

This Is Not Macbeth Production Journal

1.)

My first conflict of interest between writer and actor arises: it is the night before auditions, and I've just been told that the director has decided not to cast anyone who is currently working on another show that is going up two weeks before TINM. My initial reaction was not particularly gracious (think blood draining from the face) because that eliminates well over a third of the audition pool, including all five of the auditioning actors that made up our speculative dream team. This is difficult, just because I want to have a smooth working relationship with the director, but I firmly disagree with this decision. We both want the same thing—to cast the best possible cast, which means casting people capable of delving into roles with multiple motivations and psychological levels in a short space of time. There are different ways of reaching the same conclusion, I suppose. To me, getting the best possible cast means considering everyone who auditions regardless of outside activities; if the actors have proven that they can quickly and easily maximize character potential, I'd trust them to know if they were taking on too much by auditioning for another show. To Lucas, that means casting people who absolutely have the time and availability to commit to this show, in order to ensure the best possible product. In principle I don't necessarily disagree, but in this case limiting the audition pool cuts out a few actors who are really fantastic at what they do, and whom I would love to see in the cast.

As an actor, I have no power or right to tell the director what to do. As the writer, I could tell him that I'm unhappy with his choice, but it would be unfair of me to tell him how to run what is now his show. And to be perfectly honest, he has no obligation to listen to me. Even if he were to be exceptionally gracious and listen to me, the interference would create a serious issue in balance of power and make for an uneasy relationship—he's soon going to be my director, and I'll have to listen to him. If he thinks I'm going to usurp power every time he does something I don't like, he's not going to feel he has any control over the production.

Logistically, I don't feel like the move makes any sense. I trust Lucas though, and if he feels like this is the optimal way to get a good cast, it's his decision. I can hope he changes his mind, I can hope his method works. Ultimately, this is not the place for me to step in, and a big part of acting in TINM rather than directing it is learning to let go and treat the script like an actor. I can inwardly feel all the trepidation I want, but I'm not going to undermine Lucas or publicly disagree with him. Not on this, and not on anything during the production (if I can help it. Fingers crossed).

2.)

Just after midnight and the cast list is out. I'm cast as Julie, which is a part I didn't expect but one that I'm quite excited to play. There were a couple of surprises in the cast

list, but I've seen everyone on it perform before and I'm not at all concerned that they're not up to the challenge of throwing this show together in three weeks of rehearsal.

3.)

Our first read-thru was Friday night, with the whole cast present save one, plus the director and stage manager. Overall, I thought it went quite well. I'd only heard two of the actors read the parts they've been assigned previously, so it was a lot of fresh perspective on the characters. I found myself cringing at first, actually, hearing my words read out loud in a way that I never have before. I don't know if it was because I was actually taking part this time, instead of being a critical overseer; because it was no longer a work in progress and I couldn't use 'editing' as an excuse for any error or text I wasn't happy with; because this was the final cast, the people whose analysis and opinions mattered in a context that wasn't as much a factor in the staged readings. In any case, it only lasted for a couple of scenes, and I was able to get over it by the time I had to start reading my part.

Out of the five actors that were present (and not me), three of them had never read the script out loud before, so I was particularly curious what they would make of it. I'll admit to some nervousness about how they would interpret the parts, particularly the two actors reading for Alex and Emily. I feel like I'm going to be repeating this over and over again, but the thing I think it's going to be hardest for me to work through in the next month is that this is no longer 'my' project. I had an idea for the play, I have opinions and thoughts and an understanding of it deeper than anyone else, but it's not exclusively my play anymore. It belongs to Lucas and Becky, to decide how they want to put it together. It belongs to the actors to decide who their characters are, and I include myself in that: Julie may turn out to be someone completely different than who I expected (I'll figure it out during the character schematic, I suppose). I can have opinions about the interpretation of character and scene and elements of the play as a whole, but it's not my job, responsibility, or even right to tell anyone else what those opinions are. My opinions have been solicited a couple times for rather superficial decisions so far: what dress I think would work better for one character, whether a facial piercing would be appropriate for another, and I'm more than happy to help there. Determining the boundaries on when giving a solicited opinion would be inappropriate, however, is something I'm going to have to work out on the fly. That being said, I mostly enjoyed the readings from the new actors. There were a couple of moments where I wasn't sure I necessarily liked specific line interpretations, but again: it's not my place to say that. Besides which, a few lines here and there in a 40+ page script is really nothing to quibble about, particularly in the first read-thru of a script before the actors have really had a chance to sink into their roles. I *wrote* the lines, and I wasn't satisfied with my reading of every single one. Interpretation takes time, and I'm capable of patience.

Lucas and Becky talked to me afterwards; they have a list of little (and some larger) ideas that they want to run by me. Lucas said that the majority of them are things to keep in mind for future productions, but that if there are some I like, they can implement them in this production. He's quite looking forward to staging scene 7, and

I'm quite eager to see how it will play out. I'm working very hard to not overstep my boundaries with Lucas, and I'm so grateful that he's recognizing that and being so accommodating with me by keeping me in the loop, asking what I think about decisions and ideas. Becky has been very organized as well, having the full production schedule drawn up and ready to go by the beginning of the read-thru (which was two and a half days after the cast list was put together). I've already thanked her for her managing skills, and I'm definitely going to make sure Lucas knows how much I appreciate him. Even the cast, which is largely comprised of people I've worked with before and have varying degrees of friendship with, has been extra kind to me, knowing how nervous I was at auditions. Brooke went out of her way to thank me for writing such a compelling script with such layered characters, which really warmed my heart.

Questions for Lucas:

- 1.) Can you describe some of your overall concepts and ideas for staging TINM?
- 2.) What were some of the factors that influenced your casting? Were there particular things you were looking for in specific characters, and were you looking for cohesiveness as a cast/in relationships, or who was best suited for each role individually? What were some of the easiest and hardest decisions? (Great cast, btw ;])
- 3.) If time and expense were not an issue, what is the one thing you'd really like to try out with the script or cast?

Questions for Becky:

- 1.) Can you describe some of your overall concepts and ideas for staging TINM?
- 2.) What were some of the easiest and hardest things about casting this show? Was there any part of the casting process that you were dissatisfied with?
- 3.) What are the things that are going to be easiest or most difficult to stage, from a SM standpoint?

Questions for actors (vary by person):

- 1.) What was your initial impression of your character? Has it changed at all since you've begun working on the script?
- 2.) What are some things you like about your character? What are some things you'd rather change/ wish were different?
- 3.) If you were in charge of casting, what role would you want to play and why?

4.)

Spring break has just ended, and we are 4 rehearsals in. All of my scenes have been blocked and run at least once, and I'm fairly certain that all the scenes have been worked at this point. It is my intention to attend at least one rehearsal that I'm not required at this week, in order to see what's been going on with the blocking and character work. Ideally, I'd like to see scene 5, since it's the freshest (most recently written). I'm also planning on working my character schematic sometime very soon, preferably before the 22nd, when we're required to be off book (I'm a bit crunched for

time, between midterms and my 1/2Marathon in six days). So far, I'm really pleased with how rehearsals are going. Lucas and Becky are leaving a lot of character decisions and basic blocking up to the actors, and the actors in turn are frequently checking in with them whenever they're unsure what the best choice would be/whether or not something is working, etc. Every once in a while, someone will direct a question to both of us, or Lucas will give his answer and confirm with me that we're on the same page, but it is becoming more and more infrequent, and by and large everyone is treating me like a cast member, not the writer. I'm really happy about that, because it makes letting go of the script as a whole and latching on to my particular role much easier than I thought it would be.

I'm also pleasantly surprised at how easy it's been to play Julie so far. When I was writing, I put far more of myself into other characters than I did to her, so I thought it would be more difficult than it has been. However, I've been acting for more than half my life, and Lucas cast me well: I think it would be more surprising if it were hard to play the part. I guess I was looking at it as if it was going to be harder because it wasn't the character I identified most with. Which is looking at it like the writer. As an actor, the majority of the parts I've played were not written for me. They are parts that a director looked at and decided I would be able to play well. That is exactly what happened in this case; just because I wrote the play doesn't mean casting and growing into a role was going to be any different in reality. Just in my brain ;)

Lucas sent me an email the day after the cast list came out, and among the plethora of topics that came up was why he cast me as Julie. Julie needs to be very young. She's 18, the youngest character by about 7 years. However, her youth has been tempered by maturity and the struggles she's scene her sister go through. She needs to be an 18 year old who acts a bit like she's 30. Apparently, this is very difficult to cast ;) I've been keeping the age dynamic in my mind while working on the scenes, and so far, it seems to be working out. We'll see how the schematic goes.

5.)

Most of the rehearsals this week have been for scenes other than mine, so my focus has largely been on work outside of the direct rehearsal process—the character schematic for Julie, the writer's statement for the program, doing an interview on TINM with Lucas for the Rude Mechanicals website, etc.

The writer's statement was only two paragraphs, but it took me over an hour to write. I've assistant directed and done a fair bit of management work on shows before, but have never had to write a personal statement about a show before. It was a bit daunting. I knew that I wanted to thank the people who'd put a significant amount of time into the project (Lucas, Becky, Caleen) and people who had given me encouragement and ideas when I needed it (Caleen, Shannon, and Joe). Beyond that, though, I had to make

some sort of statement either about the show itself, or the work that had gone into the production up to this point.

I think two of the really significant lessons I've learned from the entire process of getting TINM ready for production are 1.) how much I don't know, and 2.) how much I'm capable of learning because of it. I thought that as a writer, I should know everything about TINM—character, plot, motivation, etc. The ironic part about that is that I really do feel as though I know the play backwards and forwards, but am constantly tripped up when people ask me, "What's the play about?" Sadly, it's the most frequently occurring question, and I often feel like an idiot for not having a good answer. The writer's statement sort of forced me to really pin down what I knew and what I didn't know about the play. It wasn't about nothing, I knew that, so it had to be about something. After a good hour of struggling, I tried thinking less about the overall picture, and more about the smaller pieces of what I either tried to convey through the script, or pieces that seemed to arise organically in the writing. My list ended up being pared down for the statement (only two paragraphs, after all), but was infinitely helpful:

- People show love in many different ways, and not all are healthy.
- You can't escape your past.
- You can't avoid the future.
- You are the sum of your experiences, whether you like them or not.
- The human psyche is incredibly fragile.
- The human spirit is remarkably resilient.
- Your actions ripple and radiate, affecting those around you in ways you can't always foresee.
- Life continues in any form, even when seemingly stalled.
- There is nothing so graceful as the power of forgiveness.

6.)

The first full run-through of the whole show was tonight, and we'll be doing it again in about 15 minutes. I felt like a weak link in this particular rehearsal. Which is ridiculous and slightly upsetting, because I have less of an excuse than anyone to screw up. Everything is a little mixed up in my head right now: on the one hand, every actor has rehearsals where he or she just isn't in the moment, and the fact that I've made it two weeks into the rehearsal process without having one is pretty good. Beyond that, I'm supposed to be an actor, treating the script as an actor—I don't have any more claim or ownership over the script than the other six actors on the stage. On the flip side, I've been using my knowledge of the script and the play to enhance my performance. Ignoring that and dissociating myself from the script might be detrimental. In any case, we're about to start the second run, so maybe I won't suck this time and the point will be moot.

Julie is a fairly important character in terms of Alex's unraveling and Emily's emotional development. That being said, it's more the idea of Julie, rather than the active character, that is important. Emily, Sam, Eric, even Alex to a certain extent, are dynamic and lively characters. Sara, Dr Carpenter, and Julie are more understated. In some ways,

their lack of innate urgency makes them more difficult to play. They're not static by any means, but they're less vibrant than the show's lead characters, more low-key. The biggest trick to playing Julie, something I didn't really struggle with until right now, is to keep her both interesting and honest. The first exchanges with Sam are less important—waitresses aren't always genuine with customers, so some inorganic cheer, or even a touch of overacting, is allowable. Every exchange after that, however, is laden with significance: talking to Alex, one of her favorite people in the world who looks like crap and is fighting with her sister, describing her sister's gruesome demise to a smothering mother figure and a fairly creepy stranger, rebuffing the stranger when he tries to probe her psyche on a very emotionally draining topic, having been put through the wringer by discussing her sister and witnessing firsthand the kind of environment that Alex has been living in. Delving into it like an actor—there is so much to work with. Emotional flatness is only acceptable if it's intentional, not out of inattention or laziness. Take two, with application.

6b.)

The second run-through went so much better once I switched back into actor mode. I mentioned my frustration with my first performance to a castmate, who ribbed me for having too little patience with myself—it's difficult to wear two hats at once. I'm less concerned: I have very little patience for myself as an actor, so my own frustrations with myself are familiar and a sign that I'm on the right track. I'm not a fantastically talented actor, but I am a good one. I'm also painfully aware that one of the primary reasons I'm a good actor rather than a mediocre one is that I have some natural talent that I work hard to develop. Even more uncomfortable is the knowledge that the reason I'm not a better actor is that I don't always work hard enough.

As of now, Act I is running at about 45 minutes, including set changes. Tomorrow's rehearsal will incorporate costumes, which may add slightly to the overall time (Ryan needs time to change, and time to figure out the quickest way to do so). We'll be incorporating lights on Friday, so we'll see how it goes. Every time anyone (and I include myself) botches a line, or hits the intent but not the words, I cringe. I keep telling myself "It's not my job, it's not my job", but still. Cringe. I don't think I'll be able to drop that by next weekend, so I'll just have to suppress and put up with it the best I can. These are fantastic people who are all doing this project at least in part as a favor to me; they don't need to worry that I'm developing dropped-line induced Tourettes. I'm keeping my fingers crossed for a responsive audience on Saturday—I'm not sure I'll be able to dissociate as much as I'd like with emotions running that high, so balancing the writer-actor schism might be harder than it's been so far.

7.)

Joe is the Rude Mechanicals former president and current Artistic and Public Relations director. He sent me an email midweek with the poster design for the publicity and programs (it is gorgeous) and a time slot for the AU television studio: he wanted to

film a promotional segment with Lucas and I, talking about the show and the staging process, to put up on the RM website and on Facebook. Thankfully, the shoot was scheduled for the day after the writer's statement was due in, so I'd already been forced to piece together some thoughts and concepts about 'what the play was about'. I helped Joe set up the camera and rig up the lighting, and we arranged our seats so that Joe was at a good position off camera for me to focus on (one of the first times ever I've been teased for being tall—I'm 5'6"). He started off by having me describe the project within the context of my studies and the Honors Department; how the project started, what characters were fun or difficult to write and why. I explained the origin of the title: everyone, including myself, assumed that Alex was going to be a vaguely Hamlet-esque character, until he and Emily spent a scene locked in a Macbeth dynamic—much to my chagrin, as I had really not intended it to turn out that way. He asked how it was acting in the show, why I'd decided not to direct, how I felt about playing a role in a script I had written. I didn't always feel terribly articulate, but Joe was always very gently with me, very encouraging—as he has been since he first read the script nearly a year ago.

Lucas arrived right when we were wrapping up. I wasn't sure whether or not I ought to stay for his segment, but both of them assumed that I would—after all, the Q & A session was being filmed; I'd know what he said whether or not I was there to see it. Joe had me act as Lucas's focal point the way he stood in for mine, so a good half of the answers were delivered straight to me (I tried to smile encouragingly). Joe asked him a number of the same questions he asked me, and a few that were geared more toward the production side of things. Lucas mentioned how directable the script was: the scenes were short, the action flowed, nothing was too brief to get the point across or long enough to beat a point to death, the feelings or moments (particularly the awkward ones) were palpable. The thing that always worried me most about participating in the show—making Lucas uncomfortable by my near-constant presence—came up in the questioning: how is it, having the writer in the cast? Lucas's answer made me feel worlds better: that it was both easier and harder. Easier in that if he wasn't sure what I had intended or what something meant, or whether something was actually significant or could be safely downplayed, I was right on hand to ask. Harder in that he kept fighting the urge to watch my face for a reaction, to see whether he was on the 'right track' or not.

Joe's plan is to splice together the footage to address several points of interest, and to finish editing over this weekend. Shannon and I are in Boston for a couple of days looking at grad schools, but because Joe, Lucas and I have so many details and promotional pieces to get done in a very short space of time, I've promised to take my laptop with me and to keep my phone on unless I'm actually in an interview. I feel like the ultimate paradox: an artistic yuppie.

8.)

Joe finished editing the footage of Lucas and I. It is currently making the rounds on Facebook. I hate seeing myself on film, particularly if I'm speaking (watching with the sound cut or a dance performance usually isn't too bad). This was no exception for the first minute or two. After I got over myself, however, I could watch and appreciate

what a great job Joe did, and how Lucas and I actually sound like we know what we're talking about roughly 75% of the time. Which I'm so grateful for.

I've done about half of my character schematic thus far, and I can already tell it is going to make a ton of difference in the way I'm viewing/working the last scene. Writing the character bio has introduced an element of guilt I hadn't considered before. Guilt over moving on, guilt over occasionally resenting Emily's insanity, guilt for not saving her from herself. I haven't tried it yet, but I'm feeling really optimistic about how this new interpretation is going to read onstage.

9.)

I've been looking over the actor responses to the questions I sent them last week (I had a couple responses back within the hour, a few took quite a bit longer). I thought about writing up all of the answers I was given, but decided against it—they were informally written, and while most of the actors really thought through the questions and gave deep answers, I don't think most of them expected anyone but me to see the answers. Which I'm happy to respect. All of the actors wrote about themselves and their own characters, but many of them offered up their thoughts on other characters as well.

Emily:

I was particularly curious what the reaction would be to Emily, since writing her required drawing on myself much more than most of the other characters. I really didn't know how other people would see her—I know how I look at her, but I didn't know how well anything I tried to do or say with her came across to anyone else.

I thought it was notable that every actor who wrote anything about Emily had already read Act II. (Not everyone has, for various reasons. Our Alex, in particular, is very vehement in not seeing Act II until after the show, so that he can more accurately portray his confusion and not knowing.) The overall sentiment is that Emily is incredibly complicated. She's vindictive, but devoted. She's desperate to be loved, but careless and secretive. The actor playing Emily—a fantastically talented woman—kept coming back to the idea of being trapped, feelings of desperation and unhappiness. Another actor, whose assessments of playwriting and personal character I trust unquestioningly, put it best: Emily is everything that people are and try to pretend they're not.

One thing I was proud of was that during this whole process, nobody has questioned Emily's mental illness at all. It's fairly clear that there is something wrong with her, especially in Act II, but I deliberately avoided pinpointing it within the script. It's possible that nobody's asked me about it thus far because they figure I'm a psychology major and must know what I'm doing—though the director and one of the actors are also psych majors, and no word from them either—but I'd prefer to think that it comes off well enough that it doesn't raise any red flags.

Sam:

The disparity between my own thoughts and what other people thought about the characters was by far the greatest with Sam. Everyone across the board thought that Sam was both awesome and creepy. My own view on Sam was that the real Sam is evident in the first and last scene of Act I, and again in Act II. Most of the actors viewed Sam's scenes as the complete package, not distinguishing between the Real Sam and Alex's Sam. The actor in the role was careful to mention that she didn't know if Sam would be as pushy and aggressive outside of Alex's head (or outside a mental health setting), but even with the divide acknowledged, she will still have to play the majority of her scenes as Alex's Sam. The most difficult piece, she says, is playing the Real Sam in Act I with so little background information.

Sam is interesting because Alex changes Sam and Eric the most in his fantasy world. Because of that, both characters almost have to be played through a lens of Alex's character—a double character study that I've apologized for. Alex is responsible for the alterations, it isn't inherent in Sam or Eric why he does what he does, or even to what extent the changes are pervasive rather than superficial.

Eric:

Eric was a character we almost lost in re-writes of Act I, just because as fun as he is, he isn't fundamentally necessary. He does serve enough of a purpose in Act I to justify his presence in TINM, though: he provides comic relief; he's a great example of how Alex twists his surroundings to fashion a world for himself; he is an embodiment of the traits Alex wishes he could exhibit more (charismatic, outgoing, socially at ease, casual). The actor playing Eric is one of the two actors to reprise his role from the staged readings, so I was curious to see if he would have a different perspective on his role in the context of a script he's seen modified over the last six months. Largely the two of us (and informally the rest of the cast) have the same idea about Eric. He's fun, he's suave, he's aggressive, potentially condescending, and would probably be an asshole if he weren't so likeable. I think James put it best when he said "Eric is the kind of friend I'd like to have at the office, but would rather leave there also."

Seeing crazy Eric at the end is one of my favorite moments to see performed. Mostly because our actor is incredibly versatile and talented, performing it differently every time, but also because the moment that Eric emerges has a little more shock value than I'd originally thought. The moment drags Eric and Sam in their 'real' personas into the scene, indicating for the first time that we (the audience) are now in a different reality—previously, the character makeup of the scene could have merely been a continuation of the same dimension, at some arbitrary point after the last scene.

I really enjoyed reading what the actors had to say about their characters and about TINM in general. What I really appreciated is that I know them all well enough that nobody attempted to bullshit me. They told me pretty honestly about the bad as well as the good, and none of the answers read like a softened, sugarcoated version of the truth. Some of the critiques of the characters are things I considered, others were points I hadn't yet thought of. Some could be easily addressed with the adjustment of a line,

others I chose to leave as is. If anyone didn't like TINM, they were kind enough not to tell me. The feedback I've gotten on the script as a whole has been overwhelmingly positive, however, and I'm so grateful for it. I hate having my writing critiqued—not because I think I always know better, but because I know that I usually don't and I dread being wrong. Having a group of people I know and like, whose theatrical and intellectual skills I respect, tell me that my work is great is hugely comforting and uplifting.

10.)

Why Emily Died. As much why as the manner in which she died. The most memorable note I received on Act II was that the final blowout fight between Alex and Emily (that ends with Emily's death) seemed to almost take me by surprise: it wasn't premeditated, it wasn't set up or constructed, it just happened organically. Which in so many ways was true. I set up the unanswered question in Act I around April, and I didn't know myself who pulled the trigger until around November. I went back and forth on it, thinking through a few different scenarios. What was most important to me was the idea that either one of them could have done it: it wasn't cut and dried. More than half of the cast finished the show not having read the second act, and none of them was willing to venture forth an even marginally decisive opinion about how Emily died. I didn't want it to be a surprise so much as I wanted it to be real: nobody was blameless in the situation. If Emily had pulled the trigger, Alex was responsible for not stopping her. If Alex did it, it was because Emily was trying so hard to die.

Putting the gun in Alex's hand before Emily killed herself was an extremely important visual that I tried to stress as much as possible in the stage directions: Alex needed the increased guilt of knowing that he was capable of killing her. Emily needed the memory of Alex pointing a gun at her, and the knowledge that she's completely alienated beyond repair the person who chose to love her in spite of, and to some extent because of, her faults. Emily's death was a suicide in the most technical sense, but more than that it was highly circumstantial. Alex and Emily came together to create her destruction, and it needed to be shown visually as well as psychologically.

This Is Not Macbeth Writer's Statement:

This Is Not Macbeth started out as a scene in a café between a man and a woman, neither of whom gave any indication that they were complete strangers until the very last line. Thirteen months, two staged readings, five rewrites, and an obscene amount of caffeine later, that first scene has grown into a two act, 60+ page terror of a play. I invariably stumble over an explanation when asked what this play is about, usually coming up with a stellar gem along the lines of "Um, it's....complicated". I've only recently realized that perhaps the reason I have such trouble coming up with an answer is that there really is no simple explanation. *TINM* is about a lot of things. It is about a man trying very hard to escape his past; it is about a woman desperate to forestall an unknowable future. It is about the complexities of the human psyche; the multifaceted and often dark nature of love; the resilience of the spirit.

There were times it seemed that *TINM* was writing itself, but there were just as many days when I thought I would never be able to figure it out. There are so many people responsible for guiding this project to the point it has reached now, far more names than will fit in this paragraph. However, I would be horribly remiss if I didn't profusely thank Joe Grimme and Shannon Schenck for their faith and encouragement; Lucas Cook and Becky Mezzanotte for their vision, time, and dedication; and most notably Caleen Jennings, for all the time, trust, ideas and patience it took to turn a short scene into the play I am pleased and proud to share with everyone tonight. Verbose as I am, I'll never have enough words to tell you all how grateful I am. Thank you.

Joanna Holmes
Capstone in Progress for Honorable Mentions

Earlier this month AU's Shakespeare performance group, the Rude Mechanicals, staged the first act of an original play titled *This Is Not Macbeth*. I've been an active member of the troupe since sophomore year and rarely get stage fright during a performance, but this show was different: almost every minute I wasn't onstage, I was pacing back and forth behind the scenery, radiating tension and freezing every time a silence went on a second too long. "It's going to be fine," one of the other actors kept reassuring me. "It's almost over. And hey, you'll be all done with your Capstone! Finally!"

I've always been the type of person who hates letting other people read her work, or even worse, having to read my own writing in front of the entire class. Consequently, the process of writing and acting in my own play has been incredibly nerve-wracking at times. However, it has also been incredibly rewarding. I began writing *This Is Not Macbeth* in a playwriting class over a year ago, and spent the fall semester reading dozens of plays, trying to figure out what elements and character combinations made a more compelling story. The two act play underwent copious re-writes, based both on my own research and the two staged readings held to try and hone the script into a more directable work. After finalizing a production script, the play officially went into rehearsals.

Now in post-production, I'm working on putting together a production journal that details the rehearsal process and the balance between a writer's connection with and an actor's detachment from a script, and finalizing the ongoing re-writes of Act II. Even after the performance is done, there is still a great deal of work to be done before my Capstone is actually finished. Even so, I am incredibly grateful to my Capstone advisor, and the incredibly talented director, cast, and crew that made *This Is Not Macbeth* a reality: seeing my work onstage was an experience I am so thankful to have had.

Julie Character Schematic:

I.

What Playwright says about Julie:

- 18 years old, high school senior
- part time waitress
- quiet and mature

What others say about Julie:

- Julie's just finished high school in NC (DR)
- You seem like a strong person (DR)
- You're bearing up remarkably well (DR)
- You saw more of their interactions than they did (DR)
- Julie put an end to the wandering when she was twelve (E)
- She stuck to her guns and got what she wanted (E)
- Julie was born when I was eight (E)
- She looked at me with those beautiful eyes (E)
- She would see the color and light in the world, would marry and have children and grow old and die peacefully, smiling. (E)
- She shared my beauty and my name (E)
- She was perfect, everything that mattered. (E)
- She never understood...she asked question after question (E)
- She had my heart (E)

What Julie says about herself:

- I thought things were going to be ok
- I wanted to skip work and come over
- I don't think I can do this
- I just miss them
- I don't want to blame anyone

What the stage directions say about Julie:

- smiles at Sam

- stalks off in a huff
- waits listlessly
- swallows nervously

II. Narrative

My name is Julie Mullens. I'm eighteen years old, and I've been living in North Carolina since I was twelve years old. I like it better here than any of the other places we've lived, even if it sweltering during the summer. Every time I start thinking negatively about the south, I remind myself that at least we've got roots now. We're here for good, stable for once. There were years growing up, most of my life really, that we'd pick up and move every two years or so. Emily hated it. I never liked it either, but Emily hated it. She couldn't stand having to meet all new people, make new friends, work her way around a new school. It was always harder for her than me. Partly because I was younger, and kids have less memory, are easier to befriend quicker. Partly because Emily was special. She was never like anyone else I've ever met. Living with her...she could be moody. She'd get upset over the littlest things: what we were having for dinner, if a tree in the park was too sick and had to be chopped down, the endings of books or movies, anything. She felt everything, she told me once. Most people feel their own feelings, maybe something else if they're in the right mood. Emily didn't have an off switch. I tried to do it once. Look at objects, people, and feel things the way she did. I couldn't do it. I don't know that I wanted to, really. Things hurt her in a way that I never appreciated. I didn't want to be like her forever, just long enough that I could understand. Make it better.

I talk about Emily a lot, I know. She died earlier this year. She and Alex, my brother in law, were having a lot of problems, and she wasn't feeling well. I told the police she killed herself when they started asking me questions, and they took me at my word. There was no reason not to, with her history. Some people, including one of Alex's doctors, think that he might have killed her. It's possible. But I don't think so. I'd know, I think, if he did. I'd be able to tell. Emily was special. I never thought that this is something she'd do, but at the same time, I wasn't surprised when I heard that she was dead. It was like she knew that she wasn't going to live her whole life.

She loved me. More than anything, I know she loved me. The last few years, I think in some way she knew she wasn't coming back, and was trying to get me ready to live without her. I was always so attached to her, growing up. I don't have any memories of my childhood that don't involve her. Moving from town to town, playing in new houses and neighborhoods, everything. Even in school, I'd spend the whole day wishing she were there. After she went to college, I still wrote to her all the time. It was the first time in my life that I really had friends independent of her, my own life. It was weird, and at first I didn't really like it. But I started getting used to living without her right down the hall. It was...weird. More peaceful, without her moods and storms, but more unsettling. She loved me so much, even during her bad days, it was like having a security blanket, a net under a tightrope. Without her there, I had to figure things out on my own. She moved back after a year or so, right when I had just started high school. She was more withdrawn than when she'd left. Paler, more scarred. I didn't ask questions anymore. I was afraid to break her. It was a reversal, almost, of the years before: instead of her looking out for me, I was protecting her. When she met Alex, I liked him immediately. He never really got Emily either—he was like me; wanting to know, wanting to help, but only doing so much because it was so hard. He knew enough to let her go sometimes, knowing she'd come back. He asked my permission before proposing to her, instead of Dad's. I told him not to give up—she'd freak out the first time, but if he waited out the storm, I knew she'd say yes. I remember his smile when I said that. Slow, knowing, a little dreamy, even. "I know," he said. "I know that's what's going to happen. Isn't it funny, both of us can tell how she's going to react, but telling her wouldn't make a damn bit of difference?"

I do have my own life. She's been dead for almost six months, and I wouldn't have been able to make it if I didn't have a life of my own, separate from her. And I feel guilty because I'm glad. I'm glad I'm not her. I'm glad there is a part of me that can pick up and self preserve and move on, even when the person I loved more than anyone else in the whole world is gone, and the man who was a better brother to me than a real one could have been is still shattered from losing her. There was this darkness that swallowed her, that crippled him. Cripples him still. And I escaped. I loved her more than anything, but I escaped and it didn't destroy me. Maybe I'd feel less guilty if it did.

III. Ease and Difficulty in Writing Character Bio

Writing a character bio for Julie was...unexpected, in many ways. I've written scenes and monologues from Alex, Emily, and Sam's point of view, but never one from Julie. I haven't really dug too deep with her before this week, and I feel like that was a mistake on my part. She has the potential to be an incredibly rich character, despite her limited stage time. In so many ways, her focus is locked on Emily, which is to be expected when her beloved older sister was lost so suddenly and violently. Searching for meaning in her sister's demise, trying to find a pattern or some sense to the months and years before; it's normal, I believe, for such a situation. There are pieces of the bio, however, that suggest a tugging away from that focus. I don't know if it's out of guilt, self preservation, or just the fact that life goes on and she is her own person independent of her sister, but it's an interesting schism.

Writing for Julie, while unexpected, was also easier than I thought it was going to be. I have the obvious advantage of having created her in the first place, and can consequently justify anything I want, but making new and legitimate discoveries about the character was really a treat. Mining for motivations beyond love and grief is really going to be helpful and translate well to performance, I can already tell.

8 Similarities between Julie and myself:

- 1.) We've both lost people we love in a violent, unexpected manner.
- 2.) We've both felt profound grief and guilt for those losses, despite our blamelessness.
- 3.) We're both straight A seniors.
- 4.) We're both excellent at customer service ;)
- 5.) Julie is a fairly independent person, coming into her own after several years of tagging along with her sister. My independence set in earlier, but they're fairly comparable.
- 6.) We're old young people.

7.) Julie tries very hard to be emotionally stoic, with occasional failures.

8.) We are very good listeners, even if we don't know the answers.

8 differences between Julie and myself

1.) I don't have an older sister.

2.) Julie's never understood Emily's altered mental state.

3.) I would either be a fantastic waitress or a horrible one. Julie's just fantastic.

4.) I've only ever moved twice in my life, and my upbringing was incredibly stable.

5.) I've never lived in the south

6.) I have a large, fantastic group of friends. Julie has some, but nobody she'd pour her soul out to.

7.) Julie's much more of an introvert than I.

8.) Julie doesn't feel any real connection to her parents. Mine are awesome ☺