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# An All-Female Hamlet

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**An All-Female Hamlet**

By

Madisen Evans

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
Fine and Performing Arts Honors Scholars Program  
Honors College  
East Tennessee State University

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Madisen J. Evans

Date

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Patrick J. Cronin, Thesis Mentor

Date

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Robert D. Funk, Reader

Date

## Acknowledgements

I would first like to express my deepest appreciation to my mentor and director, Pat Cronin. Without his guidance and constant support, our *Hamlet* could never have been a reality. He was a challenger of gender stereotypes as well as a friend to all when needed. I could never thank Pat enough for his never-wavering belief in my ability.

I would next like to thank our co-director Danielle Byington for opening our eyes to the world of Shakespeare and his writing. Danielle was pivotal in our production, as well as a light of positivity in our cast. Thank you for making time for our class and craziness even with an overloaded schedule.

All my love and gratitude for my cast who I could not have been successful without. We as a group made this possible, and I am so thankful to have had the chance to work with the six beautiful women in this show.

Lastly, thank you to my reader Bobby Funk for your guidance and advisement, as well as taking time to help me and chat when needed. Thank you to the East Tennessee State University Theatre Department and The Fine and Performing Arts Honors College.

## Introduction

“...frailty thy name is woman.” – Hamlet

I started my time with this show at the beginning of the Fall '18 semester. I knew going into this experience, it was going to be completely different from any show I've been part of before. The layout and schedule of our show was quite different from any other show schedule I'd seen, with much of rehearsals being completed during class. Our class met every Monday and Wednesday from 1:40 to 3 PM, with after class rehearsals beginning in October.

Our class was led by two amazing directors, Pat Cronin and Danielle Byington, who both led class in very different ways. Danielle explained vocabulary, answered countless questions and taught us things about Shakespeare and his time that we couldn't have performed without. Pat on the other hand was everything theatrical, he guided the class to make smart decisions, which we then had to make together. He allowed us as a class of seven women to make decisions about our show, not only with blocking, but with the technical side of things as well. We were in control of our costumes, sound design, and even lighting. Pat and Danielle both served our class diligently, putting in the time needed to help us be successful.

But with anything, strong guidance only goes so far. We as a class had to work together and come together to make these tough decisions, even casting the majority of the show with only guidance from Pat and Danielle. This wasn't always easy and the class didn't always get along, (this is something you'll see later in the journal entries.) It was during this difficult time with the class that I first realized just how deeply engrained the proper female attitude is within us.

We as women, especially women from the South, are put into a very tight box. We are expected to behave in certain ways, never allowed to push for the things we want without fear of being considered “aggressive” or too “manly.” This hinders some women from speaking up, and some women never realize they’ve been hindered at all, myself included.

The societal and cultural norms for women have changed tremendously in the last 100 years, but the subconscious attitude we all carry with us of how women are to behave is still deeply engrained in many, including myself—I just didn’t know that at the beginning of this show. It was through my transformation into Hamlet, that my eyes were opened to just how often I tiptoe around difficult issues for fear of being seen as rude or too pushy. When talking to a few other cast mates, it became clear that many women feel this constant push in their minds to be quiet, for fear they might be seen as something ugly to the people around them.

Our experiment into gender made me realize that the only way to fully rid ourselves of the subconscious attitudes we carry daily is to accept them head on and only after that can we strive to change them. It is impossible to change or fix a problem that we are unaware of, and that’s why gender stereotypes are still so prominent in our culture. Diving into gender and stereotypes and what it means to be a woman or a man took an entire semester, so it wasn’t an easy revelation to come to, and even two weeks before our show opened I still didn’t fully understand. It was a difficult road to find the end of with the finished product being a genderless performance of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

## Journal

### Week 1: August 27<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup>

#### Wednesday:

I, unfortunately, missed the very first day of Hamlet class due to having another Monday class at the same time each week. I'm not sure if this will be an issue when it comes to casting, but I don't feel like I missed anything. The first day of Hamlet class for me, (Wednesday,) was actually everyone's second day together. I met everyone involved, including Pat's co-director, Danielle Byington. She's from the English Department and so knowledgeable on Shakespeare, I can tell we are really going to need her.

We also talked about how this class was going to be work. Pat made it clear that this class and the show we produce will be mostly student- driven, and might even be cast by us, the students. I'm still a little nervous about this method, mostly since I've never been in a cast driven show. I'm interested to see the logistics of this class, and how the power dynamic is going to play into casting. Not only will we be casting, but the show is being performed in the round, which is entirely new to me. The audience will always be able to see us, from all sides. This presents its own unique challenges, on top of it being a student cast show.

We do officially have the script now, but it's still a work in progress, so we aren't sure exactly how the final show will look. I think it's really neat how we are going to be able to tailor this script to work for our class since that's not something you can usually do. Definitely deviates from what most actors are used to, which is nerve-racking but exciting.

To finish the class, Danielle showed us an interesting video on vulnerability. Not something I would ever have imagined watching for myself, but it was enlightening on how women's vulnerability is perceived.

I've decided to attach a class list to make getting everyone in the cast already in the journal so when it comes time for casting, they're already part of the journal.

**Directors:**

Patrick Cronin  
Danielle Byington

**Students:**

Madisen Evans  
Madison Phillips  
Madelyn Goward  
Aimee  
Lucy McGee  
Shelby Tyler  
Hannah Tiberi

**Week 2: September 3rd – 7th**

**Wednesday:**

One thing to note is that the class structure is turning out to be a little different than I had originally expected. Probably because it is a class exclusively made of women, except for one older gentleman, Pat. There's a lot of opinionated people in the class, and with a laxer class structure, I feel like some people are taking advantage of the system. I feel like the class is moving slower than I would expect, and that's because some of my classmates are very interested in aspects of the show, we shouldn't worry about this early. I hope I am not coming off

too harsh in our discussions, I simply feel like the older people in the class should try to keep it moving smoothly.

We started the class reading the “Nunnery” scene, going around the circle, taking turns with who was Ophelia and Hamlet. When I read, I only read as Hamlet, which was okay. I can see myself as both characters, but I would like a chance to explore the idea of playing Ophelia, and maybe read as her in the future.

The energy of the class was off today though. The class felt a little strained, everyone’s energy was low, including my own. It also felt like our discussions were dragging by today, and I hadn’t felt like that before. I think part of the problem is that we are diving into gender roles and femininity, and it feels a little hypocritical at times. Maybe it’s just hard to completely shake away preconceived notions about gender, but this seems to be a hot and touchy subject in our class.

The question of who’s fully running the class is also a tension- causing subject since it’s hard to keep the class consistently moving forward with so many opinions and ideas. I don’t think this is necessarily a bad thing, and I love that the students have more say in the project, but I can tell I am completely out of my element. I love having a director who lets you discover certain things about your character, but a class deciding most aspects of a whole show is a little overwhelming. It doesn’t help that many of us completely disagree on how things should look or be done, which causes more tension to grow. I hope that after a few weeks when the show is officially cast, people will settle down and listen to Pat’s direction. I can’t make any predictions though, only time will tell.



### **Week 3: September 10th – 14th**

#### **Monday:**

Received an email last night from Pat asking to meet before class. I happily went to the meeting, with no inclination of what it would entail. In the meeting, Pat seemed to be very worried about if I was enjoying myself in the class. My aggravation with certain aspects of class discussion was noticeable, and Pat even commented on them. My directness was taken for aggressive, which I thought was funny since we had just had a long discussion about how women are put into an emotional box.

Women can't be go-getters without looking rude and aggressive. They aren't expected to speak on matters they care about unless those matters are deemed feminine enough. This meeting opened my eyes to how women are truly seen since my own straightforward attitude had been taken for rudeness. I'd like to say I felt female empowerment in the meeting since I was basically proof of everything we had talked about in class, but I didn't. I felt hurt that someone in the class felt the need to talk to Pat about me. I wanted to be everyone's friend, but also a leader in the group, and it didn't seem like that was going to be possible.

This meeting changed how I look at the class as a whole, and I've decided that from now on I'm not going to be as open with my thoughts and feelings. I hope this fixes the problem, but it seems unfair that everyone else gets to fight for their ideas, and I will not. It's so unusual for me to be in a class with these kinds of power dynamics to worry about. I don't want anyone in the class to feel negatively of me, but it seems like I am being taken that way.

Thankfully, I had my lab class that took the full period, so I did not have to go to Hamlet today. I am nervous to see how class goes on Wednesday since today went so sour.

**Wednesday:**

Today we read and discussed the “Closet” scene between Hamlet and Gertrude. We as a group have decided that this scene needs to be an attack on Gertrude, and should make the audience a bit uncomfortable. Danielle was great with the discussion, as she had much to say on how she edited the piece, and how she even pulled from other Shakespeare plays to really make this scene pop.

The vibe of the class was better today, and everyone seemed to have the energy to be there and enjoy themselves. Pat wasn't in class today, but Danielle lead the discussion alone and did a great job at keeping us on track. I think she likes structure almost as much as I do, which I really appreciated today.

**Week 4: September 17th – 21st****Monday:**

I missed most of class today due to my lab running over, but when I made it to class they were discussing costume ideas. I think we've all agreed we'd like a technically simple show, to really showcase the acting. I am really hoping for an all-black costumed show, but we've talked about throwing in pops of color here and there to help differentiate who's who in the show.

I hadn't thought about how difficult it may become for the audience to tell who is playing which character since so many of us are playing multiple roles. I think the costume pieces would really help, but I don't want us to get carried away.

**Wednesday:**

We finally finished our read-through of the script today. I've read pieces of the script before, but this was my first time reading the last scenes after they'd been edited. I am so amazed at the last "Death" scene, and I can't wait to start blocking it. We talked a little about the fight choreography, and Pat is pushing for no swords or weapons of any kind. The class and I really want some kind of weapon, since we want to be taken seriously by the audience. Pat doesn't think this is necessary, and might actually make us look worse than we are.

At the end of the discussion, we all agreed to wait and see how we felt after we had a better idea on blocking for the last scene. I'm really hoping we end up with weapons of some sort, but without a cast list, it's hard to say for sure if it would be best for everyone.

**Week 5: September 24th – 28th****Wednesday:**

Everyone is getting a little antsy about casting the show. After reading through the entire script as a group, and struggling greatly with the lines, everyone is panicked about memorization. I am equally worried since I myself have struggled to say things properly, or to simply understand what these characters mean at times. I know it will take longer than normal to memorize these lines, but since this is my first Shakespearean play I've acted in, I have no point of reference.

This is the first week I've felt a little out of the loop due to my Monday Lab class. It's not anyone's fault, but I can see this schedule is going to be a harder to manage than I had hoped. Everyone is working with me and catching me up, but it seems like all they talked about Monday

was casting the show and the many different ways we could go with it. I am really excited because we have decided next week is the last week the show will go uncast. Hopefully casting will go well!

## **Week 6: October 1st – 5th**

### **Monday:**

After saying we were going to cast the show for two weeks, casting is finally here! We as a group have decided the show will be cast at the end of this week, there can't be any more delays if we are going to have a well thought out and put together show. One of the reasons the group feels a little rushed is that we need to get started memorizing lines, even if we wait to block for another week or two.

To make the process a little smoother, Pat had us memorize the "Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I..." speech to perform in front of the class, after which we would talk about who fit the role the best. The memorization was a pain, and a little taste of what whoever is cast as Hamlet will have to struggle through.

When it was time to "audition," everyone took their turn doing the monologue, but when it came to my turn I was so nervous my hands were shaking, I know the class had to notice. My performance of the speech went okay, although I think it could have gone better. The wording in the speech tripped me up a few times, which I know will be an issue for me in any of these roles.

**Wednesday:**

The big day came and went, and was even more stressful than I imagined. I did not originally come into this class hoping to play Hamlet, but that is where my heart was pulling me. I knew today that there were many other Hamlet options within our classroom, and all would probably work, just not as well as if I was Hamlet.

We started the class in a big circle on the floor, discussing how we felt so far about casting. We also talked about if we thought this was a fair process, to which everyone in the group hesitantly agreed. I think we were all nervous about the outcome of a student cast show, especially one as challenging as Hamlet. We then went around the circle and told the group how we would cast the show if it were up to ourselves. Only two or three people, including myself, openly admitted to wanting to play Hamlet. I believe it was Aimee, Madison, and myself who made it clear Hamlet was our top choice.

In the end, Pat told us he had agreed with most of the casting decisions we had already made, and after a little push, he told us how he imagined the show being cast, which then became the official cast list! I've never been so excited and scared for a role in my life, and I almost regret pushing so hard for Hamlet. I know this is just self-doubt and I will work through it, but I am still anxious about doing this role the justice it deserves.

**Cast List:**

Madisen- Hamlet, Ghost (voice)

Madison - Claudius, Ghost (if we have a physical person)

Madelyn - Gertrude, Marcellus

Aimee - Polonius, Barnardo

Shelby - Ophelia, Player Lucianus

Lucy - Laertes, Reynaldo

Hannah - Horatio, Player King

Gravediggers - Madelyn, Aimee, Shelby, Hannah, Lucy

### **Week 7: October 8th – 11th**

#### **Monday:**

Its finally opening week for the other show I am in this semester, Jack and the Beanstalk! After this show closes I will have much more time to devote to Hamlet, which is exactly what I need to get a start on my lines.

Although it's opening week for another show, we can't rest due to Hamlet opening in just a month and a half. So in class today we had a major discussion about cutting the first scene. It isn't integral to the plot, so Pat and Danielle are thinking it may be a waste of time as well as energy. They want the show to flow smoothly, and be a much more condensed version of Hamlet, which I completely agree on.

I decided to stay out of the major discussion though, since I am not in that scene and therefore it doesn't really affect me either way. I hate that some people might lose lines, but in my opinion, we have enough lines as it is. Everyone has large parts, since there are only seven of us. Whatever Pat and Danielle decide is fine with me, and I hope the rest of the class will be as flexible.

**Wednesday:**

Danielle went ahead and cut all of Scene 1, which cuts Marcellus, Bernardo, and Reynaldo. I think this was for the best, and will help to keep character confusion and mix ups down. As far as I can tell, no one is upset about this, since they know how many lines there are left to memorize.

Today we started blocking the very first scene, which is actually the “To be or not to be...” speech that’s been split up between the cast. Pat has us coming out of the audience at the start of the show, which I think looks amazing and also gives us functional chairs to use that are empty during the rest of the show. These chairs will be used throughout the show, and sometimes moved to be used by actors in the round, and then put back into the audience. I’m really glad we have these because there are scenes in the show that call for chairs or a bed, and now we will be able to sit without blocking the view of audience members.

After blocking we set a rehearsal schedule for next week with our first meeting being Wednesday evening at 4:30 PM. This will be our first out of class rehearsal, meaning our official rehearsal process is about to start!

**Week 8: October 15th – 19th****Monday:**

No physical class this Monday due to Fall Break, but I still worked on lines for much of the weekend and into the week. The class has our first essay on something we’ve learned about gender due this Wednesday, so I’ve worked on that as well.

My essay is on the autonomy of the women in this show. I'm noticing more and more, that the women of this show are victims of the world they live in. I notice it so much, since my own character is twisted into the demise of both women. It's hard to see myself as the "good guy" when I can plainly see all the pain I'm causing for other characters.

I'm not sure if this will change how I play Hamlet, but it's for sure something to keep in the back of my mind throughout the play.

### **Wednesday:**

Today in class we blocked through page 8, which is the first opening scene where we come from the audience, up until Hamlet's "Oh that this too too solid flesh..." soliloquy. I'm not feeling connected with the speech yet, but part of that comes with learning blocking, so I trust that now that I have it I can focus more on my delivery.

Although we were supposed to have rehearsal this evening, it was cancelled due to a mix up in the schedule. We all decided that our official rehearsals would start next week at some point and we could decide exact times during Monday's class.

### **Week 9: October 22nd – 26th**

#### **Monday:**

We worked hard today to finish blocking Act 1, so very there was very little discussion had in class. I feel like we are currently on track to finish blocking in plenty of time to allow for



full runs before tech week even starts. If we keep this up, I think our show will be nicely polished by the time show dates roll around.

We found out that the Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery cast will still be using our rehearsal space for another week, so we have had to push out of class rehearsals back one more week. This worries me a bit since there is still the majority of the blocking that needs to be set and worked through.

### **Wednesday:**

Today's class was very different from anything we've done so far. We had a guest from Actors for the London Stage named Grace lead a workshop with us. Her workshop was centered on connection, and truly connecting with people in the cast. I was skeptical at first, since it felt really silly. After I gave it a real chance though, I saw how beneficial a workshop like that was for a class as small as ours.

For our show to work, we are going to need to connect on a real level. Our space is too small for us to be able to hide any problems we're having as a cast, so connecting isn't optional if we want a believable story.

### **Week 10: October 29th – November 2nd**

#### **Monday:**

I wasn't in Monday's class due to my Geology Lab class, and missed afternoon rehearsal due to a family emergency. The class still met though, and I know they worked through

the parts in Act I where Hamlet is not on stage. They also finished what they could of Act I, and have the blocking ready for me for Wednesday when I come back to class.

### **Wednesday:**

Today in class we celebrated Madelyn's birthday before jumping into blocking. We also decided to cancel rehearsal so everyone could enjoy Halloween, which made everyone much more focused in class. Also learned today that Cara Harker will be coming next week or the week after to help us choreograph the "Mad Scene" as well as the final fight between Hamlet and Laertes. I'm stoked for her to come and help us, I think she will show us how to be more fluid in our movements while still portraying the anger and aggressiveness needed for the fight.

When we got past announcements and a little bit of discussion, the class went over the blocking I missed for Act I. I made sure to write it all down, and honestly, I feel fine with the blocking and am really connecting with using the black pole in CCB 205. Now that we know how the seats will be set up for the audience, I feel safe with using the pole more often so it does not go to waste. There's not going to be any kind of set, so using what we have is important.

They also told me that I am no longer going to have to voice the ghost, Madison as Claudius is going to handle that for me over the "God Mic" in CCB 205. We also aren't going to have her stand out there with me, but the Ghost will be made using lighting effects instead.

I will admit though, that today was not easy for me. My mind was everywhere else but in rehearsal, and most people in the cast could tell. After a small breakdown, I did open up to the cast about some things going on in my private life, and I feel like it really connected us as a group. I feel much closer to everyone now that they understand a little bit about my life and my experiences, and I think this might be what I needed to begin a connection with the cast. I hate it

couldn't have happened in a less stressful way, but I do feel a lot of support from everyone involved with this project, which can only help the show.

## **Week 11: November 5th – 9th**

### **Monday:**

Today is the day everything was supposed to be blocked and finished, unfortunately, we are running behind. We have scheduled rehearsals for almost every day this week, so hopefully, we will be finished no later than Friday. I am struggling with lines right now, and without them being memorized, it is becoming more difficult to add the emotion needed. I think one of my major issues is that I am struggling to remember lines while learning brand new blocking. Once we get everything blocked, I will start worrying a little more about my lines. Right now I'm worried about finding this character for myself since I still am unsure of how to feel in some of the newer scenes.

My biggest worry right now is the "Closet Scene" with Gertrude. I want to be menacing without putting an overtly sexual feeling into the air. Pat thinks this is exactly how it is supposed to be played, but with all women, it feels a little more sexual than I think is comfortable. We are starting to work on official blocking for this scene Tuesday evening at rehearsal, so I will hopefully be off book for this scene by the end of the week.

In rehearsal today we worked on blocking through for Hamlet's debut "Madness Scene" with Polonius, as well as the "Player Scene." I am uncomfortable right now with Hamlet's madness, and I'm not sure if I want the audience to go along with my fake madness, or if I want them to question Hamlet's sanity this early. I'm leaning towards letting them in on my

side, but by the end of the show, I want the audience to question what finally broke the camel's back of my sanity. I have been working on memorization for the scene with Polonius, and am completely off-book up until this scene, which is a sigh of relief.

I feel less great about the scene introducing the Players. The blocking is currently a bit of a mess, and it feels kind of randomly placed into the show when you're watching it. I understand the necessity of the players to advance the plot, but with such a fast moving story it almost feels like wasted time within our show.

To finish up rehearsal we set down plans for the costumes in our show. We agreed that I need a black or grey sweater with black pants and boots. I am going to look for a sweater this week that will work, and I am borrowing Shelby's black combat boots for show week.

### **Tuesday:**

No one else in the cast was able to come to rehearsal tonight, so Pat and I used it as a time to discuss our feelings and where we stand with the play. I am feeling much better about my Hamlet character choices after our talk, and I really liked to hear what Pat thinks so far of the show. He's much less worried about memorization than I am, which makes me feel better about where I am within the script. I feel comfortable through the player scene, and I am almost word perfect for Hamlet's "Oh what a rogue and peasant slave I am..." soliloquy.

### **Wednesday:**

Today in class we blocked the “Nunnery Scene” with Ophelia. Pat thought it was going to be difficult to block since there’s so much emotion involved in this pivotal scene, but we went with our instincts and almost had it perfect after our second run through.

The blocking of this scene is very simple since the emotions are what need to shine. I am using the pole in CCB 205 again, which I am so excited for. I love that we are using that space instead of allowing it to go to waste. I also think there’s something powerful about falling to the ground when emotion hits you, and the pole in the room allows this to happen naturally.

This may end up as my favorite scene, mostly because it allows me to show an emotional part of Hamlet that I can easily understand and relate to. Everyone who has loved fully has felt betrayal, and that’s exactly how I am looking at this scene. I need to feel the betrayal of Ophelia’s lie to fully portray just how much it hurts Hamlet. Hamlet is only pushing Ophelia away to protect her, he knows he’s on a road he can’t get off of, and so he needs to free her before things turn sour. The betrayal comes when she allows her father to spy on their intimate and secret moment. He’s laying his heart out there, breaking up with her even though that’s not what his heart wants, and she betrayed him before she even knew what the meeting was about.

In rehearsal tonight we worked through the “Play within a Play Scene”, as well as the “Closet Scene,” between myself and Gertrude. The play within a play scene seems easy enough, and Danielle and Pat even let me cut some of the long monologue at the beginning of this scene. The monologue was making the scene drag, and since I still have quite a bit to work on, I’m very happy with the cut. Even though the blocking for this scene is simple, we still have some people in the cast struggling with blocking, unfortunately.

**Thursday:**

Pat wasn't able to make it to rehearsal, so we used the time to talk about what is needed for the fight between Hamlet and Laertes. Cara is coming to choreograph but we have all decided we'd like something physical to hold to make it a little more serious and believable. Madison suggested we use wooden rods that we can paint black to match the look of the show. I think this is a great idea and might add another gender-bending element to the show if we can actually fight with the sticks and it look real.

Before we left we walked through where everyone would be standing at the start of the scene, just so we can be prepared for when Cara comes, and so no time is wasted.

**Week 12: November 12th – 16th****Monday-Wednesday:**

I have been sick and out of commission for the start of this week. I went to the doctor and she seems to think it's just a respiratory infection, but I still missed the last two days of class and one after-school rehearsal. So far I've used the time in bed to work on lines and I am fully memorized through Act I and well into Act II. I feel really good about the first two long soliloquies, memorization wise. I am still trying to nail down the emotion in Hamlet's first scene.

I want to portray the emotion I'm supposed to be feeling, but I don't want to come off as too feminine. It's such a fine line, and I haven't found the middle ground just yet. Pat has suggested David Tennant's Hamlet for the first monologue, so I am planning on watching the full version of his Hamlet before I go back to rehearsal.

I am very upset that I've missed the choreography session with Cara. The class posted the video online for me so I could see what we have worked out for the fight, but it is so difficult to follow without someone here in person to help me, so I guess I will wait until tomorrow to work with everyone. One thing I'm a little confused about is that we cut the black rods for the fight choreography. I hate that those were bought and painted only to be discarded, but since I was not there I have no idea if they looked good or if they just made us look silly.

#### **Thursday:**

I went to rehearsal even though I am feeling worse today than I have the past three days. We didn't have CCB 205 as our rehearsal space, so we met in Burleson Hall in a classroom, courtesy of Danielle. Only Lucy, Aimee, and I were able to be there so we worked on the fight choreography until I felt comfortable enough to remember it so I could practice at home. We also decided not to have rehearsal tomorrow (Friday,) to give everyone a little break before hitting it hard next week.

#### **Friday:**

Went to the doctor again today, and have been diagnosed with the flu. Luckily I only came into contact with a few people from class yesterday, so hopefully, no one else will get sick. I'm taking this weekend to finish up my memorization and the problem spots I'm struggling with. As of now, I am fully off book except for the last Act, which technically has not been fully blocked yet or even ran through.

## **Week 13: November 19th – 23rd**

### **Monday:**

In rehearsal, we introduced costumes into the mix today. Today was my first time wearing every piece of my costume with my hair braided like I am wearing it for the first half of the show. I think our costumes really set everyone apart, which is important since there's so many characters but only seven of us.

Once we were all in costume, we worked through the last Act of the play, which Hamlet is surprisingly not in as much as you'd think. The class has been working on these scenes on the Mondays I'm not with them in class, so today was my first time seeing many of the scenes. One I can't get out of my mind is Shelby's Ophelia during her "Mad Scene." It hurt me to watch like I had personally caused her pain and killed her father. I know this is the end goal, to be connected with the characters, but I wasn't expecting it to bother me as much as it does.

Once I got over my shock of Ophelia's scene, we finally blocked and then ran through the last gravedigger scene I am part of. It seems pretty straight forward, but I am still getting tongue tied and doubting my memorization. I know now that it is blocked, it will be easier to run through at home, which is the plan. I am going to use this break from class and rehearsal to finish my memorization, and make sure I am perfect by show week, which is actually next week!

### **Tuesday:**

In rehearsal tonight we finally finished the blocking for the last scene! I really needed this blocked, because I have been struggling with my death and the believability of it. You can still



tell I am iffy on my last few lines, but now that we've finally blocked everything after the actual fight I feel like I can rock it.

After we finished blocking, we moved on and ran through the first half of the play. Something clicked in me tonight that said: "You experience pain and hurt through tears, why can't your Hamlet experience it that way too?" It totally changed the way I see my first speech, and subsequently the way I perform in that moment. Tonight when I cried out to God as Hamlet, I asked him in Hamlet's words why he let this pain be given to me. I cried for my father's death, and my mother's betrayal, before letting the anger rise to the surface, and I think this finally made me give a believable performance as Hamlet.

I let my emotion take control of me in the "Nunnery Scene," and I shed a tear for Ophelia before I confronted her about her lie. This has changed the entire show for me and made Hamlet someone I can truthfully portray. I'm no longer putting this masculine vibe over the pain I feel as Hamlet, and that's freed this character to become who I need him to be.

Now that I've had a breakthrough with the first half of the show, I feel great about it, but maybe not so great about the second half of the show. I think most of the cast feels the same way since we just now finished the blocking for the last scene, it's hard to feel comfortable with it yet. I need more time to connect to the rage in Hamlet before I think I can play it as believable and real. I wish I had more time this week, but since it's Thanksgiving, we are out of time to polish.

The cast as a whole mostly has their lines down, some have been using the script this week, myself included when we get to the very last scene. We are to the point now where if lines aren't absolutely necessary, and you're struggling, Danielle has allowed us to cut them. This is helping a lot of people out to feel comfortable with their dialogue, instead of stressing for lines to

be word perfect. Even with this help we still have a few people in the cast truly struggling to remember lines, some for reasons that aren't their fault, like illness.

My hope is that we can push through next week with a great show, but I am still nervous I won't be able to pull this off.

### **Week 14: November 26th – 30th**

#### **Monday:**

Show week is finally here, and I'd be more excited, but I don't think we are even close to ready for an audience. Another big problem is that Hannah is now very ill, and was not able to make it to rehearsal tonight, which was mandatory. No one blames her, we all understand her illness, but it still worries everyone. Before we started working tonight we talked about what we would do if Hannah were too sick to perform. There's not a lot of great options, but the one we chose was to cut Horatio out of the story completely and have Shelby pick up Hannah's Player King lines. I'm glad we have a plan in case she can't be with us this week, but I would really like for her to get to perform with us. We've all worked hard this semester, and should be allowed to perform and enjoy the spotlight for a few nights together as a group.

After our discussion, everyone changed into costume, and we moved on and speed read through our lines until the lights were ready to go. When they were finished, we ran through a cue to cue with lighting and sound. This was our first night working with lights while we were acting and I think it really adds to our show. It's still a little nerve-wracking that our show opens in two days, but I think we are all doing our best to make this work.

After the cue to cue, we finished rehearsal with the last scene to refresh everyone on the choreography. I'm finally feeling comfortable with the choreography and am having a little bit of fun on stage dueling in the round. I am loving working in the round so much more than I ever imagined I would, and I feel like I've learned so much more this way. To always be aware of where my back is, and who I am facing, and learning to let go of the "cheat out," mantra all actors sing in their head, have been lessons I've had to learn this semester.

We had a very productive rehearsal, which was great since before we left we learned that the Theatre Department Faculty would be attending our run through Tuesday night. I still don't think we're ready to have an audience but there's nothing left for me to do except work on my last scene and hope for the best.

### **Tuesday:**

Tonight was the faculty show, which went as well as we could have hoped for. Hannah made it to rehearsal tonight, even though she wasn't feeling very good. We are all really proud of her for pushing through her pain even though we can all tell she's still unwell.

Quickly before we started the show for faculty, we ran the last scene and finally added the beautiful music that accompanies our deaths. I LOVE how Madison has designed the music and lights for this part of the show and was so surprised by how dramatic and epic our deaths feel when lit correctly.

We did have a few small lighting mess-ups, but I myself didn't notice any large mistakes from any of the actors while I was onstage. Even though we made it through the play with no

skips or errors, the class as a whole wasn't happy with the performance. Pat seemed proud, and I felt happy with the performance I gave, which was all I could control. But I understand the want and the need for this show to be the best it can be, which is what some people were upset about tonight.

After the run through, we didn't have enough time for another run, since we had a few lighting errors throughout the show that no one could have helped. While those were getting fixed, we talked about how we'd like to do the curtain call as well as the talkback we are having after every show. Many of us agreed that it would be nice to come out in pairs, with Hamlet being the only character to bow alone. I was all for this idea since it set me apart, and gave me the attention and recognition I craved. Unfortunately, we had two people in the cast not agree to this, so when Pat came out of the back room, there was a bit of a disagreement between him and the two women. It was a bit uncomfortable since it seemed like we'd never come to an agreement on the curtain call, but we finally did and it all worked out.

Another night down, only one class rehearsal stands between now and opening night, and I now feel slightly more ready for it.

### **Wednesday:**

In class today we ran through the whole without lights or sound. This was our last run through and last time we were able to polish before the show opened. Everything went great with the run, and I think this last run through has taken a lot of pressure off the cast since many of us didn't think we'd ever get to this point.

## **Show #1**

Tonight was officially opening night! I was so nervous but so excited at the same time. Tonight was our first night officially staggering our entrances to the audience before the show starts. I really like this entrance method, since it allows us to enter in a subtle way, while still sitting in the house.

The run as a whole went well, with very few mess ups from me. I myself only felt a little awkward tension maybe once during all my time onstage, so that's a win in my book. My emotions are definitely high right now, which I think is only helping me in the first scene. It is so easy to cry and be upset at the right moment since I'm nervous enough to cry constantly.

As for after the show, that's where our issues began. Running around to make it to the talkback, Hannah fell and had an accident in the hallway. She fell so hard on her knee she couldn't even be sat up in a chair. We stayed with her until she was comfortable and then were told paramedics were on their way and we should all join the talkback. I was so worried for Hannah I don't remember much of the talkback, other than it was very short, (since we had missed most of it helping Hannah.)

All in all, the show tonight was a success with a few accidents thrown in. We have no news from Hannah yet other than no bones are broken, which is one good thing at least.

## **Show 2:**

To start this journal entry, Hannah is doing much better than last night. No bones are broken, and even though she badly bruised her knee and the surrounding area, she is going to

push through and perform tonight. She is seriously a trooper and the type of cast member that makes theatre so rewarding.

Now on to the actual show: what can I say other than how did things go so terribly? From the first step through the door, I could tell energy was off, it was like everyone was upset which translated to snippy conversations between us all. Everyone was nervous, and Hannah's accident definitely weighed on everyone since we could all see how much her knee was hurting her.

Maybe it was my nervous energy but everything but my first monologue felt off tonight. Because of this, I had some serious line mistakes. My mess-ups started in the "Nunnery" scene, where I skipped a full paragraph of dialogue. This threw me off for the rest of the show, which is well over 20 minutes from this point in the play.

Our next accident came in the fight and death scene at the end. I'm not sure who missed lines, but many lines were skipped at the top of the scene as well as the end. It was like everyone could feel nervous energy tonight, and it came out in the worst places possible. We had quite a few issues towards the end of the show, but one thing we did do right tonight was our blocking. From what I saw there were no blocking mistakes tonight, just line replacements and leaving lines out entirely.

All in all, a subpar performance from myself. The cast pushed through, but I think everyone would agree tonight wasn't our best performance. I believe some of the nerves tonight may have been caused by the much larger audience than we are used to, but with tomorrow being Friday, and our last show, I hope this show anxiety doesn't carry over into tomorrow.

### **Show 3:**

Let me just say, I started this day so excited to be playing Hamlet tonight. Closing night has come and went and it is so bittersweet. This has been the most draining but rewarding experience I've had in the Theatre Department here at ETSU. I have learned so much through this character and my time with him, I'm not sure I'm ready to be finished with this show. At the same time, I know I am only saying these things because the show is over. This has been such a stressful and taxing time for me, I know I need to rest a bit now that we've finally finished our performances.

Anyway, back to our LAST performance as Danes. Last night's energy was nothing like what I walked into earlier today. The cast's energy today was so high, happy and excited. We were all jumping for joy that our show had made it this far, and we were actually closing this show that had felt so scary and impossible at first. Tonight everyone brought cast gifts, which all just brought us together and made me feel grateful for my time with this cast.

I know this happy and grateful energy carried over into our show, I could see it in everyone's faces while we sat in the audience waiting for our cue to begin the show. The first half of the play is still a blur to me, even now two hours later. It went so well and felt so normal and routine, no mistakes from anyone that I saw. The "Nunnery" scene and even the "Closet" scene went so well, I left the stage feeling even more excited for our final bows. The end of the show finally came bringing a smooth fight between Laertes and I, then a tearful death as Hamlet.

Tonight as Hamlet, I felt a tear fall down my cheek as I laid dead on the floor. This experience has been tough, but there was nothing harder than laying to rest my Hamlet one last time tonight.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this experience was to explore gender stereotypes, as well as our attachment as a society to what we believe to be gender appropriate. This show and the rehearsal process completely changed the way I view gender, which allowed me to portray a genderless Hamlet.

The goal for our show was to put on Shakespeare's Hamlet, with an all-female cast. This would only work if we the cast could allow ourselves to see past the gendered roles, and allow our own gender to fade away a bit so we could fully play these characters. We had to give up the idea of what women and men are supposed to act like, and how they're supposed to show emotion. Our show would only be believable if we as a group gave up the gendered expression, and took on a more non-gendered form of performance.

Unfortunately, genderless performance is much more difficult than just accepting the differences in gender, and then taking them out of one's performance. It was difficult to even pinpoint when gender and stereotypes were coming into play, which made them impossible to fully eradicate in rehearsals. Even two weeks before the show opened, we as a cast were struggling to allow ourselves to play our characters truthfully.

I struggled to show emotion, without seeming too feminine. I knew Hamlet was facing deep emotions that should be shown coming to the surface every once in a while, but I struggled to show true believable emotions. I was playing Hamlet was a "macho tough man," without even realizing it, simply because I wasn't allowing myself to show emotion in an honest way.

It wasn't until I watched David Tennant's Hamlet, that I saw a man who was playing another man crying for the death of his father. I saw someone showing emotions in the way that I myself, show them. This was the click I needed to allow myself to cry as Hamlet and to fully



show emotions in a believable way. It allowed me to let go of the stereotype that men don't cry because they do cry, and I already knew this, but I hadn't allowed myself to break the stereotype.

At last, after months of work, I allowed gender to leave my mind, and to think solely on what Hamlet was feeling in the moment. How would I react if my father died? How have I reacted in the past when love betrayed me? I played his emotions as my own, with little thought to how men are "supposed" to show emotion.

It was only because of this that I was successful in playing Hamlet, and even still the actor in me questions if I could have done more with more time. It took months before I let myself think in a non-gendered way about Hamlet, and I have still just scratched the surface. What could our classroom of eight women and one man have discovered about gender had we only more time to explore?