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Silencing the Black Body; A Look at Non-Traditional Casting in a Liberal Arts Education

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Silencing the Black Body;

A Look at Non-Traditional Casting in a Liberal Arts Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Department of Theatre, Speech, and Dance
from
The College of William and Mary

by

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Silencing the Black Body;
A Look at Non-Traditional Casting in a Liberal Arts Education

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Abstract

The idea that the United States is in a post-racial society is a lie. The ghosts of America's racist past continue to linger in the minds of all Americans. These prejudices and expectations are prevalent everywhere, including in a collegiate liberal arts theatre program. Casting is an integral part of how audiences perceive and interpret a play. It is therefore crucial that directors make responsible casting decisions to ensure that their decisions challenge and ultimately extinguish the existing racial and gender stereotypes of our time. In this paper, I identified the four different types of non-traditional casting as defined by Angela C. Pao, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at Indiana University. I then studied the history of their usage in professional theatre. Finally, I tested these ideas and concepts by analyzing the casting decisions made in five faculty directed plays produced by the College of William and Mary. I have come to the conclusion that the college's casting policies are not centralized. While some casting decisions were "responsible" others simply confused the audience and supported existing prejudices and stereotypes. These problems can be overcome in various ways including an expansion of the dramaturge and a greater awareness of the role casting plays in each production.

Dedication

This is dedicated to the future students of color making their way on the William and Mary stage. May you have courage, work hard, and be unafraid of asking difficult questions.

Introduction

The idea that the United States is in a post-racial society is a lie. The ghosts of America's racist past continue to linger in the minds of all Americans. This idea was made very clear to me as I reflected on my own casting in various plays and musicals in my college's theatre department. I discovered that while I loved being cast, none of the characters I was being cast in were written as black characters and few of the plays that my department offered reflected a black experience. When I searched even deeper I found that the statement that some of these plays was making was not equality, but instead a negative or ambivalent view of black people. These thoughts prompted me to try and understand non-traditional casting, especially in a liberal arts college theatre department. What I found is that while college theatre departments may claim that they have inclusive casting policies, their work sometimes does not reflect this concept. I believe that in educational theatre, non-traditional casting can serve as a form of color-acknowledgement, not color-blindness. If used as a directorial tool, it can be used as a way to challenge and eventually extinguish the prevailing stereotypes and racist ideas that still exist in American society.

In this paper, I will begin with definitions of all pertinent words and concepts. Then I will move to a discussion of the historical applications of non-traditional casting. This is followed by an in depth look at the values and challenges of non-traditional casting. The section will feature a discussion of the Wilson/Brustein debate and my opinion on how non-traditional casting can be used as a valuable directorial tool. I will test my ideas on non-traditional casting

by reviewing the casting decisions in several plays produced by the College of William and Mary Department of Theatre, Speech and Dance. I will then conclude with the benefits of non-traditional casting in a liberal arts curriculum.

Terminology

In order to understand the different ways in which non-traditional casting can be utilized, it is first important to understand the terminology that is used. Color-blind casting gave rise to interest in other type of casting practices. These casting policies not only dealt with ethnicity as a factor in casting, but also the gender and disability of the actor. According to Angela C. Pao, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at Indiana University, the types of casting include:

- Color-blind casting- actors are cast without regard to their race or ethnicity; the best actor is cast in the role.
- Societal casting- ethnic, female, or disabled actors are cast in roles they perform in society as a whole.
- Conceptual casting- an ethnic, female, or disabled actor is cast in a role to give the play greater resonance.
- Cross-cultural casting- the entire world of a play is translated to a different cultural setting. (4)

The term Non-Traditional Casting has become an umbrella term that encompasses all of these types of casting. It became widely used with the creation of the Non-Traditional Casting Project (NTCP). This group was created in order “to address and seek solutions to the problems of racism and exclusion in theatre, film and television “(Jenson, 1). The group worked on behalf of racial minorities, women, and the disabled to create a more inclusive environment in the American theatrical landscape. The group works to not only make more theatrical roles available to these people, but to create opportunities for playwrights, designers, and management. In 1986, their thought was that casting practices and subject matter did not reflect the diverse make-up of American society. In order to fix this problem, the group organized discussion forums around the United States, created a magazine, and developed a national registry where theatre artists could post their resumes and pictures. The group has since changed its name to “The Alliance for the Inclusion of the Arts.” This change was made in order to expand its scope of interest to areas outside of theatre including “film, television, and related media”(“About”). Because of pressure from organizations like NTCP, the Actors’ Equity took a stance on non-traditional casting. While the union claims that they “cannot defer to a social objective, however desirable, at the expense of art” it has begun to include “nondiscrimination clause[s] and an advisory clause that specifically encourages racial diversity in casting” (Pao, 7).

It is important to note that use of these terms and what they mean can vary. They are not concrete casting techniques and only gain full value when

being applied to a specific situation. Each play and casting decision is different; labeling the technique used can prove difficult. The term may also be unsuccessful in explaining the full purpose of the casting technique. Every time any of the terms to describe non-traditional casting is used, further explanation is required. The instability of these terms (and, in many ways, their existence) shows that non-traditional casting continues to challenge America by asking uncomfortable questions about race, gender, and disability.

When race is discussed in association with non-traditional casting, there is a tendency to make a distinction between a “white play” and a “black play.” In order to make the points of this paper and the plays discussed clear, it is important to define these two terms. Determining if a play is white or black depends on the cultural experience that is being depicted. It is important to note that this has nothing to do with the race of the actors in the play. The specific cultural experience is what make a play black or white, not the race of the actors.

History

In the 1970s, three theater companies became the leader in non-traditional casting. Many of the shows these theatres produced during this decade experimented with various type of casting. The three theaters that included non-traditional in their artistic policies include “The New York Shakespeare Festival under the leadership of Joseph Papp, Washington DC’s Arena Stage, headed by Zelda Fichandler, and the Los Angeles Inner Circle Cultural Center” (Pao 3). These groups found that casting based on a concept of

color neutrality or “color-blind casting” was the most successful. In this type of casting the director hopes that the race of all the actors can remain neutral in the eyes of the audience. Race is not intended to play a role in the show, so the audience is supposed to turn a “blind-eye” to it. The main goal of this casting is that the best actor is the individual who wins the role, regardless of his/her race.

In the 1940s, Joseph Papp used colorblind casting as part of his interpretation of Shakespeare. He believed in a naturalistic approach to Shakespeare. Color-blind casting became an important element of many of his shows. Because Shakespeare’s pieces are so well known, it is often considered easier for audiences to accept a reality that is drastically different than the truth (Thompson, 12). Many Black actors, including James Earl Jones, Denzel Washington, and Ruby Dee got their major professional start in one of his plays. His productions sought to imitate the modern world and he felt that interpreting Shakespeare as it would have been interpreted when written would only date the production. It would not be relatable to the audience. He chose to use color-blind casting to reflect American society at that time. In these productions, Papp wanted to create an environment in which race did not matter. He did not want the audience to judge the characters based on their race. Instead, he wanted them to only be judged based on their actions in the play.

Zelda Fichandler’s interest in non-traditional casting can be seen in the following quote:

Suppose that there were a fine acting company made up of white actors and black actors and Hispanic actors and Asian-

American actors; women and men; young actors, older, and old; deaf actors and the hearing; actors with other special characteristics. And suppose that one assigned roles freely, without prediction from history or from one's old habits of thought. What if one took non-traditional casting as far as one could? —Zelda Fichandler, American Theatre, May '88 (Schechner 1).

Zelda Fichandler seemed interested in how non-traditional casting could be used to alter the interpretation of a play. An example of a show she cast non-traditionally was the 1989 production of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. In this particular production, the show was cast with all Black actors (Petty 1). According to New York Times' Theatre Reviewer Laurie Winer, the show was able to overcome the change in casting because race was not the central problem being presented within the show. While the original play can be interpreted as a decline of southern whites, these privileged circumstances would have been very unlikely for African Americans in the 1930s. This production seeks to tackle other issues. The dynamics of this troubled family are the central conflict of this production and their race was not essential in communicating this conflict. This production is one of Arena Stage's most note-worthy uses of non-traditional casting under the leadership of Zelda Fichandler (Winer 1).

While Zelda Fichandler retired as artistic director of Arena Stage in 1991, the use of non-traditional casting at Arena Stage has continued. One of the most

recent examples is Molly Smith's production of *Oklahoma!*. In this production of the classic Roger and Hammerstein's musical, the show was cast with actors of varying ethnicities. The characters of Laurie and Aunt Eller were black actresses while, Curly was played by a latino Actor. Peter Marks of the Washington Post wrote that the change in casting revitalized the show for a 21st century audience. The casting instead showed how "dynamic" and diverse the country is now and was at the turn of the 20th century. Even with this casting the conflict of the show remained the same; between the Cowboys and the Farmers and Jud and Curly (1).

Under the leadership of C. Bernard Jackson, the Inner City Cultural Center became a theatre that reflected the lives of all the diverse Los Angeles' people. Not only did this theatre use non-traditional casting, but it also helped in supporting the works of playwrights of color, including August Wilson. Non-traditional casting was an integral part of the theatre's artistic purpose and was utilized when the practice was just beginning (Breslauer 1). C. Bernard Jackson stated "The principle function of mainstream theater is to serve a white middle-class audience[s], and anything else they do is a secondary to that function"(Los Angeles Times 1). Jackson made sure that his theatre questioned and challenged this practice.

Values of Non-Traditional Casting

Non-traditional casting is in many ways, a political act that can serve as a form of social protest. Especially in the years directly following the civil rights era, non-traditional casting expressed the changing role of race in the minds of American society. Casting non-traditionally became, and still is, a statement expressing the acceptance of multiculturalism in the U.S. According to Angela C. Pao, “the decision to cast actors of color in canonical Euroamerican plays was an acknowledgement of the abilities of black and other racial minorities.” She also states that it was “an implicit or explicit expression of support for their struggle against racial discrimination and for equal rights and opportunities” (17). This idea challenged the authority of white America and called into question how much power this group continued to hold on minority groups.

Non-traditional casting is beneficial because it can provide a greater number of opportunities for actors and designers who may not have been considered in previous decades. For actors, because certain parts may not have been available because of his/her race or gender, they are gaining consideration for more roles. These parts are larger and often outside of their “type.” This allows them to increase their skills as actors and the opportunity for casting in more shows. Designers who may have been pigeonholed into only productions that are inside their cultural experience are now getting to design a wider variety of shows.

Non-traditional casting has the ability to either intensify the theme of the playwright or bring forward a theme that may not have been previously emphasized. It can make the audience interpret the show differently, thus

changing their perception of the play's theme. When used responsibly it can be a powerful way to enhance a play's theme. Non-traditional casting can also allow the director to impose a theme on the script that the playwright may not have intended.

Challenges of Non-Traditional Casting

When non-traditional casting is used, the original intent of the playwright is manipulated. This brings to light an ethical question; is it appropriate to alter the playwright's intention of a play? According to The Dramatist Guild of America's Bill of Rights, every playwright should have control of their script. The Bill of Right's states "No one (e.g. directors, actors, and dramaturges) can make changes, alterations, and/or omissions to your script - including the text, title, and stage directions - without your consent" (Dramatist Guild of America 1). The organization also states that the playwright has the right to approve all elements, including the cast. How strictly these rules are followed depends on the playwright in question and the rules of the company producing the show. Some playwrights, including August Wilson and Samuel Beckett, have strict guidelines about how they believe their plays should be interpreted. Samuel Beckett is famous for remark that his play *Waiting for Godot* should never be cast with women. Although he objected, many companies around the world have continued to do so (McMahon 1).

Non-traditional casting can create a false perspective of history. For some plays, a recreation of a certain historical period is important in realizing the full

intent of the playwright. If the race of the characters is altered, then the play will not have depicted an accurate recreation of history. For countries like the United States with a history that is racially charged, this becomes an issue. According to Angela C. Pao “The conventions of realism and naturalism require that all the elements on stage work with the cooperation of the audience to sustain the mimetic illusion, in which iconic signs refer directly to reality(Pao 24-25). Altering casting can cause the audience to question the reality of the play. German playwright Bertolt Brecht defined this distancing effect in what he called *Verfremdungseffekt*. According to Brecht “Alienating an event or character means first of all stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious qualities and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them” (Brooker 215). The effect forces the audience to question the images and events that they are watching. Brecht created this idea in order to force the audience to avoid passive acceptance during a play. He wanted them to actively question and judge the events before them. If non-traditional casting is used without regard to how it will change the play, then the audience will make their own judgement. This judgement may be negative in that it does not challenge stereotypes or negative perceptions of minorities, but actually sustains them.

While non-traditional casting seems like a positive road to eventually creating a fully multicultural theatre community, some are apprehensive. One of the most vocal opponents of non-traditional casting was August Wilson. In 1996, Wilson gave a talk at the Theatre Communications Group National Conference at Princeton University. In his speech Wilson first stated that black people have an

obligation in telling their story. He stated that there needs to be more black theaters that work to nurture black playwrights and theatre practitioners.

According to Wilson “That black theater today comes under such assaults should surprise no one as we are on the verge of reclaiming and reexamining the purpose and pillars of our art and laying out new directions for its expansion” (Wilson 496). He believed that black people need to take charge of their own history and tell their own story. In order to do this it is necessary to establish black theatres, dedicated to cultivating black playwrights. Wilson argues that without black theaters, others will inaccurately tell the story of black people.

According to Wilson, black people are the only people who can talk about the black experience. While there are some themes that are common to all people, many experiences, including American slavery and slave ships, are very specific to the African American experience. He believes that any other race’s attempt at telling that story denies black people the right to tell their own history. This may lead to an inaccurate depiction of black people on the stage. This also extends to ideas of non-traditional casting. Wilson states quite clearly that color-blind casting is never appropriate and is a strike against the black identity. He states:

Color-blind casting is an aberrant idea that has never had any validity other than as a tool of the Cultural Imperialist who views their American Culture, rooted in the icons of European Culture, as beyond reproach in its perfection. It is

inconceivable to them that life could be lived and even enriched without knowing Shakespeare or Mozart (498).

Many of August Wilson's concerns about black theatre are absolutely correct. It is appalling that at the time Wilson gave his speech only 1 of the 66 LORT theatres was considered "black." Wilson is right in saying that one of the major reasons why there is an absence of black theatres is because of a lack of funding. All theatres require lots of money to keep running from season to season. Without adequate funding they are unable to really expand the shows within their season. Theatres are afraid to diversify their season because of a fear that the audience will not want to see it. Wilson is incorrect when he states that the best and only way to bring black plays forward is by creating more "black theatres." This is not the best way to present black theatre. Black theatre can exist within the mainstream American theatre, but there must be a commitment by all involved in presenting black theatre frequently and as accurately as possible. This includes making black theatre an important element of all theatre's artistic goals and making sure to support the work of new black playwrights. This commitment to diversity should not only include black people, but all minorities in the United States.

Also, by stating that the key to developing black theatre is through theatres that are specifically for black people, is a form of segregation. All black companies can be beneficial in developing black playwrights, but black theatre can exist and prosper in a more multicultural theatre. Wilson is saying that the

only way for white and black theatre to exist in the United States is if they are separate. The Civil Rights Movement established that separate is not equal. It is the responsibility of all Americans to present the works of all of America's ethnicities and minority groups. In other words, while race is an integral part of American society and the American perception of society, it should not be a point of contention. It should instead be a point of concord, explored in order to understand and identify with one another.

When it comes to color-blind casting, Wilson is right in stating that color-blind casting downplays the actor's race and deems their history unimportant. Wilson states that "investigation of the human condition through the specifics of white culture is to deny us our own humanity, our own history, and the need to make our own investigations from the cultural ground on which we stand as black Americans (499). By stating that all color-blind casting is wrong, including all-black productions of traditionally "white plays," Wilson fails to consider the idea of reevaluating traditional "white plays" through a different lens. By allowing an African American to play an African American character that is traditionally played by a white actor, the director is allowing the audience to reevaluate the theatrical work and the situation depicted. This can often intensify the theme of the play or even bring forward important themes that may not have been as evident before. The use of non-traditional casting as a directorial tool can highlight both white and black experiences in America.

Critical Analysis

The concept of theatre as a place for social activism is not a new idea. The theatre has always been politicized. Going back to plays including Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, theatre has been deeply political. In both of these instances the plays question the status quo and question the political situation of the time. The idea of theatre as a political statement is part of many American's perception of what theatre is. Therefore, saying that an audience can watch a play without reaching some conclusion about the role casting plays is an underestimation of the audience's abilities. The audience is not blind to color and casting decisions influence their perception of the work. The actor is the fundamental basis of a play. The actor is how the story is communicated to the audience. Without the actor, the audience would not be able to fully grasp the purpose of the play. Because of the high importance of the actor, the audience will take in all the elements of the actor in order to fully understand the story being told. Gay McAuley makes this point clear in the following statement:

The stage, even when set and lit ready for the performance, will keep the spectators' attention for a very short time if no actors are present, for in the theatre it is the presence of the actors that make the space meaningful. It is through the body and the person of the actor that all the contributing systems of meaning (visual, vocal, spatial, fictional) are activated, and the actor/performer is without doubt the most

important agent, in all the signifying process involved in the performance event” (Pao, 28).

Because audiences do consider the role race has in the interpretation of a play’s theme, it is very important that directors always make a very informed decision when casting. While casting can serve as a positive tool that intensifies or adds to the intent of the playwright, it can also send a negative message to the audience. By not carefully considering how non-traditional casting will affect the entire message of the play, the director may be inadvertently sending negative messages about race to the audience. Lisa M. Anderson clarifies this idea when she states “As much as we may abhor the negative stereotypes of blacks that became standard fare in theatre, they remain part of the consciousness of the audience that enters the theatre to watch a play... Because of their persistence, rather than ignoring race (or pretending to ignore race), it is incumbent upon artists (particularly directors) to consider the ways race in performance signifies for an audience“(Anderson 93). Not only will irresponsible non-traditional casting impede American multiculturalism, but it can also reinforce negative stereotypes. Because the audience will always consider the race of the characters in a play, it is important that the director make responsible casting decisions that challenge the racist ideas and prejudices that continue to plague American society. Whether the director wants it to or not the race of the actors will influence the audience’s perception of the play. Therefore it is very important that when casting the director use non-traditional casting as a directorial tool that aides in

highlighting a certain theme or idea within the show. If non-traditional casting is not used responsibly, the artistic concept of the director and the theme of the play as a whole, will not be fully realized by the audience.

Because of the constraints of educational theatre (lack of resources and lack of talent) and its status as an actors' workshop, educational theatre has more leeway in its casting. The number one priority of educational theatre is to provide all of its students' opportunities for developing their theatrical skills. Educational theatre puts a primary emphasis on the process of creating a play. To be as inclusive as possible, theatres have frequently begun to use color-blind casting to create more opportunities for women and students of color. In an educational theatre setting this can be a great way to provide students with the opportunity to act, but the change in casting must be addressed. It can be addressed either through dramaturgical work, a lobby display and/or a program insert stating the reasons for casting the show in such a manner. Without notifying the audience, the race of the characters will influence the audience's interpretation of the play. According to writer and journalist Touré:

“Artists have a special place in the collective mind of the groups that claim them: They are the embodiment of the group's imagination. The great ones push at the edges of what it's permissible to say and think and do and thus shape how the group sees itself as well as how outsiders see the group. Artists must work with dangerous truths the way

scientists who don protective gear work with dangerous chemicals”(58).

All casting decisions should have a clear purpose that affirm the directorial purpose of each show. Unsupported casting decisions simply clutter the intent of both the playwright and the director. It leaves the audience confused. By casting without regard to what it is communicating, the director is undermining the purpose of his play. Both educational and professional theatre have a responsibility in creating art that challenges previously held ideas and mindsets. It is there to help the public make sense of the world. It is there to help break down stereotypes and bring people together.

Applications of Non-Traditional Casting at William and Mary

The College of William and Mary, established in 1693, is a small liberal arts college, located in Williamsburg, Virginia. The William and Mary theatre was created in 1926 “with the dedication in that year of its first playing place, old Phi Beta Kappa Hall.” (xiii Hunt). This was not an official theatre department, but the group produced a couple shows each year. From its humble beginning, the Department of Theatre and speech was created in 1963 (Hunt).

As it grew, the department developed a four play season, which has in many ways continued to today. The season consisted of “a modern foreign play, a modern American play, a musical, and a classic” (Scammon). While the

department continues to select shows from these categories they are less strict with the productions that go in to each individual season. The department continues to do a musical every fall, but the other shows simply depend on what the professors decide to propose for each of the slots. The professors are more concerned with making sure that all students can be involved with a diverse number of shows over the span of their four years at William and Mary. Most of the plays come from within the western canon, except a couple shows that have been produced in the last couple years. The purpose of the department is to provide a comprehensive education of theatre that includes all areas of production. The student is required to get experience in all these areas in order to develop a well rounded theatre practitioner.

In order to investigate and demonstrate how non-traditional casting can introduce a new narrative into a play, alter the intentions of the playwright, and serve a liberal arts university, I analyzed 5 William and Mary productions and the casting decisions made. I discussed non-traditional casting with each of the production's directors and asked what educational theatre means to them. I also asked them what their areas of interest were and about their directorial objectives. In order to analyze these plays I read them several times, saw (or was a cast member) of all of these plays, and I viewed production photos.

Professor Green and Ruined

Professor Green has three objectives in her theatrical work. The first objective of Professor Green's work is to produce plays with themes that can

impact her audience. Without a deep thematic relevance the work is purposeless for her. She believes that the audience has more than enough opportunities for “entertainment in an absent minded way.” This does not mean that her pieces are without entertainment. She believes that all good pieces have moments of humanity. Even plays that discuss difficult and emotional issues can have moments of playfulness and laughter. The themes of her plays are also tools she uses to help expand her audience. She believes that providing pieces that are social relevant to wider audience can bring larger audiences to the William and Mary theatre department.

Second, one of Professor Green’s main areas of research is black theatre. There are many plays within the black canon that are under produced and under appreciated and she has made it her goal to direct these plays and bring them to new audiences. In her words, “her research in direction and dramaturgy focuses on the adaptation of themes of spirituality, oppression and liberation in plays of the African Diaspora and theatrical literature at large”(Green). One of the reasons why she was hired by the William and Mary theatre department is because of her commitment to the field of black theatre. The department was looking to expand the diversity within its theatrical season as well as the classes it teaches each semester. Since coming to William and Mary she has modified the existing course on black theatre and developed several new courses in addition to taking a more in depth look at African theatre in her theatre history class.

Finally, Professor Green looks to help students grow in their theatrical abilities and aid them in an awareness of a greater social consciousness. When

Professor Green looks for a new piece, one of her considerations is if she has the talent to adequately confront the challenges within the script. Also, just as she looks to provide important themes to her audience, she puts a great deal of effort in assisting actors in understanding another world. She looks for plays that can not only help her actors grow but also teach them about a world they may not have visited before. For instance, in *Ruined* a great deal of effort was taken to give actors a thorough understanding of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Her actors became experts in Congolese history and stewards in helping educate the world about its people.

Ruined by Lynn Nottage was produced in Spring 2012 and is noteworthy for being one of a few plays done by the William and Mary theatre department that depicts an African experience. *Ruined* tells the story of Mama Nadi, a woman who runs a bar and brothel in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Her bar serves the government soldiers, rebel soldiers and miners that are passing through the jungle. At the beginning of the play Christian, a traveling salesman who brings Mama supplies and serves as Mama's love interest, brings two girls to the bar. Sophie, a very pretty singer and Christian's niece, and Salima, described as a "sturdy peasant woman" (Nottage 8). Mama refuses the girls at first but eventually, after much pleading from Christian, decides to take the girls in. Mama revokes her acceptance when she discovers that Sophie is "ruined" (Nottage 11). Ruined means that soldiers have mutilated her genitals, causing her to be seen as unfit by her village. Mama believes that a ruined girl is bad for business but gives in to Christian's begging. She finally calls in

Josephine, one of the girls who works in the bar, to take the girls in the back and get them settled. Throughout the rest of the play the bar is visited by government soldiers and rebel soldiers. The two groups are in conflict with one another, each wanting control of the surrounding area and the resources it possesses. The leader of the rebel soldiers Jerome Kisémbé and the leader of the government soldiers Commander Osembenga each warn Mama of the dangers of providing service to the other side. The play continues when Commander Osembenga hears of rebel soldiers being seen in the bar, causing him to break in and threaten the women. As the men force themselves into the bar Salima enters covered in blood protesting the violence of the soldiers. Following these tragic events Mama confesses to Christian that she is also ruined and finally gives in to her love for Christian.

Commander Osembenga is the officer most severe in his warning to Mama. He is described as “a pompous peacock of a man” (Nottage, 28) and has the ability to bring the entire bar quiet at his entrance. When Osembenga first enters there is an obvious power struggle. At first he is unwilling to abide by Mama’s rule to leave all bullets at the door but is intrigued by Mama’s tenacity. In order to make up for this loss of power he loudly questions Mama about the whereabouts of Jerome Kisémbé. Mama replies that she “knows of him”(Nottage, 30). He continues to speak of the danger of Kisémbé and how he has and will do nothing for the Congolese people. He asserts himself to the rest of the bar by buying Christian several glasses of whiskey. Christian does not drink and attempts to avoid the drinks but Osembenga does not take no as an answer and

pressures him. Christian is also afraid of bringing trouble to Mama's bar so he eventually gives in and drinks the whiskey.

When Christian comes to visit the bar again he has obviously given in to old drinking habits and has developed a nervous energy that he did not exhibit before. One day while sitting alone with Mama and the girls in the bar Christian makes a foolish impression of Kisémbé. He dances around and proclaims that he is the "Great Commander of All Things Wise and Wonderful" (Nottage, 52). As he does this Osembenga enters unseen. Christian stops abruptly but Osembenga encourages him to continue. Osembenga is suspicious of the bar, believing that they have been servicing Kisémbé and his men. Tension escalates when Osembenga pulls Sophie toward him and gropes her. She resists the advances and eventually pushes him away and spits on him stating that she is already "dead" (Nottage, 55). Osembenga threatens Sophie and Mama intercedes by taking him in the back. Several minutes later Mama runs out of the back outraged and hits Sophie telling her not to return until "his cock is clean" (Nottage, 56).

The climax of the play occurs when Osembenga definitively hears that Mama has been giving service to Kisémbé and his men. After hearing this he forces himself into the bar with his men and holds the women at gun point. He screams for Mama to tell him where Kisémbé is. Osembenga serves as a symbol for all the violence and hostility that occurs within the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He claims to be fighting for the freedom of his people (just as the rebel soldiers claim) but is simply causing destruction and death throughout the country. For each character, Osembenga symbolizes what was taken or

destroyed in their lives. For Sophie, he is responsible for destroying her body and with it, her reputation. For Salima, he destroyed her family and the trust she had with her husband. For Mama, he is responsible for the destruction of her body and inability to love herself and others.

In Professor Green's production of *Ruined*, the character of Commander Osembenga was played by a white actor. Traditionally the part would have been played by a black actor. By casting a white actor Professor Green invited questions about the origin of the violence and destruction of the land in the DRC. By using a white actor the violence of the DRC seems to no longer be the sole fault of the people who live there. She instead makes the statement that "history was repeating itself; the ghost of King Leopold II and the plundering of the country's wealth and the brutal violence he, by way of his agents, enacted on the people of the Congo are the same kinds of actions currently used today by the Congolese against their own people and their land (Green)." Professor Green did not seek to complicate the main theme of *Ruined* but simply contribute a historical perspective on the events presented.

The audience seemed to respond positively to this new narrative. However, one of the external reviewers for the show made the following statement: "...more problematic...for me – was the casting of the General as a white man. I appreciated the justification, explained in the preshow conversation, but in the end I am not sure it worked. For me, it undermined the complexity of the tribal conflicts, turning it into the white man's betrayal, rather than the far more complicated civil war that pits black man against black man. This is most

certainly connected to the colonial history of the DRC, and I appreciate that as a touchstone for this casting, but it still struck me as problematic from a dramaturgical and political standpoint” (Green). Was this “appropriate”, given your casting pool and workable for the aesthetic needs of the cast? Perhaps. Was it the best choice for meaning-making? Probably not. None of the reviewers of the show even mentioned the non-traditional casting in the show and it did not seem to confuse the audience. A lack of discussion about the casting decisions could have been because of a thorough understanding of the decision. An important element of this show was the extensive dramaturgical packet that was made available to the cast, production team, and audience members. Professor Green and the dramaturge created this packet in order to fill in any questions anyone may have about the how casting choices played a part in revealing the country’s history.

In this case non-traditional casting worked. It added a new narrative to the play that did not interfere with the major intent of the playwright. The non-traditional casting used was a very specific decision made by the director. How Professor Green handled this use of non-traditional casting reflects her belief on how this type of casting should be used. She believes that non-traditional casting is one of several tools available to a director but one that should ultimately communicate the message of the playwright whether it introduces a new narrative or complicates an existing narrative. If used recklessly, non-traditional casting can blur the message of the playwright or even lead to misunderstanding in the role race or gender plays in the given piece.

Professor Wiley and Cabaret

Professor Elizabeth Wiley has one main goal for her students when she is directing a show: she is looking to provide an enriching experience that all her students can learn from. She is not looking to make some sort of social or political statement with her work but instead help her students work on their acting and play analysis skills. She does not wish to impose any sort of directorial statement or vision on a script but instead reveal the story that is given in the script. Professor Wiley holds a Master of Fine Arts in Acting so her intent is to help students with their acting process. She believes that working on a play is the culmination of all of one's work in the acting classroom. Her plays act more as a studio for actors to further cultivate their acting skills.

When Professor Wiley looks for a show she takes several elements into consideration. First, she looks at the season and the seasons prior to choose a show that is different than the others. She chooses shows that can help her students work an acting muscle that may not have been necessary in other shows. For instance, in the spring of 2011 she directed Aphra Behn's *The Rover*. The show was classical, and therefore different than all the other shows in the season. The show also made use of masks and the Commedia dell'Arte style. Several years ago Professor Wiley received a Professor of Excellence Award that funded study in the area of her choosing. Because she had little Commedia dell'Arte training in her MFA program she decided to attend the Accademia dell'Arte in Italy and a Commedia dell'Arte program in California. This gave her a

great deal of mask and physical theatre skills, allowing her to share these skills with her students. Her production of *The Rover* used what she learned in these programs by incorporating a great deal of physical theatre and mask work. Her students also got to work on their classical acting skills as there was no other classical acting opportunity in the season.

When Professor Wiley chooses a show there is some consideration on what is appropriate for the audience and what could help build it. While she does not make this a huge element in her show decision, it does play a small role. She is aware that while this is academic theatre, it is important to bring money to the department. She makes sure that the shows she chooses will be of some interest to the Williamsburg community so that they will come see the show.

In the fall of 2011, Professor Wiley directed the Kander and Ebb musical *Cabaret*. Her decision to direct this show started as a suggestion from one of the designers. The spot for that season's musical was still open and one of the designers suggested that it would be an excellent addition to the season. Upon hearing this Professor Wiley jumped on the opportunity. She loved the musical and was excited to do a show that had just recently had a successful run on Broadway and the West End. She also was aware that she had not directed one of the department's musicals in a while and felt it was her turn to do so.

Cabaret begins with the Emcee welcoming the audience to the Kit Kat Klub, a seedy club in 1930s Berlin. The Emcee, with the help of several scantily clad dancers and waiters sing directly to the audience telling them that in the Kit Kat Klub everything is perfect. When the number ends the scene changes to a

train car approaching Berlin. In the car sits Cliff Bradshaw, a young writer going to Berlin with the intention of finding inspiration for his next novel. In the car he meets a friendly German named Ernst who introduces himself and begins conversation. As the border officer comes to check the men's passports and luggage, Ernst hides one of his luggage pieces behind Cliff's in order to hide his smuggled goods. Cliff sees this but the officer does not and moves to the next car. Ernst explains to Cliff that he is smuggling goods across the border and gives him a friendly recommendation for a place to stay. The scene closes and the Emcee reenters reprising his earlier welcome song.

Cliff takes the recommendation of Ernst and goes to Fräulein Schneider's boarding house. Fräulein Schneider is an old German woman whose life's work has been the up keep of this boarding house. Her priority in life is its upkeep. She offers Cliff a room and after a period of negotiation they are able to agree on a price. Then enters Herr Schulz an old Jewish man who owns a nearby fruit shop and lives in the room next door. He enters, urging Cliff to share some fruit with him and Fräulein Schneider but Cliff refuses and begins work on his novel. Cliff then decides to visit the Kit Kat Klub. At the Kit Kat Klub, he meets singer and dancer Sally Bowles. The two talk for a while and Cliff tells her that he is new in town and mentions where he is staying. The next day, Cliff is giving English lessons to Ernst. The lesson is almost finished when Fräulein Schneider enters announcing that Sally Bowles is looking for Cliff. She enters with her bags and eventually persuades Cliff to let her stay. Back at the club, the Emcee sings "Two Ladies" with two of the dancers from the club, narrating the scene with Cliff and

Sally. Back at the boarding house, Herr Schultz gives Fräulein Schneider a pineapple as a gift. The next scene features a group of waiters at the Klub singing “Tomorrow Belong’s To Me,” a song celebrating Germany and Nazism.

Back at the boarding house, several weeks have passed and Sally and Cliff still live together. Sally threatens to leave Cliff but decides to stay after she tells Cliff she is pregnant. Fräulein Schneider and Herr Schultz decide to get married in the next room. Sally throws the couple an engagement party at the fruit shop. At the party, Ernst enters and warns Fräulein Schneider that marrying a Jew may not be the best decision. The two mingle and eventually Ernst takes off his jacket. Cliff is alarmed by the swastika wrist band that he wears. Ernst and Fräulein Kost, a prostitute who lives in the boarding house, lead the party in singing “Tomorrow Belongs to Me.” Cliff, Sally, Fräulein Schneider, and Herr Schultz refrain from singing.

The second act begins with the Cabaret girls dancing in front of the act curtain. They form a kick line and the audience can see that one of the girls is actually the Emcee dressed in drag. The kick line eventually becomes a goose step as the the dancers exit. Back at the fruit shop, Fräulein Schneider expresses concern to Herr Schultz about getting married. Suddenly a brick flies through the window. This causes Fräulein Schneider even more trepidation and Herr Schultz attempts to calm her. Back at the club, the Emcee dances with a monkey. The dance ends when he claims “If you could see her through my eyes, she wouldn’t look Jewish at all”(Kander 66). In the boarding house, Fräulein Schneider returns Sally and Cliffs engagement gift. The couple try to persuade her that she should

not be afraid to be with Herr Schultz but she refuses to listen. Cliff starts to sense how difficult it will be and tells Sally that he wants to take her to live in America. He believes that it will be easier for them to raise their child. Sally argues that they love their life in Germany and she refuses to leave. The two argue until Sally goes to the Klub. Cliff follows her there and Sally refuses to go back with him. Ernst is at the Klub and attempts to speak to Cliff but he ignores him. Ernst makes a remark about Herr Schultz being a Jew and Cliff hits him causing a fist fight. Sally sings her signature song "Cabaret" in the Klub. Sally goes back to the boarding house and finds Cliff packing. He apologizes to Sally and again urges her to come to America with him, saying it would be the best for the baby. Sally refuses to go and informs him that she has just returned from the doctor where she aborted her child. Cliff leaves after telling Sally how she can find him. On the train home, Cliff reflects on his time in Berlin and begins his novel. The play ends as The Emcee and the entire cast (except Cliff) enters and sings the welcome song from the beginning. The Emcee finally sings goodbye and the play ends with a cymbal crash.

In this production of Cabaret, the characters of Cliff and Herr Schultz were played by black actors. In this production, it seemed that the two black men were systematically denied the opportunity to have a family because of some unspoken inadequacy. Herr Schultz is a Jewish man who is obviously interested in Fräulein Schneider from the beginning of the play. He brings her fruit as presents and continuously attempts to spend time with her. At first she seems very much interested. She accepts his fruit and the two enjoy each other's time

together. Soon Fräulein Schneider grows weary of Herr Schultz. She even attempts to hide her relationship from Fräulein Kost. When Fräulein Kost eventually discovers the relationship she compares the relationship to the men she brings to her room, basically implying that Fräulein Schneider is too quick to sleep with Herr Schultz. In order to hide these meetings Herr Schultz says that the two will be married. Fräulein Schneider agrees but is skeptical from the beginning. When Ernst confronts Fräulein Schneider at the party and warns her of marrying a Jew in Germany, she becomes even more apprehensive. After this she breaks off the engagement. She cites fear of being associated with a man like Herr Schultz for being the reason why she distances herself from him. When she brings Sally and Cliff the fruit bowl they bought the couple, Sally and Cliff attempt to persuade her that she cannot give up but Fräulein Schneider refuses. Eventually, Herr Schultz is forced to move to a different boarding house to give Fräulein Schneider the space she needs.

Cliff was also denied a family. At the beginning of the play Cliff is resistant of Sally's plea to let her stay in his room. He eventually gives in and allows her to share the small room with him. Over time, the two create quite a strong bond and fall in love with one another. When Sally discovers that she is pregnant, she attempts to hide it from Cliff but she eventually tells him. When he hears this news he assures her that he can and will take care of this child. He refuses to back away from this responsibility and expresses a sudden strength that was not evident before. He urges her and the baby to come with him back to the United States where he believes it is safer. Later, as the Third Reich takes a stronger

grasp of Germany, Sally again gets cold feet about the pregnancy. She is weary of moving to the US and believes everything she and baby needs is in Germany. She seems dissuaded even more from having her baby when she sees how Fräulein Schneider is so fearful of marrying Herr Schultz. Finally, after Cliff has done everything in his power to convince her that they can make their situation work, Sally aborts their child without discussing it with Cliff.

Because both Herr Schultz and Cliff were played by black actors, and all of the other major characters (excluding 3 Cabaret girls) were white, the play seemed to be sending a message about having a family with a black man. Because no one seemed to want to enter a long term relationship with these two men, it seemed to send a message that something was wrong with these men. While they were constantly trying to demonstrate that they were capable of having a family, the women seemed to want them for financial stability and sexual favors. It seemed that they held some sort of weakness or deficiency that kept them from successfully having a family with these white women. Because both of these characters were played by black men, the production seemed to be saying that their unspoken inadequacy was their blackness.

While an argument can be made that the fear of having a family with these men is because of the discrimination that was growing in the country due to the rise of the Third Reich, this is not a thorough explanation. The Nazis saw Jewish people, homosexuals, and Gypsies as unworthy of participation in society. Black people were not systematically dealt with during World War Two like the Jewish people. At times they were arrested, imprisoned, and killed, but it was often

random, with black people dealt with on a case by case basis (“Blacks During the Holocaust”). This could be argued as the reason that Sally and Fräulein Schneider are so resistant of entering into relationships with Cliff and Herr Schultz, but this should have been communicated to the audience. There should have been some sort of note in the dramaturgical work to let the audience know of this directorial perspective. Also, while Herr Schultz is Jewish, his race is amplified due to Sally and Cliff’s relationship. His being black seems to completely overshadow his being a Jew.

Professor Wolf and *Rhinoceros*

For Professor Laurie Wolf, her main goal in directing a play is telling a story as best she can. When she approaches a play, she often looks to explore the story through a different concept or idea that can aid her in telling the story. She develops this concept through extensive research and dramaturgy which she does on her own. For instance, when she directed the play *Rhinoceros* by Eugene Ionesco, she was interested in the idea of time and how the concept of time was altered for many during World War Two in Europe. She cited Theodore Adorno as a major influence in this particular work. Apparently, she was moved when she heard stories about how recently released Jewish concentration camp prisoners could not get used to people wearing wrist watches. She noted that concentration camp prisoners were often tricked and taken to a false train station which featured a large painted clock on the wall. The prisoners were then taken

to the gas chambers to be executed. The clock served as a symbol of impending doom, which is an idea she brought to *Rhinoceros*.

If one were to look for common themes in Professor Wolf's pieces, one would find that she often directs shows with a "political impetus"(Wolf). Even when the theme of the play is not overtly political she looks to highlight a certain political situation and uses that as an aid for her directorial concept. For example, when she directed the play *Gypsy* by Jule Syne, Stephen Sondheim and Arthur Laurents she chose to emphasize the relationship of June and Louis with their mother Rose. She found that by emphasizing this relationship she could address a larger issue of child exploitation in American show business. Her work is deeply influenced by Bertolt Brecht who looked to use theatre as a tool in changing society.

When casting, Professor Wolf tries to go into the audition room without a fully formed idea of who each character should be. She does develop some ideas but her main focus is in seeing what each actor can bring to the character. In auditions she first looks to see if the actor has various technical skills including how an actor reacts to other actors. She also looks for actors who have attempted to achieve a great grasp of the characters in the play. She wants to see through the audition that the actor has read the play and developed a deep understanding of the character they are auditioning for. She also wishes to see how the actor takes direction and if they seem to have a sense of spontaneity. A big part of Professor Wolf's rehearsal process involves use of improvisation in order to make discoveries about the character. She wants her students to make

discoveries of their own and she often does not push them to make any decisions that are not their own. Professor Wolf cites improvisation and the discoveries it allows to be an essential part of educational theatre and something that is often overlooked in professional theatre.

When it comes to non-traditional casting, Professor Wolf states that very few plays specifically state the ethnicity of the characters specifically mentioned. Therefore, this leaves room for casting actors of different ethnicities into roles they would not have traditionally played. She also believes that this lack of ethnic specificity in the roles allows for more opportunities. She cites this as the reason why non-traditional casting is so essential to a liberal arts curriculum. It gives all students the chance to act on stage. For Professor Wolf, non-traditional casting can also serve as a way for her to better tell the story at hand and provide a new perspective on any given text.

When directing at William and Mary, Professor Wolf is not interested in the average Williamsburg audience. She instead pays more attention to attracting students within the William and Mary community. This is an expression of Professor Wolf's dedication to education. She hopes to expand her audience across the William and Mary community so that her shows can educate even more students.

When asked about shows outside of the Western/Anglo Saxon canon, she stated that she had not done any, but has an interest in doing some. She states that she is very interested in the work of Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian playwright. She said two of his plays, *Death of the Kings Horseman* and *The Strong Breed*,

were of high interest to her. She also stated that she has an interest in directing the play *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Professor Wolf said that while she had not directed any plays outside of the Western Canon, she has taken classic Western plays and changed the setting to a location outside of Western culture. For instance, in 2008 she directed *Othello* for the Virginia Shakespeare Festival. In this production she set the play in post-Apartheid South Africa. Because of the racial tension within South Africa during this time, she felt it would add another perspective to the classic play. This production included an onstage chorus that use rhythms and songs from the Zulu tradition.

In the winter of 2011, Professor Wolf directed a production of *Rhinoceros* by Eugene Ionesco. *Rhinoceros* begins with a street scene in a “French provincial town”(Ionesco, 5). It walks Berenger, a frazzled young man who is late for a meeting with his friend Jean. Jean criticizes Berenger for being late (although he has shown up late in anticipation of Jean’s tardiness) and tells him he needs to clean up his appearance. At the next table sits The Logician and The Old Man. The Logician explain syllogisms to The Old Man, many of which make very little sense. As the two groups talk, the sound of galloping gradually gets louder. A rhinoceros has galloped by and crushed a woman’s cat. The group discusses the Rhinoceros. The next day at the office Mr. Papillon, Dudard, Botard, and Daisy talk about the Rhinoceros sightings. Botard does not believe that Rhinoceroses could ever be in France and doubts what the others are saying about them. Dudard believes that there are Rhinoceroses but seems

more interested in the species of Rhinoceroses. Berenger sneaks in to work late and Daisy the secretary signs him in without the others seeing. Mr. Pappillion seems more concerned with making sure the others begin their work. Following their continued discussion on the Rhinoceroses, Mrs.Boeuf enters. She notices that one of the Rhinoceroses is actually her husband and jumps on his back as he gallops by. The Rhinoceros run into the staircase of the office building, causing the group to be trapped on the top floor of the office building. After fire fighters rescue the group, Berenger goes to visit his friend Jean who has fallen ill. As Berenger speaks with him, Jean skin changes color, his behavior becomes unpredictable, and he eventually turns into a Rhinoceros. Berenger returns to his apartment. There he finds Dudard and Daisy. They are the only three who have no succumbed to Rhinoceritis. Both Dudard and Daisy eventually choose to join their friends and become Rhinoceroses. Berenger is left alone in his room and considers changing to Rhinoceros but instead declares “I’m not capitulating” (Ionesco, 131).

This production is notable for its casting a black actor into the role of office boss Mr. Papillion and The Old Man and the casting of the traditionally male roles Jean, Dudard, and Botard as woman. The casting of this play was both successful and unsuccessful. First, the casting was successful in that it challenged the depiction of women and black men in French society. The characters of Jean, Dudard, Mr.Papillon and Botard are the powerful characters in the play who control the people around them. They are the authority within Mr. Papillon’s office. They are well respected and are in no way treated as inferior in

the work place. In comparison to Berenger at the beginning of the play, they are strong which contrasts greatly with Berenger's sloppy appearance. While they decide to join the Rhinoceroses at the end it does not seem to be a flaw attached to their womanhood or race. It is instead a logical decision they decide to make on their own. These decisions could have been made even stronger if the audience was given more dramaturgical information about this choice.

The character of Jean is interesting in that she has one of the most obvious arcs throughout the play. At first she is reserved, well dressed, and extremely intelligent. In many ways she seems as if she is Berenger's advisor instead of his friend. She seems to have control during their conversation and has a large amount of influence over Berenger. As the play progresses she is slowly undone. She starts to see patches on her skin which is a sign of her turning to a rhinoceros. While she does finally turn to a Rhinoceros, this progression of emotion presents women as deep, strong willed individuals. Also, the decline into rhinoceros has nothing to do with Jean being a woman. It is instead a struggle that everyone, both man and woman, must confront.

A very important element of this play is that it is an absurdist play and not completely set in realism. The audience is aware that people cannot actually change into rhinoceroses. This leaves room for certain realities to be manipulated. The audience is more comfortable in accepting the altered role of women and black men in 1940s French society because other elements of the society of the play have already been accepted.

Dr. Palmer, *Oklahoma!*, and *Night of the Iguana*

According to Dr. Richard Palmer, the director in an educational setting has a commitment to both directorial goals and educational goals. Within an educational setting these two goals must meet, and in some cases, the teaching goals take precedence over the directorial goals. As a teacher, the professor has a commitment in making sure that opportunity is provided for all students, students are allowed the chance to develop as actors, students are provided with tools to help them find their voice and acting technique, students are provided a fun production experience, and a sense of community collaboration is established. The director also has an interest in creating the best possible experience for the audience. Dr. Palmer wishes to stretch the audience through his productions. In his words “I always hope the audience leaves having experienced something so it is worth while for them and us” (Palmer). While it is the directors job to make sure that the play being directed meets the needs of the audience, their needs are only important in that they support the needs of the students.

After directing shows for about 50 years, Dr. Palmer has seen a trend in his work. This trend is not seen in the subject matter of his work, but instead, in the way he approaches the work. Because Dr. Palmer began as a designer and actor, the works at the beginning of his directorial career tended to have a more visual emphasis. Dr. Palmer’s early directing techniques utilizes what Grotowski calls “rich theatre.” In rich theatre, the total resources of the theatre are used

(Palmer). As he continued to direct more shows, his work began to showcase simpler design elements and became more actor driven.

As his work has become more actor driven, his plays have become more of an actors studio where he encourages them to find all that they can bring to their characters. He attempts to guide the actor in making their own choices about their actor and avoids giving the actor too much information about who he thinks the character is. He believes that plays are a collaborative process. By guiding the actor and designers in making their own decisions, the collaborative outcome will have been better than what he would have produced alone.

Finding what the actor brings to the character begins in the audition room for Dr. Palmer. He tries to avoid creating any preconceived ideas of who a character is. He instead looks for what the actor brings to the character. He states that there are limits to this idea. Some characters call for physical characteristics including body type and ethnicity. In addition to the physical qualities, other qualities including the size of the role, create some uncertainty that is an exclusive problem to educational theatre. Sometimes a director is just not sure the right actors for the role will show up. This makes it a requirement for the director to keep his visions of the characters flexible. Dr Palmer stated that “I tend to not agonize over a play a whole lot before I get into it” (Palmer). By this he means that he wishes to avoid a complete image of who each character should be. He instead keeps an open mind and looks for what the actor can bring to the character.

When it comes to presenting shows in the black canon, Dr. Palmer has directed several while at William and Mary. Some of these shows include *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *God's Children*. He also directed a show that featured several vignettes of the American South which featured an all black cast, except for 2 white actors. Dr. Palmer stated that William and Mary, because of its location in southeastern Virginia, has a responsibility in making sure that black people are included in all parts of the college. Dr. Palmer makes an effort in making sure that black people have "a presence in the mainstream of the department" (Palmer). This includes casting black actors in his shows, and making sure to direct plays in the black canon. He stated that he has some hesitation when directing a black play, because many people believe that black plays cannot be directed by white directors. He believes that this idea is not necessarily true and that he would be just as hesitant directing a play that dealt with woman's issues.

In the fall of 2010, Dr. Palmer directed the Roger and Hammerstein classic *Oklahoma!*. *Oklahoma!* tells the story of Curly, a young cowboy who is in love with a young woman named Laurie. The two like to tease one another, but their interest in one another is clear. Curly asks Laurie if she would be interested in going to the upcoming box social but Laurie declines, telling him he waited too long to ask. Once Curly leaves, Jud Fry a very intimidating farm hand, asks Laurie if she would like to go to the social and she nervously accepts. Following these events, Will Parker returns from Kansas City where he won and spent a \$50 prize. He is interested in marrying Ado Annie, but her father, Andrew Carnes

refuses this union, saying that Will needs \$50 to marry Ado Annie. Ado Annie wants to get married but expresses concern about whether she should choose Will or Ali Hakim, a Persian peddler. After discussion with the other girls and after a dream sequence, Laurie realizes her love for Curly.

As is traditional at box socials, the women prepare baskets of food and the men bid on the basket. Both Jud and Curly bid on Laurie's basket, with Jud eventually winning. Jud later tells Laurie of his love for her, but she confesses that she does not feel the same way. He then threatens her, causing her to fire him. Fearful of what Jud may do, Laurie runs to find Curly and the two become engaged. After Laurie and Curly's wedding, Judd appears and fights Curly, accidentally falling on his own knife, causing Jud to die. The town decided Curly was innocent because he was defending himself and the couple go on their honeymoon.

In this production the roles of Andrew Carnes and Ike Skidmore, a wealthy land owner, were played by black actors. The part of Laurie was played by an Asian actress. Also, several ensemble members were black and asian. This production made no specific statement about race. Because the script did not feature any sort of racial antagonism there seemed to be no difference between the white and black people in this community. Also, characters including Andrew Carnes and Ike Skidmore were given land and authority within the community. Andrew Carnes is a land owner and respected in the community. Ike Skidmore is considered the wealthiest landowner in town and also has authority in the territory. When Curly and Jud argue with one another over who will receive

Laurie's basket at the box social, Ike is the one who is able to stop the confrontation. Because race was never mentioned or even noticed within the play, it did not necessarily send any statement about race or equality, it was just a dramaturgical inaccuracy.

This play is dramaturgically inaccurate because it portrays a false perspective of Oklahoman history. The musical takes place in the Oklahoma territory in 1906, just before the state receives statehood. At this time racial prejudice and tension existed in the Oklahoma territory. While the Oklahoma territory did have large native american, black, and white communities, the three were separate from one another. While there is no problem with making a directorial choice that differs from the true historical context, these intentions should be communicated to the audience. Also, as Dr. Palmer stated in his interview, he is looking for more black inclusion in the department. While this is an incredible gesture, the audience should be made aware of these intentions so they can view the performance through the appropriate lens. Also, this play is grounded in realism. Therefore any alteration of history should be explained to the audience.

In February of 2012, Dr. Palmer directed Tennessee Williams *The Night of the Iguana*. *The Night of the Iguana* tells the story of Larry Shannon, an ex-reverend who serves as a bus driver through Mexico. His job is to take a bus of Texan women to their requested resort. He instead decides to stop at his old friend Maxine's hotel. The women, specifically Miss Fellowes all wish to continue traveling to the intended hotel but Shannon refuses. Miss Fellowes argues with

Shannon, but he simply puts the key in his pocket and refuses to leave what he thinks is a great place to stay. Arguing stops momentarily when Hannah and her elderly grandfather Nonno enter the verandah. The two are looking for a place to stay but have no money. Hannah sells paintings to make money and Nonno, a poet, is working on a poem. As Hannah enters Shannon cannot help but observe her beauty. Maxine notices this and with Shannon's urging, she jealously says the two cannot stay, but eventually relents to them staying one night. That evening, Charlotte, a young 16 year old girl runs to the verandah to find Shannon. The two have had a love affair but Shannon refuses to acknowledge it. Charlotte is deeply upset by Shannon's lack of interest in her and screams outside of Shannon's hotel door. Miss Fellowes forbids Charlotte from talking to Shannon and threatens to report Shannon to the police for statutory rape. The tour group eventually find a new bus driver and leave the hotel after wresting the key from Shannon. Shannon who has a history of mental instability is angered by the whole situation and will not calm down until he is tied to a hammock. While in the hammock he talks about life, love, and relationships with Hannah. The two develop a deep understanding of another and share more similarities than previously thought. The conversation ends when Hannah tells Shannon to free the Iguana that has been trapped under the verandah. Following this event, Nanno finally finishes the poem he has been working and dies while sitting in his wheelchair.

In this production, the character Hannah was played by a black actress and the character of Nanno was played by an Indian actor. I believe that this

casting was successful because it challenged stereotypical ideas of black women. Hannah is characterized in the text as a beautiful woman who is both intelligent, cool headed and sexually innocent. She is the one who connects the most with Shannon and helps him in his emotional journey. When Shannon grows angry because of the women on the bus, Hannah relaxes him and helps him discuss his problems. Hannah's race is addressed very briefly in this production through an edited line. The original line is Shannon's remark that "Mexicans go for blond ladies. (Williams 66)" In this production the line was changed to "Mexicans go for black girls." An awareness of Hannah's race is most evident in her interactions with Maxine. While in the original text Maxine is hostile to Hannah because of her beauty and the attention she gets from Shannon, it seems that Maxine also disapproves of the relationship because of Hannah's race. Even though Shannon feels this antagonism, he does not shy away from Hannah and the two develop a deep emotional and intellectual relationship. Through their conversation, Shannon and Hannah become the most well rounded characters. The character of Nanno does not really change with the different race of the actor. This only helps in making the play seem more realistic because both Nanno and his granddaughter are people of color.

This change in race helped debunk American stereotypes of people of color and added a new narrative to the play. While Tennessee Williams may not have written this piece with black people in mind, this change brought a new ideas to his original intent. In other words, casting helped to further develop the intent of the playwright.

Conclusion

The College of William and Mary Theatre department provides a number of shows each semester that serve as laboratories for students to learn about acting, directing, and theatre production. They are successful in providing opportunities for their students both on and off stage. They also create plays that communicate important themes and entertain the audience. However, these efforts could be taken one step further by increasing the role of the dramaturge for each production, increasing directorial communication about his/her intent for each play, expanding the types of courses in the department, and increasing student outreach.

Over the past several years, the job of the dramaturge has grown in professional theatre. Dramaturges have begun to take on larger roles in shaping a production than in previous years. The department should reflect this change. The job of the dramaturge has served a peripheral role in the department and is given no funding and little say in the production process. The specific tasks they take on in the department vary greatly, depending on the director. Some directors rely heavily on dramaturges and ask that they remain available throughout the entire process while others directors only ask for a research presentation to the designers at the beginning of rehearsals. Most dramaturges also create a dramaturgical display, but the quality and research on these boards vary. In order to help this position grow, the department should compile a list of required tasks

for each dramaturge. Dramaturges should continue to present their research to the cast and designers at the beginning of the rehearsal process, but they should also be on hand in rehearsal to help with any questions that may arise.

Dramaturges should continue to create a display in the theatre lobby that provides historical and cultural information to the audience about the play. This display should not be looked at as simply a way to present research. It should be looked at as an artistic and scholarly project that can bring the audience into the world of the play. This display should also include, if necessary, information about casting. This information about casting does not have to be explicitly stated to the audience. There is room for subtlety but the information on the display should point the audience in the direction of why the decision was made. This will require a small stipend to be given to the dramaturge in order to buy the necessary materials. Finally, dramaturges and directors should consider how pre- or post-show discussions with the audience could be helpful in clarifying any points to the audience or could serve as a forum for community discussion.

If casting non-traditionally, the decision should either highlight the intent of the playwright or provide a new perspective on the piece. Because of this, the director should make it their responsibility early in the rehearsal process to communicate their vision for the show to the cast and designers in order to explain the reason for these decisions. It will help them to understand their role in helping realize this vision. This will also give students insight into how race plays into the piece. This will promote discussion in the department and make each production's intent clearer to audience.

While the department has definitely cast students of varying races in the departmental main stage shows, their commitment to diversity can be taken one step further. It is time that the department promote diversity within the theatre major. This includes making sure that the department, in addition to teaching plays and playwrights of the white western tradition, include information about plays and playwrights of other cultures. Reflecting on my time in the course Theatre History since 1750, none of the plays we read were of playwright's outside of the white Western tradition. Some professors claim they often do not teach plays outside of their culture because they feel there is a lack of understanding. This is very interesting to me because the professors are communicating a double standard. They are claiming a commitment to diversity, but they are unwilling to spend time in understanding and teaching plays of other cultures. They are then preaching a double standard by asking their students of color to break down and understand plays within the white culture. Professors must be willing to go outside of their comfort zone and leap into shows outside of their culture. This will set a tone for the department and teach students to embrace diversity.

One problem that the theatre department has overall is a lack of advertisement and an inability to attract new students. The department should make every effort to always be on the look out for ways they can attract new students to the department. The department can attract other students by either expanding the variety of classes they teach each semester or finding new ways

to work with other organizations or departments around campus. Creating a more multi-cultural season will attract new students of all backgrounds.

Overall, the William and Mary Department of Theatre, Speech and Dance is an excellent example of a typical liberal arts theatre education. These departments are not taking full responsibility for their art and the message it is sending to the public. They are also not discussing the role race continues to play in theatre and more broadly, American society. In order to move the conversation about race forward and enhance the value of a liberal arts theatre education, it is important that we begin to confront these difficult issues.

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