerse and convince the audience I am playing a different character in each of my scenes. The way I am going to achieve this is by creating a distinct accent for each of my characters. By studying tonality and different accents I can unlock different ways to portray characters. I play on

studying three different accents, Lowland Scottish for The Executioner in the *A Man for All Seasons* scene, West Country or Southwest British for Horatio in the *Hamlet* scene, and a Transatlantic accent for Henry's introduction scene. After researching dialects, these three will work seamlessly. They are unique and very different from one another, which is exactly what I'm looking for. In the short term this will create the effect I'm looking for in the play. In the long-term simply learning how to study accents and dialects is wildly important. It is also an attractive trait for an actor to have when being considered for certain roles. Mastering different accents and dialects adds versatility and leeway.

Since last year Professor Janis Astor Del Valle has really opened my eyes to the opportunity's actors can create for themselves by producing their own work. In my "Introduction to Independent Producing" class, Professor Del Valle is pushing our boundaries and testing our creativity when it comes to original production. Although I am not rewriting *The Actor's Nightmare* or creating a parody of the play, our version of this work is just that, ours. In a way, I have found myself in a sort of executive producing role as well as an actor. From carefully considering a cast to helping raise money for the play, I am a bonified creator of this piece of theater. As mentioned earlier, I've done most of recent theater work outside of the BA program. Usually, this entails semi-professional or professional theater endeavors. In that atmosphere I am not expected to do any extra work behind the scenes like fundraising or choosing who will be acting alongside me. Of course, I have plenty of experience with making my own choices as an actor, but my work on *The Actor's Nightmare* will be much more than that. The prospect of interpreting different lines, making set choices, and helping others make character choices are all very

exciting. My goal for this production is to learn the ropes as a creator, and I plan on doing that by doing my own research on the play, working closely with my fellow creators, and getting to know all the different jobs and their responsibilities to the piece as a whole.

As an actor, one of the first things that you learn is that you cannot do it all. If you try, you will regularly make either your fellow actors look bad, or yourself. In most cases, both of these would be true. I remember watching high school level productions and noticing the difference between the quality and interest from the actors. When you have one or two people not working with the rest of the cast for whatever reason, the entire production suffers. I have personally experienced a few productions like that during my high school theater days, and I can say that in some cases I was the problem. I will protest that I did not know any better and either thought too highly of myself or was frustrated with some of my fellow actors. One of the worst qualities an actor can have is to be unteachable or ignorant. I wasn't until I tasted some professional theater in New York City that I realized collaboration on every level is the catalyst to a wholesome production that the team can feel confident in. I would like to believe I have become a great team player in the last few years, and I really hope to show that on stage. I already have a solid base of friendship with my director Jeremy Suarez and the lead Jacob Wade. My goal for this production is really to get close with everyone in the cast, offer as much help as I can with the crew, and leave myself open for critique from everyone. I hope to benefit from working with this really talented cast and crew that we are beginning to assemble. My hope is that through our off-stage relationship, our on-stage will prosper. I hope the audience will be able to see the chemistry between all of us.

Research Essay

Christopher Durang's play *The Actor's Nightmare* revolves around dreaming. George Spelvin does not recall any of his lines and doesn't remember rehearsing them at all. He is thrown into the thick of things immediately, having to fake his way through different plays that switch faster than he can catch up. Durang's approach on creating this nightmare is through comedy. There are many ways to approach comedy, and reviews from the original production detail just how Durang does it. *The Actor's Nightmare* was first staged at Playwrights Horizons New York City on October 14th, 1981. Frank Rich wrote about the performance in the *New York Times*. In his review he states, "The premise lets Mr. Durang show off his gift for theatrical and show-biz satire." Also working for the *New York Times*, Carol Lawson claims that Durang is, "a demonic satirist for whom no subject is sacred." Approaching theater with satire is not new in the theater business. Satire can be extremely complex. Satire also tends to use comedy to mask very serious subject matter. Through the detailing of satire in this play, arguments can be made that this play may be more dramatic than people recall. Considering what the point behind the use of satire is, *The Actor's Nightmare* is in many cases a drama.

To understand this exploratory idea, one must first understand satire. Satire, as defined by Merriam-Webster's dictionary, is "a literary work holding up human vices or follies to ridicule or scorn." Of course, satire isn't just based in literature. Satire spans all genres of art and can be explored through many different mediums. The mode in which satire is delivered plays a big part in how it is received, mostly because there are so many different modes of satire. Satirical techniques are expansive, and most of which have been portrayed in some medium for centuries. From works like *The Praise of Folly* (1511) from humanist Erasmus to *The Wolf of Wallstreet* (2013) by Martin Scorsese, satire has been around since history has been recorded.

The question then becomes, what is the point of satire? This question is just as complex as the forms in which satire is delivered. Ronald Paulsen, an esteemed writer and English professor, states about satire that punishment is “the most extreme, and at the same time most common, consequence in satire.” (*The Fiction of Satire*, 1967). In Ruben Quintero’s book *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern* (2007), he states “The satirist attempts more than visceral laughter or corrosive spite... a true satirist must be a true believer, a practicing humanitarian, responsible even in his or her own subjective indulgence” (Quintero, 3). What Quintero is saying is that satire is used as a means of change. Satire punches up at societies wrongdoings. This attack of authority can reap massive consequences. The satirist is trying to effect change and is making a statement. Artists create satire to “sway us toward an ideal alternative” (Quintero, 4). The goal is really to affect the audience in a way that they re-align their moral compass. If an audience is questioning themselves or society, the satire has worked. Satirists aim for their audience to engage the work with their ideas on the subject matter.

Exploring different modes of satire is paramount in understanding the dramatic qualities *The Actor’s Nightmare* possesses. As mentioned earlier, satire is expansive in its techniques. The more popular techniques an audience notices with relative ease are parody, embodiment, personas, and exaggeration. Parody in its simplest form is defined as “a feeble or ridiculous imitation.” (Merriam-Webster). Great examples of parody can be seen in modern films. The *Austin Powers* films are ridiculing other spy flicks, the *Scary Movie* franchise parodies the horror genre, and *Spaceballs* parodies the Star Wars franchise. Parody is complex as it encapsulates many different techniques in one. Personas, which can be described by the definition of its Latin origin personae as “the mask of an actor” (Brittanica), is another separate technique of satire that is often found within parody. Embodiment is similar to the persona technique but relies more

heavily on word choice rather than physicality. Exaggeration is self-explanatory and is often used in conjunction with the creation of a persona. Many rants use exaggeration as a satirical device.

If satire is used to punch up, what are these satirist's trying to critique? A popular target for satire is politics. Politics, in satire, are the root of almost all evil. Political satire is in many cases the most serious form of satire. Grant Julin, in his essay on political satire, states that political satire is "a moral concern and seriousness that seeks political reform on some perceived wrong or injustice" (*Satire in a multi-cultural world: a Bakhtinian analysis*, 1) He even goes as far to pose the question if there should be limits of satire's sting. The weight that satire can hold is best portrayed by the mass killings at the satirical French magazine *Charlie Hebdo's* headquarters. After publishing cartoons satirizing the Prophet Muhammad, two men stormed the office and murdered 12 people. BBC news reported on the attack, releasing their story saying it was "a massacre at the offices of Charlie Hebdo on Wednesday 7 January". Julin studied the attack in his essay and goes on to state "These attacks, a reaction to Hebdo's own cartoons of the Prophet, revealed the ugly consequence of political satire's sting." (Julin, 2). These horrific attacks show just how serious satire is. Masked in humor, satire is sending some sort of message. In the case of the Prophet Muhammad, it wasn't well received by many and the satirists were murdered. Satire has a pull and this example goes to show how the humor is a mask for real criticism.

Another large target for satirists is the media. Steven Colbert, a television host, comedian, and writer, on his show, "The Colbert Report", tackles issues by creating personas. Colbert's main satirical focus is on the news, and the world of media. He focuses on how news stories manipulate their audience into thinking one thing or another, either by purposely leaving out

information or by bending the truth. A good example of this is when Colbert created a persona of a reporter during the Bush administration. Using irony, he states, “But what they don’t talk about is all the amazingly damaging things we haven’t reported on. Who didn’t uncover the flaws in our pre-war intelligence? Who didn’t…” (*Satire TV*, 127). Colbert draws from real life media and the stories they report on. He then uses their own medicine against them, creating an imitation of their work. His goal, as any good satire is, is to make his audience question their own realities. His personas are humorous, but they clearly outline problems that are extremely serious.

Similar to the work of Colbert, Jon Stewart paved his satirical path through attacking the media as well. Jon Stewart’s satirical target is summarized well with his segment about media trying to sway peoples’ opinions for or against war. It encapsulates everything satire stands for. “Media Blitz”, the name of the segment, is a satire about the news clips different media distributors will show to scare or provoke their viewers. The clips Jon satirizes are about war. Jon does a really good job of attacking both sides of the media, not just focusing on one to push his own agenda. Through his satire Jon is attempting to make his audience realize how ridiculous and vague these news clips are. He wants to show how the media uses simple yet ambiguous buzzwords to draw you in and direct you towards a certain opinion. Jon is aiming towards an audience that watches these news shows often. People will put them on in the morning or in the background, and it is awfully easy to be manipulated by the media. Jon wants to break down the power they have so that the people actively watching these shows can be smarter and stronger in their consumption of the news.

Jon’s satire comes in a few forms. One Jon uses well is exaggeration. Jon creates this exaggeration in the same segment by mentioning how the sun is going to kill everyone and

“there’s nothing we can do about it.” Jon also uses a bit of comparison, comparing the similarities between liberal and conservative media. Jon uses imitation very well in this segment also. He does so when he explains how ridiculous it is, and then shows how anyone could make one of these silly reports. Jon creates his imitation about Finland, stating that they, “control the herring we love”, and asking, “Why are they so quiet?”. His intentions are clear and his concerns about the media and those receiving it are very present.

A final exploration of some of the satirical techniques commonly used comes in the form of a street performer, Reverend Billy. His parody of a pastor teems with satirical potential. Reverend Billy approaches his satire through creating a direct persona of a pastor. Through this method he is parodying a Church service. He uses language that one would hear in a Church, dresses accordingly, and by reading his published articles, seems to fully buy into the persona he created. Considering Reverend Billy is a pastor at the “Church of Stop shopping”, it is rather easy to see what his main satirical target is. He aims his sights on the ‘Shopocalypse’, or more directly consumerism. In his journal “What Would Jesus Buy”, he attacks the idea that love is so often connected to consumerism, and how companies are finding ways to convince shoppers that they can sell love. In his words, “The corporate Love research started long ago.” (What Would Jesus Buy, 9). Reverend Billy uses common practices of a Church service in order for his audience to see just how serious he is. He uses his platform as a fake pastor to perform live in front of an audience, many of which we can assume have been to a religious service or have prior knowledge of what it’s like. This allows him to actually preach to his audience in a similar manner. Reverend Billy uses different techniques to satirize his targets. He uses distortion often, but also uses reversals, intervention, and direct imitation. Reverend Billy is also not afraid to use

irony in his work. Overall, Reverend Billy, although comical, comes off really sincere in his persona. He is very clearly trying to make a change.

Exploring the work of Christopher Durang also lends its hand perfectly to the idea that in *The Actor's Nightmare* satire is drama masked by comedy. Durang's accomplishments are extensive. He has a B.A. in English from Harvard College, and an M.F.A. in Playwriting from the Yale School of Drama. His first Obie award came in 1980, for writing the play, *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*. As a result of raising money for the play to run again more commercially, *The Actor's Nightmare* was premiered as an opener. The two plays were then moved to Off-Broadway, and the list goes on. The reviews of the 1981 premiere of the two were extremely positive, citing satire as the theatrical element to note. Many of his works are considered to be satirical by critics and Durang himself. Other plays he wrote are *Beyond Therapy* (1981), *A History Of The American Film* (1976), *The Nature And Purpose Of The Universe* (1975), *Sex And Longing* (1996), and many more. Durang also worked as an actor, director, and screenwriter.

Christopher Durang Explains it All for You (1983), Durang's self-published book, is a compilation of six of his plays. Within the book is *The Actor's Nightmare* and *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*. Stephen Grecco, a writer and reviewer for "World Literature Today", reviewed the book extensively. He states that, "Durang is unquestionably America's funniest playwright—and also one of its most serious...Durang is no respecter of dead traditions, using wit to expose prejudice, hypocrisy, and self-defeating illusions." (*World Literature Today*, 488). His plays are clearly satirical and are mostly considered comedy. Grecco continues to speak about each of the plays in this grouping, stating about arguably Durang's most significant play *Beyond Therapy*, "Initially a seemingly straightforward satire psychotherapy, *Beyond*

Therapy gradually reveals itself to be a dark metaphysical comedy about the limits of rational understanding.” (*World Literature Today*, 488). Grecco does an excellent job describing how Durang uses his satire as a tool for serious subject matter. He even goes on to say about *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*, “the play dramatizes our agonizing search for life’s meaning in a chaotic world” (*World Literature Today*, 488). Durang’s dramatic qualities are masked by the comedy. Grecco mentions how he believes *Sister Mary* is his funniest work to date as well, again proving just how effective his satire is at impacting his audience.

The Actor’s Nightmare is no different from these other works. Reviews of the original production congratulate Durang on this satirical work. The reviews, quoted above, clearly mention Durang’s satirical prowess. In order to properly understand how this play is a drama, the forms in which satire is expressed in the play must be analyzed. Taking into consideration all of the satirical techniques mentioned through the works of satirists above, *The Actor’s Nightmare* is littered in parody, personas, distortion, and more.

Parody is at the very core of *The Actor’s Nightmare*. The plot of this play takes us on a journey through multiple different other plays. Some of the works expressed within the play are *Hamlet*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *Private Lives*, and a mash-up of Samuel Beckett’s works called *Checkmate*. This mash-up is Durang’s way of using meta-theatrical parody. If we consider the aforementioned definition of parody as a ridiculous imitation this falls perfectly in the category. The imitation comes through the particular moments drawn from each piece. For example, in a wild back-and-forth, the two characters on stage both get into a “garbage can” (*The Actor’s Nightmare*, 16). In conjunction with the sporadic and ludicrous nature of the dialogue between characters, including moments when the characters speak about “Godot”, saying “Yesterday he came. Garlic on his breathe, telling a lot of unpleasant jokes about Jews and Polacks and

stewardesses". (13), the entire section is a parody. Even more obvious parody is the actual plot of the entire play itself. The play follows a man who doesn't know how he got on stage. He makes it very obvious throughout the play that he is wildly confused and absolutely lost, going on to say things like "And am I an actor? I thought I was an accountant. Any why does everyone keep calling me George?" (6). The parody element of this satire is aimed right at an actor's worst nightmare; forgetting your lines. The idea that Durang is parodying the tools he uses to portray his art is satirical in itself!

Piggybacking off of the incredible amount of parody this play boasts, personas are easily as prevalent. Almost every character in this play is exaggerated, and much of the comedy comes through the physical and over-the-top vocal embodiment of these characters. Everyone seems just a tad off. Examples of these personas lies in the stage directions and by some of their dialogue. Characters enter to stage directions like "a glamorous actor, perhaps in a sweeping cape" (5), "a bit less grand" (6), and "also somewhat grand" (6). Each of these characters are distinctly over-the-top. The least grand character, Dame Ellen Terry, is noticeably trying too hard. She changes her pitch and yells simply for dramatic effect. At one point she is frantic because she's lost her eyesight. She changes from horrified to "Suddenly very cheerful again." (17). The imitation of each of the pieces is also important to note as a satirical element. Durang took pieces from each play, imitates their lines and twists the outcomes through his protagonist George, the one who doesn't know where he is or why he's on stage.

As prevalent as the satirical elements are, it wouldn't mean much unless there was a target or bigger idea. As mentioned earlier, satire is all about effecting change and working towards something you think will progress society. As a veteran of satire, what was Durang

trying to say and how does that change the reception? *The Actor's Nightmare* is more than just about an actor forgetting his lines. This play is a satire on human nature. More specifically, this play satirizes human beings constant struggle with being forgotten. People will do anything to be remembered. In our society, many people put their wants in front of other people's needs. People will do anything to leave their mark on the world. Through the use of satire, this play becomes a commentary on the narcissist, selfish nature of our society. Durang ended the play in the best way he possibly could. George, who still has not even remembered his own name, is killed. In the last scene, in the *A Man for All Seasons* section, The Executioner cuts Georges head off. Right before he dies George exclaims, "They say you can never dream your own death, so I expect I'll wake up just as soon as he brings the blade down." (20). The lights fade to black, but then they come back up. Durang ends the play by having the actors gesture to George to bow. The stage directions say, "They Gesture for George to take his bow, but he seems to be dead. They applaud him, and then bow again, and lights out." (21). The fact that the only one who doesn't remember anything about himself is killed in the end is awfully poetic. The other actors are so focused on their curtain call they don't even realize how serious the situation has become.

Technical Essay

The experience of working on your own project is really special. I put in so much time with this piece, and I feel I have benefitted greatly. I would even go as far to say that working on my own piece from top to bottom, helping with whatever I could has taught me nearly as much as all my classes in my four years have. Not to discredit the professors for all their work, but I have always been an advocate that life experience and being well-rounded is unrivaled when it comes to being a professional. In my opinion, this play could not have gone smoother. I had plenty of time to research and create my characters, build relationships with my cast and crew, and use plenty of my in-class work, drawing from my wide-array of classes to bolster the production as a whole.

The process of working on this production began way before rehearsal. I couldn't even count the number of messages that were shared between the seniors working on this piece. We laid out the framework over and over, altering things as needed. I am extremely happy to have been a part of this team because we worked simply as that, a team. It would have been easy for me to give up on the project and not put in the work early after having my own proposals denied. However, my fellow seniors had their first choices denied as well. I believe we rallied around that. We definitely used a little anger and resentment, but soon got so invested in our work and each other that we forgot all about it.

The first of many major collaborations we worked on was casting. We had a surprising amount of people interested in the production, and after asking the auditioning actors what drew them to the play, most claimed it would be cool to work on a comedy. I knew that within the Theater and Performance BA program comedies weren't the norm. I didn't know, however, that many people were craving them. We obviously were happy with the turnout but deciding who to

cast took a while. After the callbacks we had a set cast in mind, however we had each actor cast in a different role. After a healthy debate, we all came to the same conclusion. I believe we cast a near perfect group of actors, and I could not be more thankful for their work ethic. I will say, however, I have never had to do tons of research on the other characters in a piece that I wasn't cast as. Doing this really created a sense of investment from the seniors and a connection to each of the characters in the play. Collaborating on casting worked really well for our production and I believe we only benefited from working as a team.

I didn't take a major role in finding monetary investment in *The Actor's Nightmare*, and we all were lucky enough to have the producers of the Spring Performance Lab lend their expertise in the matter. Meeting occasionally every Wednesday to talk everything production with Jack Tamburri definitely helped me feel comfortable that we would have enough money and resources for our piece. Going to meetings with producers and other crew members isn't foreign to me, but realizing I have a major role in our pieces artistic direction added importance to these meetings. All of the behind-the-scenes work really gets you invested in the piece you're working with. It really felt like this was my child of sorts!

After putting in so much work on and off the stage, our entire team really wanted our production and the entire festival to be a hit. As any other production would, we really wanted to attract a large number of people, students especially, to our shows. I am pleased to say that after we first trimmed the number of seats open for the audience so that the last production could hold their seating arrangement intimately on the stage, we opened it up to more people. We had to do this twice, once on Friday night and once for the Sunday matinee. Working with Jack Tamburri and Sydney Gottesman, the producers of the festival, gave me a solid sense of how best to spread the word. It's incredible just how effective word of mouth and working on social media can be. I

really focused on sharing our project and sending the RSVP's to people through Facebook. Our generation is so attached to social media now that the best way to reach your peers by the masses is through connecting with them that way. I was surprised by the number of people who responded to me about the play, claiming they were definitely coming. Social media is actually how my lifelong friends from my hometown surprised me by showing up. They knew exactly where to be and when. Simple things like reaching out using Instagram and Facebook really all work in conjunction to create buzz and a little hype for your piece. It worked phenomenally well with our piece and I'm ecstatic I got to be a part of it.

Reception and understanding of the play, in my opinion, is equally as important than just drawing numbers. I have to give major props to our Director Jeremy Suarez on giving us the tools to make our piece accessible. We were worried from the beginning that our piece would only resonate with actors and members of our community with solid prior knowledge of theater. Even the title supports that theory! We worked on and changed around scenes occasionally so that our audience could enjoy the comedy of our play. This process was the most fun for me. I think the biggest thing that we worked on was staging and physicality. We wanted to tell stories with our bodies as well as with the textual comedy. We must have worked on and changed around the staging of each scene ten times over. We were a little distraught during tech week because our staging had to be altered again, but we did it and after some smart advice from the faculty we had it down to a tee. The focus on movement worked really well for us and certainly added to the comedy and reception.

There were many lessons to be had and many failures to happen throughout this process. Considering my previous artistic goals, I had a lot of room to grow and a lot of technique to hone in on. Trying to master new and different techniques than you previously learned is arduous, and

in terms of my voice work, I believe I did not hit my goal. I wouldn't say I failed, but I definitely don't feel I did a fair enough job. I find it important to set the bar high for yourself and always reach. This only works if you don't get deterred when not hitting that bar. This is one of those cases. I mentioned earlier that I planned on working on three different accents, which I had accomplished. In my opinion, the process of studying and attacking those accents didn't get me to where I wanted to be. I expected to feel confident on stage using three very different accents, and after working on those accents and studying videos and clips of people with them, I didn't feel as confident as I wanted. I worked on a vocal warmup that utilized each of the accent's peculiarities, if you will. After our performances I got to watch a video of our Sunday matinee performance and it just wasn't as convincing as I had hoped for. I think this is a case of me being a little too harsh on myself, but I find it to be appropriate. In fact, the lowland Scottish accent planned for The Executioner role didn't end up making the final performances at all. Nothing is ever going to be perfect, and this is a great example of that.

Important to note is how pleased I am with the growth in my physicality and movement. I attest a lot of this to Jill Echo, the movement professor I mentioned earlier. As a movement instructor she connected to me very easily. Jill has a keen eye for reading people and our work in class inspired me to try new things on stage and with my body. My movement goals revolved around trying new techniques in different categories, including emotional study through movement and physical warmups. Aside from the basic pushups and sit-ups pre show to get me fired up, Jill taught me techniques through stretching and dance to warm-up. Earlier in the year Jill mentioned just how important warming up can be, saying "If I can warmup amid chaos, I'm ready for anything. The world is chaos. Life is chaos." I took this quote and really ran with it. One thing I struggled with in the past was proper technique. Over this semester she kept on me,

and after I finally got certain movement techniques down, she told me, “Technique is more about creating freedom than it is learning technique.” Thanks to her I was able to help in creating staging and movement for our piece that emphasized physical comedy. I am not a master by any means when it comes to movement, but through the work in this production and in class I have surpassed my goal in movement and physicality.

Understanding parody was another big goal of mine. When I first started working on *The Actor’s Nightmare*, I really didn’t know just how intertwined parody and comedy was. I mentioned how I planned on working with Andrea Thome in her Satire focused class this semester to get a much better understanding of parody. I then hoped to use that to create exaggerated, funny characters with the material in the play. The process of feeling confident with parody started by creating different personas in class. Andrea had me bring in a few different satirical monologues to class, performing in different exaggerated characters. I studied Jon Stewart and his satirical monologues. Studying the works of Jon Stewart really opened my eyes to how effective personas can be in comedy. Although satire is more focused towards punching up at something you find oppressive or dangerous to society, personas can create very effective comedy. I am thrilled with the personas I created, and if only my voice work was trained more effectively I would have really felt amazing about my own performance.

When I take a look back at some of the artistic goals I set for myself, I can’t help but feel successful. I certainly didn’t hit every goal one hundred percent, but overall, I can confidently say I’ve grown as an actor, an artist, and as a person. I learned many valuable lessons during our run, and more importantly I made some incredible friends. After a rough start to my senior project campaign with two denied projects, I am thrilled to say I feel accomplished and fulfilled. It genuinely feels like I had to dig deep into my academic bag and bring out techniques and

learnings from my prior classes. As I mentioned earlier, I consider life experience to rule above all. After completing my senior project and my collegiate career, I can happily say I still believe that to be true. I know have, however, a better grip on how studying and practicing new techniques leads to much more refined final project.

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Actor's Portfolio

Ramsey Kristian Heitmann
2015-2019

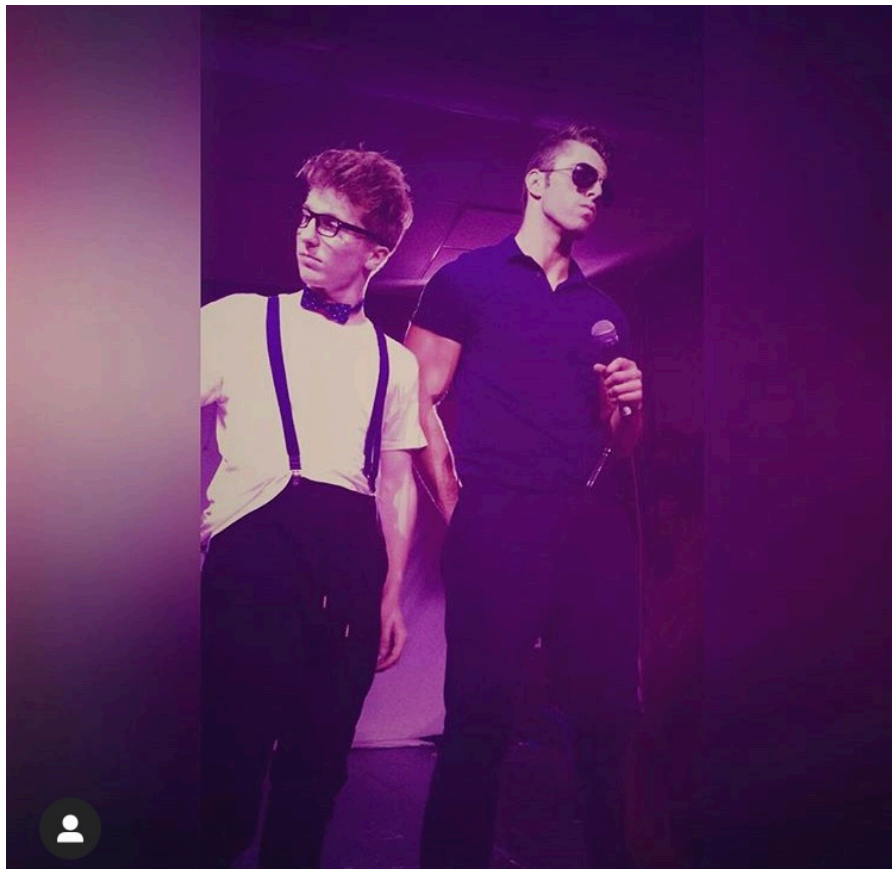
Magic Myles (Independent Theater)

Playwright: Myles Clohessy

Director: Antony Ware and Michael Austin Nicolo

Location: The Stood (2015)

Written originally by Myles Clohessy, *Magic Myles* was inspired by the success of the film *Magic Mike* (2012). This comedic take on the hit movie was the first of its kind of campus. The male-only strip show incorporated comedic skits, a sporadic plot, and plenty of dancing. As a member of the cast, I played multiple different roles. This was my first attempt at dancing on stage. I played numerous roles, including an RA (pictured), a Russian spy, and a professional athlete. The role was fun and surprisingly empowering.



The Actor's Nightmare

(Senior Project)

Playwright: Christopher Durang

Director: Jeremy Suarez

Location: Humanities Theater (2019)

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwmgWRBDSn0&feature=youtu.be>

All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players.”
When George Spelvin walks on the big stage, the last thing he thinks is going to happen is that he will play the starring role in a series of classic plays. But the lead actor has gotten into a car accident. Uh-oh. Now it is up to George and a cast of historically inaccurate characters to go on with the show. What a nightmare.
A Senior Project from Jeremy Vance Suarez, Jacob Wade, and Ramsey Heitmann. I played the role of Henry Irving and The Executioner. This production was my first real shot at pure comedy. I was honored to be a part of the inaugural Purchase Theater Lab's Spring Festival.

