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Everyone's Their Own Worst Critic OR How I Learned Not to Fear The End

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Everyone's Their Own Worst Critic

OR

How I Learned Not to Fear The End

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by

Audrey B Rosenblith

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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And to RAI, for better and for worse.

For some reason somewhere along the line I told myself that my art was not good enough to be shared with the world. That my real talents lie in promoting other people's better art. This may be true. We will find out soon enough.

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PART 1: We're All Going To Die or The Beginning of The End
We tried to construct a narrative. All people fear death.

Dana sat next to me in the second floor seminar room of the Bard library, crying. “Oh my god. I’m having an epiphany. Audrey! This is it! This is what the show is about!” she said loudly. “Dante has come to the brothel to role play death. The Inferno doesn’t exist. It’s because Beatrice died and he knows he’s next. The whole thing is Terror Management. HE role plays what his death looks like over and over again. It’s the movie moments.”

The phrase “movie moments” referred to one of the first pieces we prompted Charlie, the actor who would become our protagonist, to devise. He was killed seventeen different times in succession, and each time as he fell to the floor he would cry out a different famous line from a death scene in a movie or a play. It was 4pm on November 9th, 2015. This conversation made me realize what the real theme of the project would be: Death.

It was important to Dana and myself to create a piece that felt accessible. To me this meant creating something that could resonate with as wide an audience as possible. Much of the work I’ve seen in the past few years, from Ivo Dimchev’s “Fest” to Larissa Velez Jackson’s “Star Crap Method,” has been created using a very specific vocabulary and subject matter. The content of Dimchev’s piece and the form of Jackson’s felt accessible only to an informed theater-going audience such as the demographic that regularly attends festivals like American Realness or COIL in New York City. Whatever we created, we had to do it with the intention that it was for everyone. Death is something that every person must confront. Using death as a focal point in our project gave us the opportunity to make something universal. It felt appropriate, that this

would be a ‘farewell’ piece, to say goodbye to our time at Bard and put to rest our lives as students.

Death is a central motif in the *Inferno* and *The Balcony*. I spent many hours contemplating and grappling with how the themes of these two texts could coalesce in our piece. Our proposal was based on the idea that combining these texts in performance would enhance both of them. The worlds created by Dante and Genet in these works are filled with scenes that depict and try to define death. Dante imagined it as pits of fire, rivers of blood and shit, and frozen lakes; showing that death is not an escape but rather a direct consequence of the choices we made in life. Genet pictured it as a game, with costumes to dress up in and scenes to perform; the patrons of *The Brothel* fantasize about their deaths to forget the problems of the present.

Death is a vast subject, so it was inevitable that I got swallowed by the research I was so excited to do. With each new article I read, my view of the project shifted. “Damn, that kind of blew my mind a little bit.” It was exciting to dissect the texts, and read scholars’ varying analyses of these authors and their lives and work. For example, Keith Botsford’s article on Genet, “Jean Genet”, that breaks down the recurrent themes in Genet’s novels. The essay points to certain details and facts of Genet’s life relevant to his writing to examine why he was so focused on evil and death. It starts with a criticism of Genet’s personal life, referring to his criminal activity, how Genet’s writing was banned in many places because of the lewd content of his works. At first glance it would seem that Botsford is not a fan of Genet but as I read more I realized that’s not the case. Botsford appears to be frustrated that this idea, that Genet’s work is simply pornographic and therefore lacks artistic value, is the one Genet and his writing have been

reduced to because of the often explicit imagery in his work. He muses, “How Genet should come to write and how he should achieve, apparently without formal training, his superb mastery of a complex and vital style, is a mystery of love.”¹ One of the reasons I have come to admire Genet’s work so much is because of the amazing natural talent and ability he possessed. I have spent many years taking writing workshops and training my “voice” as a writer to sound natural, with just the right balance of informality and confidence. Genet managed to write his lyrically complex masterpieces with only a primary school education.

What is particularly important is that though this article talks only about Genet, (with reference to/mention of other French writers that influenced him) it articulated many of the themes, ideas, and images Dana and I found within Dante. Botsford point out that “Genet had done new things too in the exposition of characters...His characters are amply divided into categories that have certain functions assigned to them...each character is thus an embodiment of a set of attitudes, of gestures if you will, to which others respond.”² Genet does this very clearly with the characters in *The Balcony*, giving them positions rather than actual names. The first three scenes are role plays of “The Bishop”, “The Judge”, and “The General”.³ We are introduced to the world of *The Balcony* through these displays of performative gestures and attitudes. The characters in the *Inferno* function in a very similar way. In each circle, Dante encounters souls who embody the sin for which they are suffering. They share their stories,

¹ Keith Botsford, "Jean Genêt," in *Yale French Studies* (n.p.: Yale University Press, 1951), 8: 82.

² *Ibid.*, 90.

³ Jean Genet, *The Balcony*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1966), 7-27.

literally offering up the exposition for the where and how and why of Dante's journey through Hell in that moment.⁴

It was exciting discover research that supported our idea to combine *The Balcony* and the *Inferno*. Reading Botsford's writing inspired me. It made me want be able to write about Genet and Dante with the same passion and confidence. I dreamed that my project could be that well written, but I also knew that I was far from that level of scholarship, which was somewhat disheartening. Luckily, not too long after that I discovered A.N. Wilson's *Dante in Love*.

Wilson is also an incredibly accomplished writer. However, he states in the first chapter of his book "To be a Dante scholar is a full-time, lifelong occupation. Such rare beings need to possess a knowledge of medieval theology, astronomy, linguistics, poetics, mathematics and history of which I possess only an amateur's smattering."⁵ If Wilson is considered amateur and was able to write such a well thought out, thoroughly researched book on Dante, then surely I had some small chance of writing a decent project on the subject. It also reminded me that unless I was planning on devoting my life to studying these writers, I would most likely not come up with any groundbreaking revelations about them or their work.

The picture that Wilson paints of Dante is a romantic one. "Dante is the self-proclaimed poet of love, but he is also the poet of hate, the poet of vengeance, of implacable resentment and everlasting feuds" he affirms.⁶ I quickly grew to admire Wilson through his writing. His casual, yet personable style made the book easy and enjoyable to read. He wrote about Dante like he

⁴ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Mary Jo Bang, illus. Henrik Drescher (Minneapolis, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 2013), 55-57.

⁵ A. N. Wilson, *Dante in Love* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

knew him intimately, which made me feel like I was gaining insights into the inner workings of the poet's mind. There was one passage in particular which allowed me to find the missing link in the connection between Dante and the piece that Dana and I were creating. This passage in the chapter entitled "Late Teens-The Dream", which explores Dante's early years as a poet and how he developed his skills as a writer and scholar:

"When we read a book, according to Dante, we experience it on four levels. The first, obviously, is literal. But the second is allegorical. When Ovid tells us that Orpheus could make wild beasts, and even stones and trees, follow his music, it means that art can tame and soften cruel hearts. The third sense is moral. The moral lesson of the story of the Transfiguration in the Gospels, when Jesus went up a mountainside and was seen in a shining vision by the three Apostles conversing with Moses and Elijah, is that we should only have a few companions in matters which touch us most closely. And finally, Dante's fourth level was that we should be able to read anagogically--that is, relating the text to The End--to one's own death or to the End of the World. He gives as an example, that when we read of the Israelites escaping Egypt, we should see it as an anagoge for the soul escaping sin."⁷

After reading this I realized that all the projects being created as part of the Senior Project Festival may not necessarily be so much a literal translation of the *Inferno* to the stage as they were Dantean in their creation. As artists and creators, Dana and I understood the use of allegory and moral in storytelling, and it is how we chose to approach and convey our ideas to the audience that aligned with Dante's method. We are attached to him by his own desire to create and be defined by his work. We are more like Dante than we might know, divulging our lives, and our struggles through our work. Just as he took it upon himself to shed light on the issues of his day, to offer criticisms of powerful institutions and politics that most did not have the courage to do, and tackle the "big questions" about love and death, so must we too. That's what Dana

⁷ Ibid., 84-5.

meant when she talked about Terror Management, which is a psychological theory about how humans deal with their fear of death. As humans, our advanced level of consciousness allows us to realize our imminent death. We spend our lives creating and doing things to try and put off the inevitable, or to try to achieve a sense of purpose so that when we do eventually have to face death we can feel like our lives had worth because we added to the cannon of the human experience. Dante was writing about these themes and exhibiting the behaviors associated with this theory hundreds of years before there was language to explain it. According to Wilson, he was reading and writing to make sense of his life and inevitable death. Dante needed a way to interpret what was happening in the world around him, and his writing was how he made sense of it all. Especially because there is no way we will never be able to hear from Dante himself why he wrote, it's necessary to try and get to know who Dante was, to know the world that he lived in through books like *Dante In Love* in order to understand what drove him as a person and a writer.

While Genet remained relatively reclusive over the course of his career, he did give the occasional interview. We are therefore able to ‘hear’ in his own words some of the reasons why he wrote. He was interviewed towards the end of his life in the Summer of 1983, by writer and arts censorship lawyer Edward De Grazia. Genet was looked to as a sort of ‘poster-child’ for homosexuals in theater and art when he became popular in the mid 20th century. De Grazia observed that “homosexuals [had] more power and freedom in the United States than in France.”

⁸ He asked Genet if the publishing of certain works, such as Gide and Proust, influenced homosexual freedom in France. Genet responded:

⁸ Edward De Grazia and Jean Genet, "An Interview with Jean Genet," in *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* (Cardozo School of Law: Taylor & Francis, 1993), 5, 2: 313.

“No...because literature doesn't begin by positing the problem of homosexuality or heterosexuality or Marxism or whatever. It begins with the choice of vocabulary. That's what literature is built upon. I didn't write my books in order liberate homosexuals. I wrote my books for a completely different reason: for the taste of words, even for the past of the commas of punctuation, [sic] for the taste of the sentence.”⁹

Genet wrote for the pure joy of writing, because it was a passion of his. Or at least that's where it started for him. By this point, near the end of his life, Genet had travelled the world. He had published essays on behalf of the Black Panthers, documented life in Lebanon in the midst of a civil war, and written a book about the struggles of the Palestinian people.¹⁰ These works speak to a clear political agenda. But ultimately, for him the motive of his writing remained simple. To write for the pleasure of the words. He makes a point to say this in the interview. The knowledge of this fact gives the reader a whole new way to experience Genet's works, to really see the lyricism and appreciate that he wrote for the purity of the aesthetics.

Genet didn't shy away from contemplating death either. In “The Deaths of Jean Genet” Scott Durham digs into Genet's portrayals of and commentaries on death in his play *The Screens* and his final work, *Prisoner of Love*. This article became a main source of prompts for Dana and I in our earlier stages of rehearsal. In the introduction of the essay there is an anecdote that describes when Genet gave a lecture at the University of Connecticut on behalf of Black Panther activist Bobby Seale¹¹. According to the story that Durham tells, the police made an announcement that there was a bomb in the auditorium. One of the Panthers, not believing it was real threat, claims that he's not afraid to die and that the struggles they (the Panthers and the Black American community they represent) have lived through will give their death meaning. He

⁹ Ibid., 314.

¹⁰ David Bradby and Clare Finburgh, *Jean Genet* (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 26-7.

¹¹ Scott Durham, "The Deaths of Jean Genet," in *Yale French Studies* (n.p.: Yale University Press, 1997), 91: 159.

is applauded for his bravery. Before returning to his written speech, Genet adds “Now, it’s understood we have blown up. We have died. We are now beyond death.”¹² Dana felt very strongly about this image. It helped us to know that Genet himself had played with death in this way, making a farce out of the idea of his own death on a stage in front of an auditorium full of people.

Durham discusses Genet’s views on “the work of art” in relation to the fear of death as exemplified by his works:

“The work of art, according to Genet, occupies “this tranquil shore” (*Giacometti*, 44) which separates life from death, being from nonbeing, identity from nonidentity. And the true artist or actor, as Genet will go on to suggest...does not memorialize the identity of the departed but, in forcing the deceased (along with the assembled public that mourns and remembers) to “live and relive” his death, releases the unactualized roles he or she contains: at the limit of being and nonbeing, the actor “divides and multiplies himself” to become a veritable “theatrical troupe” (*Reflections*, 73).”¹³

For Genet, death was the ultimate theatrical challenge. By this logic, art is the ideal tool for coping with and exploring death. When Dana explained Terror Management theory to me, she said that it attributes most people’s major life pursuits and decisions as being motivated in some way by their innate fear of death. For example the choice to have children can be interpreted as a way to attempt to avoid or stave off this fear. According to Durham, Genet was unique because through his work he sought to bring this looming terror to the forefront, and believed that the creation of art was meant to help humans confront the fear without necessarily having to try to understand or come to terms with it. Durham goes on to explain that the way Genet viewed it, “[Art] also permits us to affirm in the thought of death our power to not-be as a

¹² Ibid., 160.

¹³ Ibid., 165.

creative power”¹⁴ There is no way for us to know what death will be like until we have died, so we are forced to imagine it and create an image of it. Art allows us to do this. The actor can “live and relive” death on stage to help quell their own fear (as well as the the audience’s fear) of the great unknown that lies beyond the grave by giving it a concrete image. Dante does this with the *Inferno*. In his case is it not the actor “living” death on stage, but the writer conjuring an image of death through his epic poem. He journeys through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. He maps out each level of the after life and explains to his readers the forms death can take.

Genet approached a fear of death an aesthetic dilemma, while Dante viewed it as an intellectual and moral battle. If we were to combine the *Inferno* and *The Balcony* within our project, *The Vestibule*, we would have to present both Dante’s and Genet’s ideas about death and how to confront it through art. Ultimately, I feel that we leaned more towards Genet’s aesthetic approach in terms of what actually wound up on stage, relying on the imagery in his work to construct the images in our piece. However, we also represented Dante’s desire to question and challenge and try to understand and come to terms with death. In our piece, Charlie accepts his fate. But, before he can do that, he has to take a journey to come to terms with what is happening. We made no attempt to explain his death, to “fix or replace the ephemeral presence of the departed.” We offered no exposition for who Charlie was, how he got there, or why he was dying other than the known fact that everyone has to die at some point.

¹⁴ Ibid., 166.

PART 2: What the F*ck is Devising¹⁵ or The Making of *The Vestibule*
We had an idea. I did some research. We made a thing. All people fear death.

In *The Vestibule* Charlie, our main character, wakes up lost, with the knowledge that he is going to die in 25 minutes. He looks for a way to get more time and finds assistance in the form of Nina (aka Virgil). Nina brings Charlie to The Brothel, (aka The Gate), and introduces him to the Madame (aka Minos). The Madame runs The Brothel, but it is no ordinary brothel. Rather than engaging in sexual activities, clients are given time to role play their death in a number of scenarios in order to prepare to pass on to what awaits them in the afterlife. The Brothel is staffed by The Neutrals. These are the souls of people who spent their entire lives wishing they were someone else. So now, in the afterlife, they are destined to role play as different characters for eternity. Every time there is a new client, they play different parts in the death scenarios, which change based on the requests from the clients.

Charlie's death scenarios were:

1. Run over by a train, or "The Mime" scenario
2. Eaten by a whale, or "The Sailor" scenario
3. Poisoned, or "The Butler" scenario
4. Shot, or "The Sheriff" scenario
5. Hung, or "The Judge" scenario
6. Drowned, or "The Bishop" scenario

These were mostly inspired by the role play scenes in *The Balcony*. In the play, the clients of The Brothel role play with the prostitutes, acting out their power hungry fantasies. The featured characters are the Bishop, the Judge and the General. These characters inspired Charlie's scenarios, we adapted some, for example using a Sheriff instead of a General to fit Charlie's

¹⁵ See Appendix G, 67.

personality. “The Mime” and “The Sailor” came out of some of the research I did on Genet, specifically the articles by Scott Durham ¹⁶ and the Botsford article on Genet ¹⁷, respectively.

The very beginning of this project was me reading *The Balcony* for the first time. I knew almost nothing about Jean Genet or *The Balcony* when I first started. I knew that Genet was French and that he wrote surrealist or absurdist plays. But, when I picked up *The Balcony* for the first time I was dumbfounded. I began researching Genet’s life and reading interviews, getting to “hear” the way he spoke about his experiences and work gave me a fuller image of not only his personality, but his writing as well. He was ostracized growing up because of his status as an orphan being raised in foster care.¹⁸ Genet was only able to come to terms with his sexuality when he was placed in a youth penal colony at the age of fifteen.¹⁹ As a result of being in and out of prison for most of his young life, Genet spent many of his later years in self-imposed seclusion.²⁰ He was clearly very passionate but in a quiet, ashamed way.

I knew a little more about Dante, but not much. I had read about half the *Inferno* when I was assigned to read it my freshman year of college. I recognized its importance within the canon of Western literature, and I appreciated the poetry. But when it was time to move on to the next assignment, I didn’t really give it any more thought. I was abroad when the senior class was in the process of choosing what text to use as the basis for the festival. I was able to offer a few suggestions via email, and voice my preferences. I don’t remember what the other finalists were

¹⁶ Durham, "The Deaths of Jean," in *Yale French Studies*, 91: 162.

¹⁷ Botsford, "Jean Genêt," in *Yale French Studies*, 8: 86.

¹⁸ Stephen Barber, *Jean Genet* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2004), 15-19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22-25.

²⁰ Bradby and Finburgh, *Jean Genet*, 3-5.

besides the *Inferno*, but I do remember thinking the *Inferno* was an interesting choice. It was practical because we had all been required to read it in FYSEM. So everyone had at least basic familiarity with the text. The structure of the circles and cantos would make it easy to divide up the text and give everyone free reign over their section without fear of overlap or redundancy. It presented a unique challenge as well because it had less of a narrative arc than most of the other options initially considered. The votes were cast, the final decision was confirmed, and we sent in our project proposals. A few months later I found myself sitting on the banks of the Spree in Berlin and reading *The Balcony* on a warm spring day. I couldn't help but picture Madame Irma standing on the banks of the River Acheron, waiting for Charon's boat.

When I returned to Bard over the summer, I took out several biographies of Genet from the library and began reading them. I took meticulous notes, wrote down my thoughts and questions. Only now, after reading multiple biographies and articles about both these authors as well as re-reading the *Inferno* and *The Balcony* have I come to realize the profound connection I felt to these authors and their work.

When the fall semester began, Dana and I started to meet every week, talking about our ideas for the piece: images, themes we wanted to explore, how we wanted to go about the process of creating and devising, how we wanted to cast the piece. We sat together and read *The Balcony* out loud, jotting down any ideas that came to us along the way. At the same time, I was gathering my research material and putting together a bibliography. I was developing a tentative writing plan and trying to shape what I wanted to accomplish with my written project.

I would identify the beginning of the actual creation of the show as when we got on our feet and actually started to devise something. On the first day of our floor work we invited Ethan,

another theater senior, to come to our meeting because we wanted the option of one of us being able to observe while the other two people were creating. Dana and I met earlier and began by writing down questions that we had specifically about how our piece would begin, and the beginning of Dante's journey. We knew it was important for us to examine the beginning of his journey, considering that our circle, Circle 0, included the "Gate to Hell", and was also going to be the opening piece of the festival. We also wrote down some quotes from *The Balcony* and the *Inferno*, as well as a book by Leroi Jones, *The System of Dante's Hell*, a retelling of Dante's *Inferno* that I had been reading. Ethan arrived, and we did some warm ups and worked with the text to devise a short piece²¹. Both Dana and I were actively involved, playing roles in what we created. We did one more devising session like this (where we both played an active role) with Antonio, also a senior theater student, examining the beginning of the *Inferno* and *The Balcony*, and working with the same quotes, images and ideas.

Looking back, it seems as though we had known from the start of the process that the piece would be supertitled. In our early meetings we talked about the idea of putting the show in a "user guide" format, essentially an instruction book on how to die. I had seen a lecture performance piece in Berlin done by a group of four men who were African refugees living in Belgium. It was sort of a beginners guide on how to survive as a refugee in Europe, with instructions on how to act in public, what to say, what to wear, etc. They had used supertitles in their piece to list out the instructions for the audience, and then the performers would elaborate each point. The supertitles also offered the occasional cheeky comment, functioning almost like another character in the piece. Dana had spent a month in Berlin doing Bard's summer theater

²¹ See: Appendix C and D, 59-60

intensive and had also seen a number of shows that used supertitles in different ways. We wanted our audience to know what was going to happen in the piece, (i.e. “Charlie is going to die”) and then let the story unfold to reveal how it happened, and we liked the idea of supertitles as the tool to execute it. Dana was drawing her aesthetic inspiration from Brecht and Wes Anderson, and felt like supertitles fit naturally into that picture. I liked them because I felt like they would help to solidify the structure of the narrative. Additionally, we thought it would give each individual spectator a personal connection or stake in the piece because they were being forced to interact with it, albeit somewhat passively. Initially we thought perhaps they would include quotes from my research, or comments from Dana. We knew that at the very least they would introduce the title of each act.

We moved into the next stage of the devising process and we brought in two people in (Charlie and Anya) and gave them three prompts that we had decided on in advance. “We need to come up with three prompts and make three five minute pieces that are NOT Dante’s Inferno” Dana said decisively. We came up with:

1. Using these quotes from *The Balcony* “it takes all kinds to make a world”²², “entering [the] brothel means rejecting the world”²³ and “one can hear all that’s going on in the street; which means that from the street one can hear all that’s going on in the house”²⁴; Rules: Create a world and then reject it. There must be a secret. There must be an illusion. There must be a moment of silence.
2. You can be anybody but yourself. Wait two thousand years to shed all traces of who you once were.
3. Make a piece titled “17 Ways Death Is a Dying Art”

²² Genet, *The Balcony*, 29.

²³ Ibid., 41.

²⁴ Ibid., 34.

We got the third one by plugging the word “death” into an online content idea generator which randomly generated blog post titles using whatever subject was given. This was the stage of devising the piece where Dana and I became somewhat more passive facilitators. While Dana is incapable of being passive when it comes to her work, we made the choice to create a structure and then have our actors generate material that we could use to fill that framework. From our first two devising sessions, it became clear that if we kept creating pieces on our own most of what we made would be echoes of the same image. Therefore, we came to the conclusion that the best way to come up with a diverse pool of material to pull from would be to bring in other people whose opinions and creative practice we trusted. It was also important to us that our actor’s personalities were incorporated into the characters they would play.

We would give prompts and leave the room giving whoever we had brought in five to ten minutes to create something (we had one more session where we brought people in before casting the show, and then we continued to do this with our cast) and then we would come back and watch the pieces. We would discuss them afterwards, talk about what we liked what we didn't, what it would it made us think of and why. Sometimes Dana would rework the pieces the cast made, having them do it again but giving them instructions to make certain changes (adding or adjusting blocking/physicality, changing the speed or rhythm) while they were on their feet.

At this point in the process, my role became bringing in material for prompts, helping Dana construct the prompts and offering feedback on the pieces. We gave occasional homework assignments, some of which I came up with, (i.e. choose a moment from each text that interests you) and some of which Dana came up with (i.e. use a fake French or Italian word in casual conversation; pretend to be someone else and introduce yourself to someone). Dana and I still

met outside rehearsal to plan as well as discuss the overall structure of the piece. We talked about large, vague ideas (Did the piece have a message or moral? If so what was it? What is the thesis of this piece?) and very specific ideas (What does Kellan's costume look like?). Then we narrowed down the five acts, gave them each a title and summarized what 'happened' in each one. This was what the first draft of that outline looked like:

Prologue: Apocalypse, We've Lost Dante

(In which the apocalypse happens/is happening and Dante gets lost in the forest)

Act I: What Are You Afraid Of?

(In which the Saints appear and encourage Dante to go forward on his journey)

Act II: Dante Finds a Friend

(In which Virgil/The Chief of Police appears and offers to guide Dante)

Act III: Dante and Virgil Arrive at the Brothel "follow the yellow brick road"

(In which Dante and Virgil arrive at the Gate/Brothel and meet The Madame/Minos)

Act IV: The Madame Shepard's through the Valley of Death

(In which The Madame orchestrates/conducts role play scenarios with Dante playing various characters)

Act V: Dante Dies

(In which Dante dies)

Epilogue: The River of Acheron

(In which Virgil and Charon bring Dante across the River Acheron and deeper into Hell)

We introduced this structure to the cast and had them devise each act, sometimes giving additional, more specific prompts (quotes from research, Dante or Genet) to guide them. Then, on November 18th, Dana and I sat down with the list of the fifty 2-5 minute pieces our cast had devised over the past three weeks (our first rehearsal was on October 30th), we narrowed it down to twenty-five pieces and we drew a chart that put each piece in an act. We created one final piece after that process. Dana came up with an exercise where she made everyone write down five questions about death and then the group interviewed each other one at a time, everyone asking their questions and one person answering.

Then we began constructing the story. We started with the prologue, which we envisioned as an apocalypse. We created the first draft of it based on some of the smaller devised pieces, Dana conducted the cast into a slow motion sort of dance, with them moving as the forest and Dante (aka Charlie) trying to find his way out. Then Dana decided to add the death questions on to the beginning of this sequence. It was a reversal of the original exercise, with one person (aka the supertitles) asking the questions and everyone answering in unison. Eventually, after showing the prologue to our advisor and receiving feedback, the dance got scrapped and the prologue became just the death questions.

Soon after this, I stopped attending rehearsals regularly. I was behind on my writing schedule, still doing research and constructing outlines. So I decided to spend less time at rehearsals to try and give more time to my writing. By this point I had mostly been functioning as a sort of “outside eye” in the room for rehearsals. I wasn’t actively involved in creating material or re-working pieces. I would offer my thoughts, opinions and ideas when I had them, but because she was the director, Dana ran the room.

In November I was beginning to feel really stressed about my writing project. At the time, I was attempting to do a joint Written Arts and Theater project. I had planned to write series of essays about Dante and Genet’s lives, doing a literary analysis of *The Balcony* and the *Inferno*, and illuminating why these two works and these two authors reflected each other and uncovered certain ideas and themes about each work. Originally I thought that I would put together a dramaturgical casebook, complete with a production history of *The Balcony* and survey of all the ways and times *Inferno* had been manifested in performance, with examples such as the first feature length (and oldest surviving) Italian film, which was an adaptation of Dante. But I was

having immense trouble writing because of an injury. I had bi-lateral carpal tunnel which made it difficult to type, and that in turn caused a mental block. I lost sight of what I was saying and couldn't find a way to get motivated. Did it matter that we--the royal "we," the reader "we" which included myself-- know why these men chose to write? Would it really enrich the experience of reading this work? I truly believe there is so much more to be seen in a work if you know who makes it and why. That's not to say that one can't appreciate art if they don't know anything about the artist, but there is so much more to be gained when experiencing art by doing the research and getting personally invested.

I had been wrestling with the same five pages for months and no matter what I did it didn't feel right. It wasn't specific enough, there wasn't really any thesis, I suppose it could be said my working thesis was "Dante and Genet were both writers. They went through trauma and their careers reflected that." I had laid out these 'chapters' for myself focusing on biography, and literary analysis but I had no idea what purpose they ultimately served, other than that it seemed like the most logical way to go about it. I was getting distraught by the fact that I didn't actually know why I wanted to write this project, on this topic, about these authors. Because it was essentially picked for me and seemed interesting enough? Because I was abroad when the proposals had to be written so I felt that it was safer to give my proxy to someone actually in the room, and Dana seemed like someone I could work with and trust? Because I felt so left out and lonely when I was away and I thought that latching on to this group idea could re-connect me with all the people and events I was missing?

As a result of this frustration, I contributed most of my time and energy to the theater project. I like to think that I was the 'Dante' to Dana's 'Genet.' I would look at what was literally

happening on stage and try to interpret the allegorical value of each scene we created, to extract the moral of the story, and finally to find a way in which it related to this ultimate question of death and how we as humans try to deal with the fact that we are all going to die. She served as the 'Genet' in our partnership in that she wanted to explore these themes and ideas by putting an image on stage that exposed death, and the innate human fear of it but didn't define that fear. I chose to work with Dana not only because I was excited about her ideas and interested in Genet, but because I felt she needed what I was offering the most. I also knew that she would take what I did seriously, and treat me with respect as a partner.

I had only gotten to know Dana about six months before we agreed to work together. She's from Orlando, Florida; she's blonde haired, blue-eyed and large chested. Her voice is loud, high pitched, and just a little nasal. You always know when she walks in a room because she's made sure to make you aware of it. It seemed she was the polar opposite of me, and I didn't think we could ever be friends. Honestly, Dana scared me at first. I had only seen one piece of Dana's work, a semi-autobiographical one act play about her family's reaction to the death of her grandfather. While the characters were compelling and there were good, honest moments in the piece, its biggest weakness came from length and pacing. The play needed an editor, someone to sit in the room and say "This moment isn't really doing anything to serve the story. I think it needs to go." It needed a dramaturg.

As we worked on the project, we developed a sort of mantra that we came back to every time something was added or changed: What are you saying and why? Attempting to answer this question became my mission. It helped me identify passages in my research to bring into our devising sessions. In the rehearsal room, it was my job to say "Why do we need this here? Do we

really need it? How is it serving the piece?” There were times when Dana would want things in the piece because they were aesthetically pleasing, or it was simply a moment where she found joy. In those cases the discussion was usually over pretty quickly. I would ask “Can we still tell the same story without this moment? Does removing this or changing it change the meaning?” For example: having a clear plastic blow up couch for Kellan to sit on, as much as Dana would have liked it, was unnecessary for introducing his character.

Dana was working from an emotional angle. She certainly had an objective and a story to tell, but for her it was largely about finding the emotional pinpoint of the moment and then really hitting that note. So, I counteracted this by working from a narrative angle. If we had both been making decisions based on one or the other the piece would have been unbalanced. It may have wound up as many of the other projects did, a series of images (sometimes very powerful), with little or no through line to connect them. Dana had decided in the beginning of the process that we would work from a five act structure, and I fully supported this idea. The five act structure served us well. It was helpful to have a plan, and definitely made things easier when crunch time came, and we weren't scrambling to find time to work on the problem areas that needed fixing or adjusting.

That said, we did limit ourselves by using it. We committed to it basically from the beginning of the process, which meant that we never fully allowed ourselves to explore what could have existed outside that structure. I don't know what narrative we would have found if we didn't use the five act arc, but because of the way that Dana and I work and the fact that we made the choice to define our roles as 'dramaturg' and 'director' at the start of the process, I'm confident that we would have found a narrative through line for the piece even if we hadn't

committed to using five acts. What influenced our project the more than anything else was the fact that we chose to use *The Balcony* in partnership with the *Inferno*. There were a few other projects that also chose to partner other texts with Dante and it was very clear when watching the pieces in succession which ones had and which ones had not. A big clue was the language. The projects that chose to use the *Inferno* in tandem with another text also tended to have more dialogue. In terms of what wound up on stage, we relied heavily on imagery, dialogue and theatrical devices from Genet. This is the first time since I began using devising as a method for generating work in the two and a half years since I was introduced to it that I have understand how it can be used as a tool to create a finished piece. When I had to devise my moderation piece in my sophomore year, I was still pretty unclear of what devising was or how exactly to do it, and no one I asked could define what it meant to “devise theater.” It seemed to me, from my own moderation piece as well as the other moderation pieces I saw and participated in, that it was a more of a tool to generate ideas that could then be used to inspire a fully formed show. *The Vestibule* was also the first complete original piece that I made in my four years at Bard. Working so intensely with one collaborator changed how I viewed the devising process. It was Dana’s job to look at each moment, to fine tune. It was my job to look at the big picture, to make sure that all those moments strung together painted a larger picture.

I came back to rehearsal again after a period of time and there were now the “role play death” scenes in place. Not all the scenes were created yet, but an order had been roughly setup, and rules for how they worked had been established. Most of The Neutrals had characters (The Sailor, The Judge, The Sheriff etc.) I was in the room for the creation of “The Sailor” , “The Mime” , and “The Lover”.

When I attended the final rehearsal before winter break, I watched the first ‘run’ of the show. It was about forty-five minutes of material. There was a prologue, Act 1, Act 2, Act 3, and Act 4 in which all the role play death scenes occurred. Act 5 hadn’t been finalized yet. Dana was still working though some ideas based on the devised pieces. We had asked a few of the other senior theater majors to watch rehearsals and give us feedback over the course of the last month of the semester, in addition to having our advisor attend some rehearsals. More than once we had been told that one of the death scenes in particular, “The Lover”, was not working. I admit we created it in a rush. It was the last of the death scenarios we had constructed.

Dana had been having a hard time figuring out what Becca’s role play character should be, so I suggested ‘The Lover’ because I was heavily engrossed in A.N. Wilson’s book, *Dante In Love*, at the time. We based the scene on a passage from Canto V of *La Vita Nuova*, in which Dante describes a dream he had. Wilson summarizes the experience described in the poem:

“As he lay in his bedroom, Dante fell asleep. A fiery mist filled the room, and through its vapours he made out the fearsome Lord of Love, who declared that he was Dante’s Master. In the arms of the Lord of Love, a woman was asleep. She was naked, except for a blood-red cloth loosely wrapped around her body. Dante recognized the lady whom he had met in the street [Beatrice]. In one of the Lord’s hands, Dante saw a flaming object. ‘Vide cor tuum’--see your heart, says the Lord in Latin. (In the dream, which is related in Italian, the Lord of Love always speaks in Latin, some of it unintelligible.) Then the Lord of Love woke up the young woman and forced her to eat the heart. The Lord, who had been joyful, started to weep, as he and Beatrice vanished, drifting upwards towards Heaven.”²⁵

The vivid imagery of this vision seemed perfectly gruesome for “The Lover” death scenario. In our version of Dante’s dream, Becca and Charlie sat together at a romantic dinner. The other Neutrals formed a band, serenading them in a combination of made up Italian, French and

²⁵ Wilson, *Dante in Love*, 103.

Spanish. The two were so enamored with each other that they were totally unaware of their surroundings. Annie as The Executioner played the role of their short-tempered waitress. She quickly became so fed up with trying to take their order that she ripped out Charlie's heart and fed it to Becca. This was mimed, like all the other deaths, but since it was such an intricate action the mime didn't read as well from an observer's point of view. This was one of several reasons why the scene felt weak. Most of the dialogue was just Becca and Charlie cooing "Oh I love you!" back and forth while making kissing noises. The biggest problem was that there weren't really any stakes in the scene, especially since it had to be so short. We managed to convey this in the other short scenes because we chose the dialogue carefully and gave Charlie just enough time to realize and then be scared of his imminent death.

Dana and I debated how to fix the scene. She pointed out that all the other Neutral's role play characters were based on professions, so we should find an alternative to "The Lover" that fit that rule. She suggested a spy or assassin, and pitched me a scene where Charlie was a king or president and Becca would hunt him down. I didn't agree with that idea because there was no basis for it in either of the texts we were working with or any of the research I had done. When we returned from winter intersession we informed the cast that we were going to scrap "The Lover" scene entirely and create something new. We split the cast into two groups and gave them each a profession, and a couple of genres to devise some short death scenario pieces. It was time to return to our original source texts for inspiration. While they worked Dana and I looked at *The Balcony*. "I was looking at the Envoy scenes," she said.

"Oh yeah! Those have some really great dialogue. That's a profession we should make them work with" I responded. After watching the pieces the cast devised from the first prompt,

we presented the idea of “The Envoy,” and while we were trying to explain what exactly an ‘envoy’ is, Becca unintentionally gave us the best idea so far. “So it’s kind of like a butler?” She asked.

“THE BUTLER!” Dana and I looked at each other and squealed.

“We have to do the butler.” Dana said.

“That’s the scene. That’s the one it has to be.” I replied.

Okay, so it was also a little bit of a stretch. An envoy is really more of a messenger than a butler, but The Envoy in *The Balcony* becomes a vital assistant to Madame Irma after she assumes the role of The Queen, performing many duties that would befit a Butler. For example, helping The Queen a.k.a. Irma organize her affairs and watch over the Brothel.²⁶ I advised Dana that we should settle permanently on “The Butler,” so she gave the cast some guidelines and they devised two short pieces based around the character of. At our next rehearsal, we incorporated ideas from both of them and created “The Butler” scene. That was the first week of February.

The only part we had left to do at that point was create the ending. Dana had proposed some ideas to me over winter break that involved Charlie doing a dance with the three saints (Beatrice, the Virgin Mary and St. Lucia). We had been debating about whether or not to cut the saints from the piece entirely for about a month before break. Originally, they were supposed to be walking in slow motion across the upstage valence for the duration of the piece. We had liked the idea of distorting the sense of timing on stage by having them there, moving in such an extreme way. But as we had gone forward with constructing the story of Charlie’s journey, the addition of the three women felt superfluous. In the end, we decided to cut them. I think it was

²⁶ Genet , *The Balcony*, 75-82.

the right decision because I felt that they would have been a distraction from the scenes taking place on stage rather than an enhancement to the piece. Additionally, it turns out the actual playing space on the stage was rather small, and we had a hard enough time scaling all the physical sequences and building the set to fit comfortably on stage with our company of ten actors.

I'd like to return to the Durham article for a moment, before addressing the process of how the ending of the piece was constructed and performed. He writes:

“This terror before nonbeing is overcome by the joy of this passage itself, which, if it cannot be fully actualized in the depths of the body, can nonetheless be counter-actualized on its surface, at the level of visual and linguistic expression. It is through this purely theatrical act of expression...that monstrosity itself becomes heroic and the nonbeing of death and abjection is transformed into the joy of becoming other: at the surface where the mortified flesh passes into its simulacrum, where the virtual intervenes with the actual.”²⁷

“Non-being” here refers to death. Durham is saying that death is a theatrical act of expression in Genet’s work, one which allows the performer (and subsequently the audience) to find the joy in the freedom that comes with dying. He also makes us see that there’s theatricality in death in general because it is bodily transformation, much like a performer assuming a role. Being dead releases us from all identity and responsibility, and Genet saw this as an important part of dying and contemplating the inevitability of death. The closest we can get to experiencing the joy that comes from this feeling of pure freedom is by performing death, since it is impossible for us to actually achieve it.

I don’t know how much of or how closely Dana read this article, if at all. I know she was very interested in it and really enjoyed all the quotes I brought her during devising that we were

²⁷ Durham, "The Deaths of Jean," in *Yale French Studies*, 91: 177-8.

from this piece. In any case, I believe that Act V of *The Vestibule* demonstrated this idea onstage quite well. In the beginning, Charlie is terrified by the prospect of his death. By the end of the play he has been rehearsing his death for 2,000 years. Running through the six different death scenarios over and over and over. He is now ready to die. The supertitles ask “Are you afraid?” to which he responds “I was.” I wouldn’t necessarily say that he is “overcome by the joy” of what he is about to do (die), but he is certainly at peace with the idea. In this way, he could not fully actualize the feeling in the depth of his body when he performed the dance. His actions were being controlled outside of his body by Dana telling him what to do. She was controlling him on the surface level, intensifying his body’s potential for movement, because she would change the movements each time as he was doing it and he never knew what the next move would be. It was horrifying to watch, a true monstrosity because we as the audience are finally forced to really examine death in its pure form. It is ugly and unnatural and completely out of our control. Charlie becomes a hero and a martyr in this moment because he conquers the fear. He keeps going even after his body has begun to be destroyed and he is bleeding and in pain. He faces his death with courage because he is terrified, but he is aware of his fear and acknowledges it. Charlie confronted the terror in those final moments.

The first time I watched this sequence, it was right before a rehearsal we held in the multi-purpose room in the Bertelsmann Campus Center, which is a very large space. It was just me, Charlie, and Dana. She played the music, an a capella version of “Under Pressure” and screamed the different movements at Charlie. It was disgusting, captivating and incredibly effective. For a long time I couldn’t find the words to express why, and I’m still not sure I can quite articulate the emotions it made me feel. It was incredibly simple compared to all the other

‘deaths,’ and that made it stronger. Watching it made me think about the fact that most of the time, death happens very simply. It is also almost always out of our control. Most people don’t choose how or when or where they will die, some other force is out there, calling the shots.

Durham’s analysis also highlights a “secret” aspect in our story, known only to Dana, Kellan (who played the role of The Madame/Minos), and myself. The Madame/Minos’ was actually the first person to perform the death dance. She created The Brothel as a way for the souls passing through to rehearse for it, and prepare to confront their deaths. We worked with Kellan to come up with a backstory for his character. Both Dana and I agreed that The Madame and Nina/Virgil had an ongoing sexual relationship, and have even begun to develop some feelings for each other after all those centuries working together. This was drawn from the relationship between Madame Irma and the Chief of Police in *The Balcony*. Cerberus was their offspring. We both felt it was important that each character had at least a few specific ideas for their character’s backstory. For Kellan in particular, it gave him the motivation he needed to execute some of the scenes he was having trouble working with, such as the scene between The Madame/Minos and Annie/Cerberus after Charlie is hung. The secret gave him a reason to treat Annie with a harsh cruelty in that moment, because Minos never told her about what it was like to do the dance, and that she created The Brothel.

Thousands of souls came before Charlie and thousands will come after. And Minos will always be there to clean up the mess and be ready for the next one. This was what led into the Epilogue of the piece, which Kellan performed in the dark after the death dance. We were advised by multiple people that this final monologue, a version of Madame Irma’s final monologue from *The Balcony*, was extraneous and that it did not add anything to the

performance. In some cases, people actually felt that it detracted from the strength of the dance sequence. Perhaps Dana's and my knowledge of these extra character details clouded our judgment when it came to keeping the monologue. I gave over to Dana's emotional connection to this moment. For us, it hinted at the ongoing cycle of death, specifically the endless train of souls coming through the Madame/Minos' Brothel to rehearse, realize, and execute their own death scenarios and death dances.

The final part in the process of making the piece happened four days before the show opened. On Monday, February 22nd, we had our first tech dress rehearsal. After that dress rehearsal, we decided to cut the supertitles. It was the first complete run of the show with all the technical aspects in place. This was the first time we actually saw the show with the supertitles. When we first did an invited rehearsal where we had a group of about ten people come watch a run of the show earlier that month, we got overwhelmingly strong feedback in favor of replacing the supertitles with Dana's voice. At this point we hadn't finished designing and making the slides, so Dana had just been saying everything that would be supertitled. Even though everyone who watched the run, and later in the week our advisor, said that they thought we could get rid of the supertitles, we decided to keep them. We wanted them to represent a neutral, omniscient presence, and we felt that if we made it Dana's voice it would take away from the universality of the message we were trying to send.

After that dress rehearsal, we got feedback from our advisor and another faculty member outside of the theater department. They both advised us to replace the supertitles with Dana's voice, even though it would be a very last minute change. Now that we had seen the full thing with the supertitles in place, we could see that this was ultimately the best choice for the show. It

would add a level of personal connection that the show was lacking. It would also fix some of the pacing and timing issues caused by the difficulty of the actors having to work from a cue light which signaled when the supertitles went on and off, but didn't tell them what was being projected. However, we knew we couldn't simply have Dana say everything that the supertitles projected, there was a bit more adjustment that needed to be made to strengthen the character of the omniscient voice.

Dana and I sat down and looked at the script. "I know they're right...but I'm just not sure how to do this." Dana said.

"What if, for the interlude bits between the death scenes, where they ask Charlie how it went ...what if we gave those moments to The Neutrals instead? And they were allowed to break character just for that moment? They could ask Charlie directly." I offered.

"Yes! I really like that. It works because it lets them show a bit of who they were before they got there, that they were people who died and came here and did this too." She replied. So we went through the script and edited the interlude moments, assigning them to different Neutrals. We also decided that since Dana would be doing the voice over live every night, that she could ask different death questions to each person individually and they could respond naturally, which would help it be more organic and engaging. It also connected the prologue to the live creation of the dance in Act V nicely.

"Can I ask for something" I said to Dana cautiously while we sat and edited.

"What?"

"Can I be in the prologue? Like will you ask me a question?" I looked at her.

“I think I have to! Oh definitely. That’s so important. Yes, Audrey, yes.” She resumed typing. I was now in the piece. I would only be on stage for the first minute of the show, but it was the first and last time I ever appeared on the Luma stage or in any Bard Theater Department production, and it felt good. The addition of this small detail, and Dana’s reaction to my suggestion, helped to partially resolve some of the fear and discomfort I had been harboring about my role in the project.

We ran our final dress rehearsal with these changes and it went off without a hitch. It solidified our decision to make the change and get rid of the supertitles. It felt great. We had a packed house for every show, people were singing our praises. We had a party and exchanged some teary-eyed, inebriated embraces with the cast, and thanked them profusely for their hard work. All the seniors celebrated our breakthrough accomplishment in executing the festival. Then it was over, and on to the next project.

PART 3: What are you going to do now? or Facing the Fact That it's Over
I wrote a senior project, I will graduate and get a job. I still fear death.

I'm incredibly proud of the work that we made. So then why am I sitting here feeling unsatisfied? Perhaps its because I don't feel much ownership of the project. Dramaturges never "own" the project, they are forever working for and on something else, for someone else. But this was *my* senior project, and yet there was an inherent contradiction between the how I saw my role and the fact that I was a collaborator in what we created. Maybe it's because I didn't attend every rehearsal, so I feel like I gave up my chance to contribute in a more direct way, or maybe it's because I chose to take a back seat when I was in the room. I can't help asking what the show would have been without my voice, or if I had committed 100% to being present in the room. I know that I contributed a lot of time and effort. I know that what I read and said and did had an effect. According to Dana, "The devising process was so important and we had such little time to make something, not direct or write, but generate material. Without the research [you did] we would have needed twice the time. It was incredibly beneficial to have someone who was there to keep everyone accountable for what are you saying and why, it helped with security--we made agreements and didn't have to worry about it not making sense, so we never had to backtrack."

I certainly don't regret doing this project. I really enjoyed working with Dana and I think we both were so happy to discover how well we worked together. For me, it's often difficult not to feel regret at the end of things, whether it's a project, a show, a relationship, or college. I consistently set the bar very high for myself, and when I don't get there it's difficult not to be disappointed. But I learned so much throughout this process! I've gained two very strong

mentors in Dante and Genet, I could research these topics for another five years, and then maybe I'd be ready to write the project I originally envisioned.

Initially, when people told us that we should get rid of the supertitles and replace them with Dana's voice, it terrified me. I already felt like I was disappearing in more ways than one, within this project and outside of it, in my personal life. Dana was such a strong presence throughout the whole process, and her voice could be seen so clearly in all the other aspects of the show. I thought that if she became the voice of the omnipotent presence represented by the supertitles, it would officially be her show and I would lose any ownership or part in what we had made. So I managed, that first time around, to convince her otherwise. Thankfully, always the supportive partner, she agreed with my argument for why we should keep the supertitles. But after we had seen the full run with them in place, it became clear what the best choice for the show was. Ultimately it was my ideas for the script adjustments that sold Dana on getting rid of the supertitles and using her voice instead. I recognized in that moment that it was what the show needed, and that was way more important than what I felt I needed for my own personal reasons. That night, I pulled my advisor aside and admitted my secret fear in whispered tones, and was immediately assured that I shouldn't be worried and my contributions to the project were visible and appreciated. While it did help to hear that from someone I greatly admired, it didn't completely erase my feelings of dissatisfaction and disappointment with myself.

This is the first time I had ever 'dramaturged' anything. A year before we started this whole process I wouldn't have been able to tell you anything about what a dramaturg does, though I had heard the word before. When I first started learning about dramaturgy, I didn't think it could be applied to a devised performance, since I believed most of the work was based in

historical context research. Based on my experiences having done dramaturgy this year for *The Vestibule* as well as *Don Juan*, if I decide to pursue it I would much prefer to work on new or devised work. Devising is a collaborative process, and the roles of each collaborator tend to be more fluid than in traditional productions. If it's an original piece of devised work there's the chance to be able to have more of an influence and make instrumental contributions to the show as a dramaturg than there might be working on dramaturgy for an existing play.

My decision to function as a dramaturg for my senior project was made largely based on practicality. I was submitting a proposal to do a joint senior project for both Written Arts and Theater, and I thought that basing my project in dramaturgy would allow me to participate in the group theater project, while also having a wealth of material and a format to use for a written project. It turns out that there was some miscommunication and I found out in March, just after the festival had happened that I was not, in fact, doing a joint senior project, and therefore was under no obligation to complete the requirements outlined for the Written Arts department projects. I was very upset about this at first. However, I subsequently felt that despite all the work I had done to moderate into two majors and to adjust my schedule to in order to take all the requirements for both departments, this news turned out to be more of a blessing than a curse. I was very far behind on my writing, largely due to my injury, but also because I had been struggling with a lot of personal issues over the course of my senior year and found it incredibly difficult to get anything done because of these underlying emotional problems. It was really hard to come back as senior after having spent the spring of my junior year abroad. I recognized that that period had been a pivotal one for many of the friends I had made at Bard. New friendships and relationships were forged in my absence that would be the building blocks for the social

structure of this final year together. Since I had missed out on being there, I was excluded from the lives of people I had thought were my friends, who I had spent the last four years forging relationships with. I began to spend an unhealthy amount of time alone, exhausted and frustrated by the work of trying to rebuild these friendships on my own. If I had to chase down and fight for just one minute of attention from the people I cared about, the return for my efforts didn't seem worth it. I resigned that I would treat everyone as a colleague, and if we could serve each other professionally that would be the only relationship I maintained with those students.

“I will serve as a dramaturg.” I told myself in February 2015. Although, at that time, I only had a very basic sense of what this meant. I could work with another theater senior who felt that their project could benefit from my playing this role. Though I did not choose to write about Genet and Dante completely on my own, I feel deeply connected to the topics that both chose to tackle through their writing, I also think that for this project, at this time, in my life, it's so very important to look towards artists who I can take with me into my career, into my professional life.

Senior Project may be the culmination of four years worth of work, and it is a large undertaking, but it is certainly not the determinant for the rest of my life. That's actually quite difficult to remember at times. I wanted so badly for it to be a blueprint for the kind of work I would create in the future, a start to the next phase of life. In the introduction to her translation of the *Inferno*, Mary Jo Bang writes “You know the story: Heaven, but not yet. First, you have to come to your senses in a dark forest and realize you've strayed from the path. You have to lose hope, then find something bright that renews it.”²⁸ As this year, and this period of my life, come

²⁸ Alighieri Trans. Mary Jo Bang, *Inferno*, 1.

to a close I am realizing that this is--in fact--not just a witty, somewhat tongue-and-cheek summarizing of the first few pages of Canto I, but also how I have felt for the past six months. I am not reaching towards Heaven (literally), but rather the bright lights of New York City and the salvation of a job with a salary, and an apartment. However, we know that this is just the beginning of the story.

The Vestibule in particular was working from the first three Cantos, which are literally the beginning of the end of life, the first steps in the journey through Hell. It was the first phase of my senior project process, the beginning of the thing that represents the end of college; and it was the first piece I made in my last year of working on my own pieces for what I'm guessing will be at least the next few years.

The *Inferno* is, in many ways, the story of my life as I transition from college to post-college life. This year I've been journeying through rivers of emotional shit, crying out "Dear God!" and fainting, (though Dante may have me beat on that count). I've had strange encounters with figures from my past, reaching out to former mentors and friends to try and gain some insight to what my own future holds. Reading further in Bang's introduction, I can't help but to place myself in Dante's shoes; "So, save me, you say. And Virgil says, paradoxically the best way out is by going deeper in."²⁹ The use of the second-person narrative makes it that much easier to see the parallels between his treacherous path into the unknown beyond and my own uncertain march forward. This is the realization I have refused to believe, up until now. The most difficult part of this process is not the research or the planning, or even the endless pile of internship applications. It is the writing, the doing of it. My own personal Virgils keep telling me

²⁹ Ibid.

I just have to do it, and that “by going deeper in”, I will eventually find my way out on the other side, with a plan and a place to live and a vague idea of what the next step will be.

A. Show Script

THE VESTIBULE
 A SENIOR PROJECT
 SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATER AND PERFORMANCE
 BY DANA SHIMKOSKI AND AUDREY ROSENBLITH

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Prologue

(Dim lights up on EVERYONE except DANA standing in a single file line down centerstage, facing front. There is a large black wardrobe on wheels upstage center, barely visible.)

DANA (voice over): PROLOGUE: Charlie finds out that he's going to die

Hello

EVERYONE: Hi

DANA: Welcome to Hell (almost).

EVERYONE: Thank you.

DANA: Are you afraid?

EVERYONE: Of what?

DANA: You have twenty-four minutes and thirty seconds left.

EVERYONE: Damn. Okay.

DANA: When did you first realize that you will die?

EVERYONE: Earlier.

DANA: Are you afraid?

EVERYONE: Of what?

DANA: The End.

EVERYONE: If you say so.

DANA: Audrey [death question]

AUDREY: [answer]

DANA: Kellan [death question]

KELLAN: [answer]

DANA: Becca [death question]

BECCA: [answer]

DANA: Elise [death question]

ELISE: [answer]

DANA: Nina [death question]

NINA: [answer]

DANA: Duncan [death question]

DUNCAN: [answer]

DANA: Annie [death question]

ANNIE: [answer]

DANA: Collin [death question]

COLLIN: [answer]

DANA: JaQuan [death question]

JAQUAN: [answer]

DANA: Cassandra [death question]

KASSANDRA: [answer]

DANA: How do you want to die?

EVERYONE: I don't know.

DANA: Charlie?

CHARLIE: Yes

DANA: Charlie [death question]

CHARLIE: [answer]

DANA: You're going to die in twenty-four minutes.

CHARLIE: Damn. Okay.

DANA: Are you ready?

EVERYONE: Yes.

CHARLIE: No.

DANA: Places.

CHARLIE: What?

EVERYONE: Thank you places.

CHARLIE: No-

DANA: Three, Two, One

CHARLIE: Wait! Hold on!

(Blackout. EVERYONE laughs.)

Act I

DANA *(voice over)*: ACT I: The Best Way Out is by Going Deeper In

(A loud, clicking metronome sound is heard. (CHARLIE poses.)

CHARLIE *(does a series of jerky choreographed movements as he speaks)*: Can I kill myself? Have I the power to die?...Do I die, humanely, a death which will be that of a man and which I will imbue with all of human intention and freedom? Do I myself die, or do I not rather die always other from myself, so that I would have to say that properly speaking I do not die?

(he begins to walk around the stage, as if looking for something)

DANA: Charlie?

CHARLIE: Yes?

DANA: You have twenty-two minutes left.

CHARLIE: I need more time than that. I need... I need...

DANA: What are you looking for?

CHARLIE: I'm looking for more time

(the asking and answering of the question, "what are you looking for" get more rapid and frantic with each exchange. CHARLIE becomes visibly frustrated)

DANA: What are you looking for?

CHARLIE: [answer]

DANA: What are you looking for?

CHARLIE: [answer]

DANA: What are you looking for?

CHARLIE: [answer]

DANA: What are you looking for?

CHARLIE: [answer]

DANA: What are you looking for?

CHARLIE: [answer]

DANA: What are you looking for?

CHARLIE: [answer]

DANA: What are you looking for?

CHARLIE: I don't know!

DANA: What are you looking for?

CHARLIE (*runs downstage center and throws up his arms, looking out*): A way out!

DANA: You're not looking in the right place.

(Beat. The clicking stops.)

Act II

DANA(*voice over*): ACT II: Charlie Starts Looking In The Right Place, or Charlie Finds a Friend

CHARLIE (*still standing downstage center*): So save me.

NINA pokes her head out from behind the road box and begins to tip toe forward, towards CHARLIE.)

DANA: That's it. Keep going. Almost there. Closer. Closer. Closer.

(NINA is right behind CHARLIE. She sticks her head under his outstretched arm, looking up at him.)

NINA: Boo!

(CHARLIE screams and faints. NINA catches him and throws him over her shoulder—in a fireman's carry—She looks at the audience, laughs maniacally and runs offstage. BLACKOUT.)

Act III

(THE NEUTRALS bring on their boxes—life sized, white doll boxes. Each one is labeled with their character on the top of the frame. They place them and then stand inside, and pose.)

DANA: ACT III: Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here

KELLAN (*steps out from the wardrobe*): PART I: Let Me Tell You About The Vestibule
(Music plays, a plucky, Spanish guitar tune)

KELLAN: This is Annie as The Executioner as Cerberus.

ANNIE (*runs out from behind the wardrobe*): Bow wow! Bow wow!

KELLAN: This is Elise as The Mime.

(ELISE steps out of her box and mimes. Crosses down center and poses.)

KELLAN: To my left is Duncan as The Sailor

DUNCAN(*stepping out of his box*): Land ho! *(He crosses down center to join ELISE.)*

KELLAN: Up there is Cassandra as The Bishop

KASSANDRA: The power of christ compels you. *(She climbs down from her perch and crosses down center to join the tableau.)*

KELLAN: This is Becca as The Butler

BECCA *(stepping out of her box)*: At your service! *(Crosses to join tableau)*

KELLAN: Above here is JaQuan as The Judge

JAQUAN: Justice is served! *(Climbs down, crosses to tableau)*

KELLAN: This is Collin as The Sheriff

COLLIN *(stepping out of his box)*: This town ain't big enough for the two of us! *(crosses to tableau)*

KELLAN: And I'm Kellan as The Madame as Minos! *(Takes a deep breath, positions himself in the center of the tableau and poses)*

Welcome to the Vestibule.

(Music cuts. THE NEUTRALS and ANNIE run behind the wardrobe, stopping every time they speak)

Crawl Hurry up!

THE NEUTRALS/ANNIE: But I've got to go and get dressed

KELLAN *(laughing)*: Crawl Hurry up!

THE NEUTRALS/ANNIE: But I've got to go and get dressed

KELLAN *(laughing)*: Crawl Hurry up!

THE NEUTRALS/ANNIE: But I've got to go and get dressed *(They all go behind the wardrobe, leaving KELLAN alone on stage.)*

KELLAN *(clasping his hands to his chest)*: Sublime! Sublime function! I'll have all that to judge. Oh, child, you reconcile me with the world. A judge! I'm going to be judge of your acts! The world is an apple. I cut it in two: the good, the bad. And you agree, thank you! you agree to be the bad! But it's a painful occupation. If every judgment were delivered seriously, each one would cost me my life. That's why I'm dead. I, King of Hell, weigh those who are dead, like me. She's a dead person, like myself. Cerberus?

ANNIE *(running out from behind the wardrobe)*: Bow-wow, bow-wow!

KELLAN: You're handsome ! And the smell of a fresh victim makes you even handsomer. Show your fangs. Dreadful. White.

ANNIE: Bow-wow, bow-wow!

KELLAN: Be still. In the depths of Hell I sort out the humans who venture there. You, thief, spy, she-dog, Minos is speaking to you, Minos weighs you.

(ANNIE begins to sing “Que Sera Sera” They bow towards the audience, then to each other. They waltz upstage and ANNIE puts KELLAN into the wardrobe and then goes behind it, letting her voice fade away. NINA runs on stage carrying CHARLIE, unconscious, over her shoulder. She freezes at center stage and looks at the audience)

NINA: PART 2: Password

(She puts CHARLIE down. She shakes him.)

NINA: We're here! Come on! We're here!

Charlie wakes up, sits up, and screams. Nina joins. They both stop abruptly.)

NINA: Are you ready Charlie?

CHARLIE: Who are you?

NINA: I'm Nina Tobin but you can call me Virgil *(holds out her hand.)*

CHARLIE: I'm Charlie, but I guess you already know that.

NINA: You've got 18 minutes Charlie.

CHARLIE: I'm going to be completely honest with you Nina I have no clue. I haven't rehearsed this.

NINA: Well we've been rehearsing for 2,000 years.

CHARLIE: I'm scared.

NINA: I know, 2,000 years is a long time.

(Nina walks towards the wardrobe.)

CHARLIE: Where are you going?

NINA: You said you wanted a rehearsal?

CHARLIE: We can do it more than once?

NINA: Yeah you can only die once but practice makes perfect. You were born for this role. (*beat*) Don't you trust me?

CHARLIE: No.

Nina knocks on the wardrobe.

ELISE *(popping her head out from behind and then receding)*: Password!

NINA: Homicide

KASSANDRA *(popping her head out from behind and then receding)*: Password!

NINA: Drowning

COLLIN *(popping his head out from behind and then receding)*: Password!

NINA: Poison

ANNIE *(popping her head out from behind and then receding)*: Password!

NINA: What's that thing where someone cuts you up and plays with your innards?

DUNCAN *(popping his head out from behind and then receding)*: Password!

NINA: Gunshot wound

BECCA(*popping her head out from behind and then receding*): Password!

NINA: Auto-erotic asphyxiation

JAQUAN(*popping his head out from behind and then receding*): Password

NINA: Regular asphyxiation

EVERYONE (*popping their heads out from behind and then receding*): PASSWORD!!

(*KELLAN emerges from the wardrobe. He walks towards NINA, who backs away from him. They lock ands and shake vigorously, turning their heads to the audience when they speak*)

KELLAN AND NINA: Hey there. (*beat*) How's is going. (*beat*) Been a while.

KELLAN(*twirling NINA away from him*): That'll do now.

NINA: You're crazy! I haven't finished.(*slaps his ass*)

KELLAN: I'm not trying to pick an argument, and you know it, but we've no time to waste...

NINA: Of course. But you should get acquainted(*gestures to CHARLIE.*)

KELLAN: Well if you say so (*steps over to CHARLIE and stands too close for his comfort, offer his hand.*)

CHARLIE: I'm Charlie.

KELLAN: I know.

NINA: Back down Minos. Where's Annie?

KELLAN: Unfortunately Annie's not free.

CHARLIE: Who's—

NINA: isn't she coming?

KELLAN: I can't imagine what she's doing. I gave instructions that everything was to be ready by the time Charlie arrived. The horse is already here, so is the whale. I'll ring her.

NINA: Don't, I'll attend to that. I like to ring! Ringing's authoritative. Ah, to ring out commands. Beat. Annie! (*she starts barking.*) Cerberus!

ANNIE(*running out from behind the wardrobe*): Bow-wow! Bow-wow-wow!

KELLAN: Are my studios ready?

CHARLIE: Umm... excuse me... what studios?

(*KELLAN, NINA and ANNIE put their arms around each other and laugh. They begin to walk off.*)

NINA (*while walking off*): Come on Charlie! Time for your first rehearsal.

Act IV

DANA: ACT IV: Six Ways Death is a Dying Art, or THE REHEARSAL

(*The lights change, dimmer, more ominous*)

ELISE (*stepping out from behind the wardrobe*): Part 1: The Mime

(*ELISE mimes lassoing CHARLIE. He is caught and she reels him in. He tries to speak to her but she shushes him every time. She lays him down and begins miming tying him to*

train tracks. THE NEUTRALS emerge from behind the roadbed as the train. ANNIE enters and blows CHARLIE a kiss, then mimes pulling a lever. The train runs CHARLIE over and goes offstage, killing him.)

NINA *running on stage and untying CHARLIE*): How'd it go?

CHARLIE *(sits up, gasping for air)*: I don't know... I think I just died!

NINA *(laughing.)*: Attaboy! *(she exits)*

CHARLIE: Wait! Nina don't—*(he gets up to follow her)*

DUNCAN *(entering from the wings with his ship's wheel)*: Part 2: The Sailor

(He grabs CHARLIE by the arm and swings him so that CHARLIE is now in the "boat" with him, NINA and KELLAN join, they appear to be sea sick. They all weave their way across the stage.)

CHARLIE: Do I know you?

DUNCAN: Do I know you?

CHARLIE: Where are we going?

DUNCAN: Where are we going?

CHARLIE: How long have we been on this boat?

DUNCAN: How long have we been on this boat?

(THE NEUTRALS enter from the opposite side of the stage as the whale and cross towards them.)

CHARLIE: Do you hear that?

DUNCAN: Do you hear that?

CHARLIE: Does anyone else see this?

DUNCAN: I see a big one! Thar she blows! *(He tosses CHARLIE over board. CHARLIE gets eaten by the whale. EVERYONE exits except DUNCAN and CHARLIE.)*

DUNCAN *(whispering)*: Charlie...Charlie...Charlie! How did it go?

CHARLIE: Duncan? *(DUNCAN makes a fervent shushing motion)*

Is this... am I going to keep--

DUNCAN: Dying?

CHARLIE: Yea.

DUNCAN: Yes .

CHARLIE: Okay.

(NINA enters from offstage, she gives DUNCAN a menacing look. He quickly puts his wheel back in his box and exits.)

NINA: How did it feel?

CHARLIE: Nina...it was a whale! I don't know it just felt a bit silly.

NINA: Why's that?

CHARLIE: Well, first of all whales have baleen, and not teeth. So... I don't know, I mean Jonah and Geppetto survived inside the whale, so I guess I could too. Even if it's an ending, it's not a death. *(NINA nods. She exits upstage to wardrobe.)*

BECCA*(enters from offstage, to audience):* Part 3: The Butler *(to CHARLIE)* Dinner is served!

DUNCAN enters with cardboard violin and mimes to violin music. THE NEUTRALS, except for COLLIN, enter and form the table. ANNIE runs on stage.

ANNIE: Charlie! Come on! We have to go right now! *(She grabs him and pulls him off upstage, behind wardrobe.)*

(NINA enters. She and BECCA whisper.)

BECCA: Yes sir, or course sir. *(She exits upstage to wardrobe)*

(NINA crosses to the table. KELLAN, ANNIE, and CHARLIE join.)

NINA: I'd like to propose a toast to my lovely wife Minos, and my beautiful daughter, Annie, and her new fiance Charlie.

ALL: Tchín-tchín! *(they toast)*

BECCA*(emerging from behind wardrobe):* Hot towel anyone?

ALL: NO! *(BECCA exits)*

COLLIN*(emerging from behind the wardrobe with cardboard bowl, almost unintelligible):* Oh!

I'm absolutely covered in sauce! *(he exits)*

KELLAN: Silly chef! You have bigger fish to fry!

CHARLIE: Someone added more than a grain of salt!

ANNIE: You're barking up the wrong tree.

NINA: It takes two to tango.

KELLAN: Don't bite the hand that feeds you.

BECCA *(emerging from behind the wardrobe):* Champagne?

ALL: YES! *(BECCA exits)*

COLLIN*(emerging from behind the wardrobe, almost unintelligible):* It seems I lost my shoe in the sauce! *(he exits, BECCA enters with bottle of champagne, begins to go around the table and fill everyone glass starting with KELLAN)*

KELLAN: Silly chef! You have bigger fish to fry!

CHARLIE: Someone bit off more than he can chew.

ANNIE: Let sleeping dogs lie.

NINA: He'll get a taste of his own medicine.

EVERYONE freezes. MUSIC STOP.

KASSANDRA: He is worse than the bad tusk of an elephant!

JAQUAN: His mouth needs to be washed out! But I doubt there is soap brave enough to even try it!

ELISE: Wherever did Annie find him? Upside down, being used as a mop for the zoo?

EVERYONE unfreezes. MUSIC RESUMES. BECCA moves off to the side, COLLIN joins her and they watch CHARLIE.)

KELLAN: Blood Is Thicker Than Water

CHARLIE: Over my dead body!

(They all toast and then freeze. CHARLIE drinks and then dies. BECCA and COLLIN exit. NINA and KELLAN finish their drinks and exit. The table exits. DUNCAN finishes miming song dramatically and the music ends. DUNCAN exits. ANNIE picks up CHARLIE'S body and drags it upstage. She stands him up, grabs him by the hair and controls him like a puppet.)

ANNIE: How'd you like that one Charlie. *beat.* 'I don't know Annie, it wasn't exciting enough.' *beat.* Really Charlie! Tell me more! *beat.* 'You know I think I want something with a little more adventure' *beat.* Be careful what you wish for. *(she walks behind the wardrobe. CHARLIE wakes up. ANNIE re enters, guns in hand)*

CHARLIE: Will it always be you?

ANNIE *(handing him the gun)* : Take this. You're going to need it. *(she poses)*

COLLIN *(stepping out from behind the wardrobe)*: Part 4: The Sheriff

THE NEUTRALS run out and cross downstage from behind the wardrobe as the horses. KELLAN and NINA enter and stand next to COLLIN. HORSES neigh.)

COLLIN: Down on your knees

HORSES neigh.

EVERYONE: Bravo! Bravo, Dove!

COLLIN: You haven't forgotten a thing.

(EVERYONE mounts his or her horse, one by one.)

KELLAN: Giddy up Cherrybomb!

NINA: Faster doolap!

COLLIN: Off we go Doug!

CHARLIE: One last ride, 400!

ANNIE: Yee-haw! Senior Macho-suave

KELLAN and COLLIN *(singing)*: Yippee-yay there'll be no wedding bells, for today

EVERYONE (*singing*): I got spurs that jingle, jangle, jingle

As I go ridin' merrily along

And they sing, 'Oh ain't you glad you're single

And that song ain't so very far from wrong

Oh, Sally Jane, oh, Sally Jane

Though I'd love to stay forever this is why I can't remain

KELLAN and COLLIN (*singing*): So I'll go jingling, a-jangling a-jingling along!

ANNIE: It's approaching, sir!

CHARLIE: But suddenly?

COLLIN: We're at the edge of the meadow. Your thighs are warm and you're pressing my flanks.

Death...

CHARLIE: But suddenly?

NINA: Death has pricked up her ears. She puts a finger to her lips, asking for silence....

CHARLIE: But suddenly?

ANNIE: The water lay motionless in the pools. The wind itself was awaiting an order to unfurl the flags

CHARLIE: But suddenly?

KELLAN: Suddenly? Eh? Suddenly?

COLLIN: Ah yes, suddenly all was fire and sword! Now death was in action. Death was ready to drop. Finally, exhausted, herself dead with fatigue, she fell asleep. (*he reaches for his or his gun.*)

ANNIE(*to COLLIN*): Stop, stop, it's not time for that yet, but I feel it'll be magnificent. (*puts his gun away*)

CHARLIE: Tell me, Dove?

ANNIE: What is it, sir?

CHARLIE: You were saying: for this minute close to death ... and then?

HORSES: And then!

The HORSES get up and take the guns.

COWBOYS: Oh my!

HORSES: Nobody move!

CHARLIE: Okay! (*tries to move*)

HORSES: Bang! Bang! Bang! (*CHARLIE falls to the floor. THE HORSES walk upstage and pose. KELLAN, COLLIN, and NINA form a tableau down center around CHARLIE.*)

CHARLIE: Close to death ... where I shall be nothing, nothing but my image. So, in a little while, to the blare of trumpets, we shall descend to death and glory, for I am about to die...

COLLIN: But, sir, you've been dead since yesterday.

CHARLIE: Because I'm dead, prating horse. I am now only the image of my former self.

NINA: You are a dead deputy, but an eloquent one.

CHARLIE: Your turn, now. Lower your head and hide your eyes, for I want to be a deputy in solitude.

KELLAN: Dove, are you ready?

(CHARLIE nods)

COLLIN: The nation weeps for that splendid hero who died in battle.

CHARLIE: Dove... Add that I died with my boots on!

KELLAN: My hero died with his boots on! *(walks upstage, mounts horse)*

NINA: How I loved you, my hero! *(walks upstage, mounts horse)*

COLLIN*(kneeling down)*: But, sir, you've been dead since yesterday. *(walks upstage, mounts horse)*

CHARLIE: Dove?

ANNIE: Yes.

CHARLIE: Is it time?

ANNIE: The nation weeps for that splendid hero who died in battle.

(ANNIE shoots him in the face. Walks upstage, mounts horse. EVERYONE whistles the song as they ride their horses offstage. ALL exit, except CASSANDRA, who crosses downstage, as a horse, to CHARLIE.)

KASSANDRA: How was that one?

CHARLIE*(sitting up suddenly)*: I feel like a goddamn hero.

KASSANDRA: Is that all?

CHARLIE: Well it was goo, but I feel like it was missing something. Some official capacity.

KASSANDRA: Was it close?

CHARLIE: Almost.

(THE NEUTRALS except for ELISE, sit on blocks stage right as the jury, ANNIE enters as the bailiff, ELISE and NINA stand stage left as the prosecution and the defense JAQUAN enters and stands on block center stage)

JAQUAN: Part 5: The Judge

ANNIE: All rise for the honorable Judge JaQuan presiding.

EVERYONE stands.

JAQUAN: You may be seated. *(they sit)* So what brings us all here today?

ELISE: This man killed my horse!

EVERYONE poses and turns to the audience.

JAQUAN: Do you admit to these charges, Charlie?

CHARLIE: Umm--

JAQUAN: Shh!

CHARLIE: Excuse--

JAQUAN: Shh!

CHARLIE: I--

JAQUAN: Shh!

NINA: Objection!

ELISE: Overruled!

JAQUAN: Sustained!

EVERYONE poses and turns to the audience.

JAQUAN: Please state your case.

ELISE: This man killed my horse!

EVERYONE claps. ELISE bows.

NINA: Permission to defend.

JAQUAN: Granted.

NINA: Your honor, my client is a horse lover. Tell me, is this the face of a killer? No. If you want to know who the murderer is, you should look no further than Elise!

EVERYONE is shocked!

JAQUAN: Order! Order!

ELISE: I demand that this man be sentenced to death!

EVERYONE: Dun-dun-dun!

JAQUAN: Bailiff, take him away!

EVERYONE exits, except ANNIE and CHARLIE. She drags him upstage to blocks, he protests. She forces him up on blocks.

ANNIE: Any last words?

CHARLIE is hung. KELLAN watches from behind the wardrobe. After CHARLIE'S last breath, he enters. ANNIE sits on blocks.

KELLAN: Do you miss that, Annie?

ANNIE: When our sessions are over, Madame, you never allow anyone to talk about them. So you have no idea of how we really feel. You don't even want us to talk about it among ourselves. You're afraid of a smile, of a joke.

KELLAN: The clients want sober ceremonies. My house is a severe place. You're allowed to play cards.

ANNIE: Then don't be surprised that we're sad.

KELLAN: One day when you're older I'll tell you a sad story.

ANNIE leaves.

CHARLIE: Can you let me down?

KELLAN lets him down.

KELLAN: Are you sore?

CHARLIE: Yes. Just my neck.

KELLAN: That tends to happen *beat* You've got one more left. Any requests?

CHARLIE: My throat's awfully dry. I could use a glass of water.

KELLAN: Annie! Bring him some water!

ANNIE: *(enters carrying fish tank full of water, place it down stage center)* As you requested.

(KASSANDRA and NINA enter)

KASSANDRA *(to audience)*: Part 6: The Bishop *(to ANNIE, KELLAN, and NINA)* Has he ever sinned?

ANNIE: Barely six sins, and far from my favorite ones.

NINA: But deadly ones!

KELLAN: And it was a job finding those.

KASSANDRA: About the sins, you really did commit them?

CHARLIE: And what if my sins were real?

KELLAN: Don't listen to him. As for his sins, don't worry.

KASSANDRA: I'm quite aware of that. Here there's no possibility of doing evil. How could you do evil? The Devil makes believe. That's how one recognizes him. He's the great Actor. And that's why the Church has anathematized actors.

ANNIE: Reality frightens you, doesn't it?

KASSANDRA: Stop talking and undress him. *(Music starts, the hymn "Holy Holy Holy", to CHARLIE)* Charlie, I'm going to ask you some simple questions that are going to have a profound effect on the rest of your life.

(THE NEUTRALS enter and become the statues. NINA and KELLAN undress CHARLIE)

CHARLIE: Alright.

KASSANDRA: Do you reject Satan?

CHARLIE: I do.

KASSANDRA: And all his works?

CHARLIE: I do.

KASSANDRA: And all his empty promises?

CHARLIE: I do.

KASSANDRA:

CHARLIE:

(Very fast.) Do you believe in the God the Father, almighty, creator of heaven and earth? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints,

I do!

I do!

I do!

the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, I do!
and life everlasting?

Beat.

CHARLIE: With the help of god I do.

KASSANDRA: Then I baptize you in the name of the father, the son, and the holy spirit. Amen.

(CHARLIE kneels and bends backwards. THE NEUTRALS exit.)

NINA: Do you trust me?

CHARLIE: Yes.

(NINA and KELLAN exit. ANNIE approaches CHARLIE and drowns him, shoving his head into the fish tank. MUSIC STOP)

ANNIE: You're silent. That's right Let's be silent and wait...

(The lights dim to a spotlight on CHARLIE. ANNIE exits. THE NEUTRALS remove their boxes in the dark.)

DANA(voice over): Charlie.

CHARLIE comes up for air, spitting water out and breathing heavily.

CHARLIE: What?

DANA: That was your last rehearsal.

CHARLIE: I know it was my last rehearsal.

DANA: You have three minutes.

CHARLIE(*picking up the fish tank*): I know! Okay! I know! You think that I don't know that I only have three minutes left? We've been doing this forever!

DANA: For 2,000 years.

CHARLIE(*walking to wardrobe and putting fish tank inside*): Exactly. The prologue is always 2 minutes. Act 1: 1:30. Act 2: 3 minutes. Act 3: 5 minutes. Act 4: 45 seconds, 1 minute, a minute and a half, 2 minutes, two and a half minutes, Three and a half minutes, Annie just walked off stage so we must be back to act 5: only three more minutes! I know.

DANA: Are you afraid.

CHARLIE: I was.

DANA: Me too.

CHARLIE: Thank you.

DANA: ACT V: Opening Night

(DANA enters through the house and comes to the edge of the stage.)

DANA: Charlie. I'm right here. Are you ready?

CHARLIE: Yes.

DANA: Three... Two... One... Cue music please.

(Lights up very bright, the traveler opens up to reveal the white valence. MUSIC START, a cappella version of "Under Pressure". DANA directs CHARLIE in the DEATH DANCE. CHARLIE screams, BLACKOUT.)

DANA *(in the dark)*: EPILOGUE: The Afterparty

KELLAN *(from the house, in the dark)*: Someone get his body off the stage. Oh well, everything's in working order...glory means descending into the grave with tons of victuals! Annie! Annie! Bolt the doors, my dear, and put the furniture-covers on... In a little while, I'll have to start all over again put all the lights on again ... dress up... Dress up ... ah, the disguises! Distribute roles again ... assume my own... Prepare yours ... judges, mimes, sheriffs, bishops, sailors, butlers who allow the revolt to congeal, I'm going to prepare my costumes and studios for tomorrow. . . . You must now go home, where everything-you can be quite sure-will be falser than here You must go now. You'll leave by the right, through the alley... It's morning already.

END OF SHOW

B. Video Documentation of performance of *The Vestibule*, February 26th, 2016
<https://vimeo.com/158628519>

C. Photo Documentation of dress rehearsal of *The Vestibule*, February 24th, 2016

1. The Prologue



2. Act II



3. Act II, Part 1: Let Me Tell You About The Brothel



4. Act III, Part 2: Password



5. Act IV, Part 1: The Mime



6. Act IV, Part 2: The Sailor



7. Act IV, Part 3: The Butler



8. Act IV, Part 4: The Sheriff



9. Act IV, Part 5: The Judge



10. Act IV, Part 6: The Bishop



11. Act IV, Charlie gets drowned



12. Act V: Opening Night (The Death Dance)



C. Summary of the first piece we devised

Dana and Ethan improvise movement while Audrey says: “Am i dead? I’m dead. I’m alive. Am I alive? Is anyone there? Can anyone help me? I can’t see. i’m here. How did I get here? I’m lost. I’m dead.”

Dana and Ethan laugh, the look at each other. Its funny? No its not

One of them remembers they are Virgil (Dana) and she begins to chide and tease Ethan, who is Dante.

“You’re mean.” He says.

“Are you a coward? Are you scared? Are you ready?” She asks.

She tells him to take the lead, but tells him “You’re going the wrong way.” It becomes a guessing game. She says “When you’re ready, you’ll find it.” He does. They continue on their journey.

They arrive at the Gate. “We’re here, what do we do now?” He asks.

There is something guarding the Gate (Audrey).

“Talk to her” Virgil says.

Dante takes a few cautious steps forward. He and the Gatekeeper pace side by side. He asks her questions. She doesn’t speak but has “yes” written on one palmo and “no” on the other.

“You want me to dance?” He asks. She flashes approval.

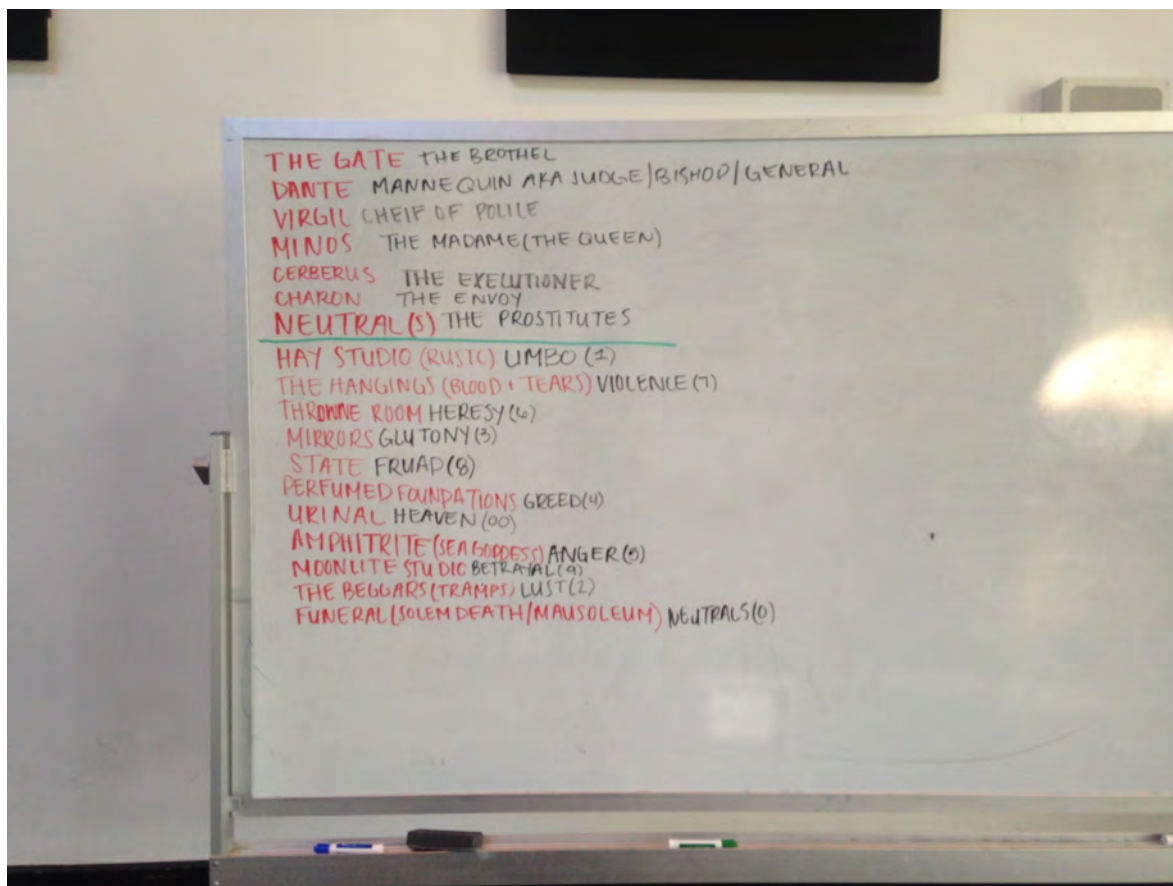
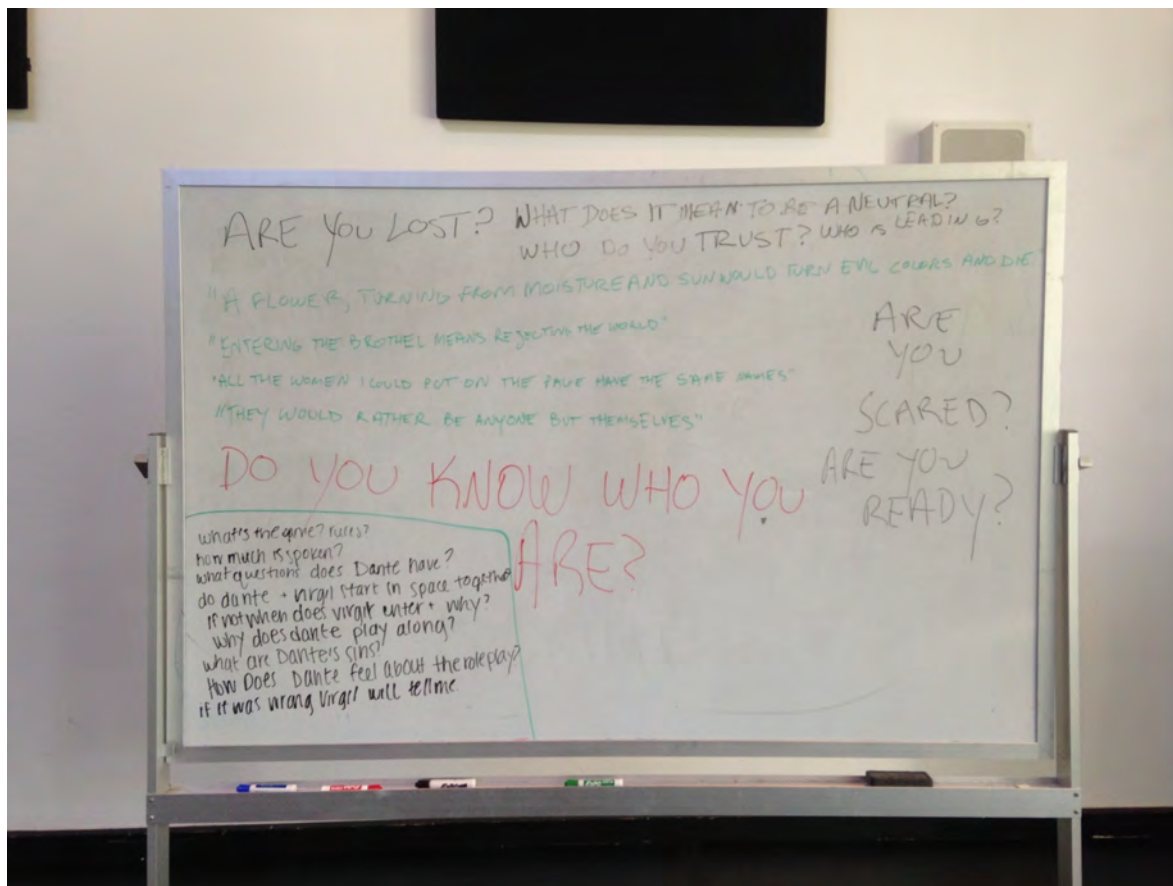
‘Disco Inferno’ comes on. He dances, and then goes stiff. Virgil and the Gatekeeper manipulate him like a mannequin into various positions. The song ends. The Gatekeeper leaves.

Virgil is excited “She said yes! She said no. She hates you. She made you dance?”

Ethan reads text from The Balcony. Ethan is Dante and the Madam

All three do the Judge/Executioner/Thief scene from the balcony (scene 2).

D. Photos of notes from first devising session



E. Archive of Material

This is a spreadsheet of all the devised pieces we has our cast create based off of prompts.

DATE	TITLE	CAST	DESCRIPTION	STRUCTURE
11/1/2015	"Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here"	Kellan, Nina, Annie, and Charlie	Fake Italian, apocolypse huddle, dinner table, cowboy cafe.	Act 2, Act 3
	"One has to believe in God, of course, in order to sin."	Kellan, Nina, Annie, and Charlie	White board, lecture theater, hitler, order order order	Pre show/Supertitles
11/2/2015	"The Trial of Veronica"	Charlie, Annie, Nina, Becca, and Elise	Judge, trial, murder, game theory, chaos, saying you are something and then you are that thing, placing the audience as the jury.	Act 4
	"The Club"	Kirsten, Kellan, Duncan, Jo, Jaquan	Music, down the rabbit hole, jaquan dances and is sad about it	
	"Veronica's Birthday Party"	Charlie, Becca, Collin, Duncan, Jaquan	Bathroom Opera, toilet flush (3, 2, 1), isolate audience, function (s).	Prologue, Act 1
	"Sublime, Sublime Function"	Kirsten, Kellan, Nina, Annie, Elise	Mime, cats doing drugs, window, let me in.	
11/4/2015	"Heroic Music"	Nina, Kirsten, Jaquan, Duncan	Ding, cat in tree, phone in burning building, can someone help?	
	"Saint Veronica"	Becca, Charlie, Annie, Elise	eat the heart out, do this do that, what can i do? Keep up the good work	Act 1, Act 2

	"Medicine Man"	Kellan, Cassandra, Collin, Anya	Kellan is Jesus, neutrals fall to his feet, Minos weighs you	Act 3, Act 5
	"Medicine Man" reworked		restaging etc	Epilogue
	"Evil Big Eyes"	Elise, Kellan, Jaquan, Becca	ring around the rosie, just make believe, Elise is isolated from the group	
	"Evil Big Eyes" reworked		reworked with slomotion, distance, speed, and volume	Act 4.5
	"Tapas"	Kirsten, Collin, Annie	burps, no one to escort me, isolation of a person	
	"Crawl"	Nina, Cassandra, Charlie, Anya	bathrooms, Nina as Virgil, I have to get dressed, crawl, hurry up	
	"Crawl" reworked		reworked with the whole cast behind partition	Act 3
11/8/2015	"Dinner"	Kellan, Anya, Annie, JaQuan	Kellan gives instructions, pass the food, red rover	Act 3, Epilogue
	"Mommy Issues on a Rainy Day"	Kassandra, Elise, Becca, Duncan	Mom in the mirror, child sins, neutrals reverse mess	
	"You Mad?"	Kellan, Anya, Annie, JaQuan	Elevator, dead body mannequin puppets	Act 4
	"Clouds"	Kassandra, Elise, Becca, Duncan	Outside clouds, you'll never see the sun again, massages	
	"The Ball"	Duncan, Kellan, Joanna, Annie, Elise	Blind dancing, switching conductors	

	"Rest In Peace"	JaQuan, Anya, Cassandra, Becca	Funeral procession, laughter	Act 4, Epilogue
11/9/2015	"Poor Guy"	Becca, Kirsten, Nina, JaQuan	JaQuan wakes up and dies over and over again, pushed down and falls right asleep, toes sticking out of curtain	
	"Dancing With Myself"	Charlie, Elise, Cassandra, Annie	The end of an apocalyse, slow motion, billy idol, body falling away from head (elise), dying with your eyes open	Prologue, Act 5
11/11/2015	"Waterfall"	Kirsten, Kellan, Becca	Drowning, water out of mouths, rock lobster	Act 5
	"Elevator Music"	JaQuan, Elise, Nina	Sickness as apocolapse	
	"Eulogy"	Annie, Anya, Charlie	Funeral mime, Annie dies, they all mime	Act 4.5
	"Eye Love you"	Elise + Becca	Sex call, Spectacles, eyeball touching, orgasm	Pre-show?
	"We'll Figure It Out"	Nina + Kellan	Peek a boo,	Act 2
	"New York, New York"	Kirsten + Anya		
	"Half Past 1:00"	Duncan + JaQuan		Act 4
	"Rock Bag"	Charlie + Annie		Act 5, supertitles
11/13/2015	"We Are the Champions"	JaQuan, Duncan, Cassandra, Elise		Act 3,4

11/14/2015	"Get Low"	Kellan, Nina, Charlie, Annie, JaQuan, Duncan, Anya, Elise	
	"Don't Look Forward, Don't Look Back"	Elise, Annie, Anya	Act 2, 3
	"Sounds of Summer"	Kellan, JaQuan, Charlie	Act 4
11/16/2015	"Hold That Door"	Kirsten + Duncan	
	"Hey There"	Kassandra + JaQuan	Prologue, Act 4
	"We Do It [Every Day] Before Rehearsal"	Charlie + Kellan	Act 3,4
	"Inside Your Head, Dana"	Becca + Elise	
	"Yucca Flats"	Kassandra, Elise, JaQuan, Kellan, Becca, Charlie	Act I

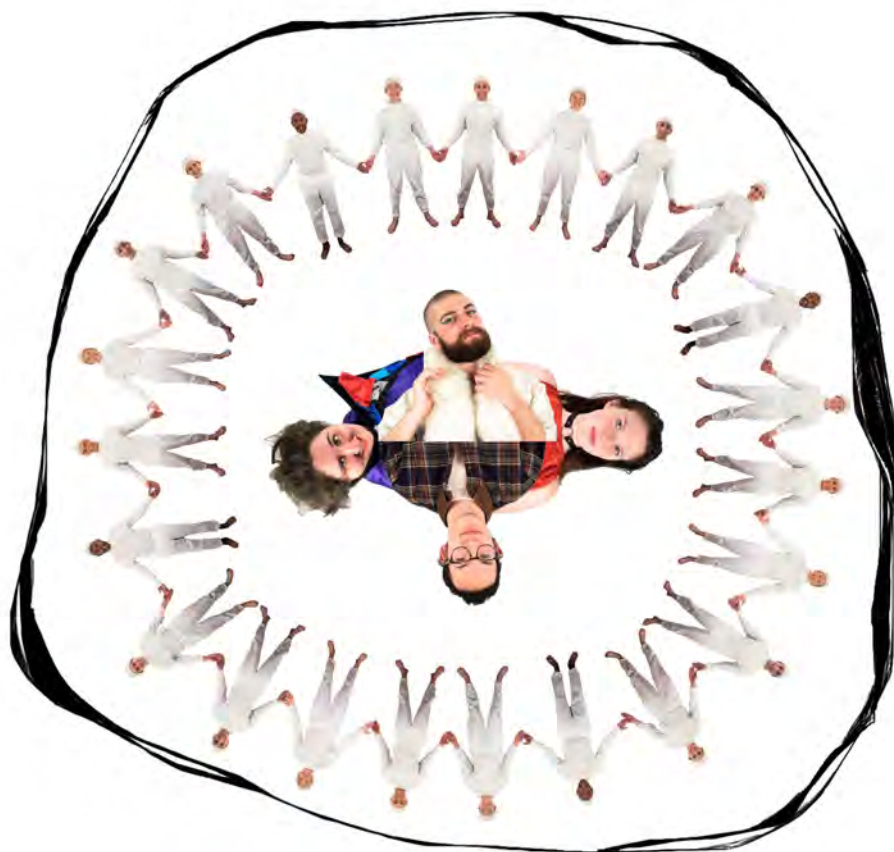
F. Show Posters

Photos taken by Emma Ressel, Poster created by Dana Shimkoski

THE BARD COLLEGE FISHER CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
A SENIOR PROJECT IN THEATER & PERFORMANCE

THE VESTIBULE

CREATED BY AUDREY ROSENBLITH AND DANA SHIMKOSKI



PROGRAM A

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26 6:30PM

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27 12:00PM

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28 12:00PM

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G. The Definition of “devised theater”

According to Alison Oddey’s book on devising, *Devised Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*:

“Devised theatre can start from anything. It is determined and defined by a group of people who set up an initial framework or structure to explore and experiment with ideas, images, concepts, themes, or specific stimuli that might include music, text, objects, paintings, or movement. A devised theatrical performance originates with the group while making the performance, rather than starting from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted. A devised theatre product is work that has emerged from and been generated by a group of people working in collaboration.” (1)

This may seem very vague for those not familiar with this method of creative practice and/or those who are not well versed in a modern theatrical vocabulary. In my experience, this is one of the more succinct definitions/descriptions I have been able to find of devising and what it means to make a “devised theatrical performance.”

The key element of a devised piece is that it is created collaboratively. I haven’t been able to find another rule that is universally true of devised work. The inspiration can be drawn from practically anywhere or anything, much like Oddey says.

American theater has experienced an explosion in the popularity of devised work over the course of the past decade.

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Audrey Rosenblith is a petite individual from Brooklyn, NY with a loud voice and a to-do list. As an arts enabler she hopes to connect artists who create brilliant work with an appreciative audience and open up a wider public to the art of the world. She has worked as a writer, director, social media “expert”, dramaturg and arts administrator. Audrey has also acted and performed, and has completed seven years of acting training, ten years of tap dance instruction and eight years of jazz vocal education, and has earned a B.A. in Theater and Performance from Bard College upon completion of this project. She is known for her excellent emailing skills, willingness to do that annoying thing no one else wants to do, and painfully relentless positive outlook in the face of impending despair.