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Performing Duchess of Berwick in Lady Windermere's Fan

Jessica Lane

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PERFORMING DUCHESS OF BERWICK IN LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

An honors paper submitted to the Department of Theatre and Dance
of the University of Mary Washington
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

Jessica Lane

April 2016

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Jessica Lane
(digital signature)

05/31/16


Performing Duchess of Berwick in Lady Windermere's Fan

submitted to the Department of Theatre & Dance
in fulfillment of THEA 482: Senior Project

<http://jesslane.umwblogs.org/>

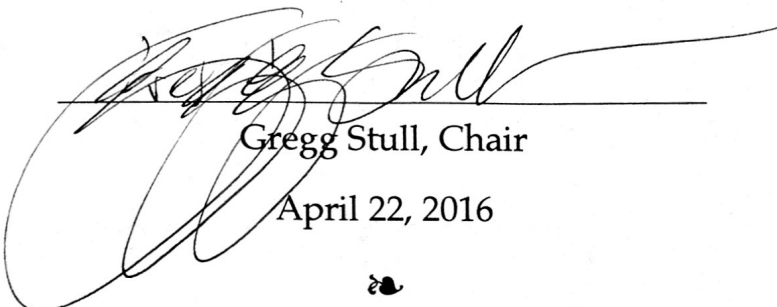


Jessica Lane



Cate Brewer, Project Advisor

AWARDED HONORS IN THEATRE, 2016



Gregg Stull, Chair
April 22, 2016



UNIVERSITY OF
MARY WASHINGTON

Department of
Theatre and Dance



The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

[Basic Character Research »](#)

The Dear Duchess

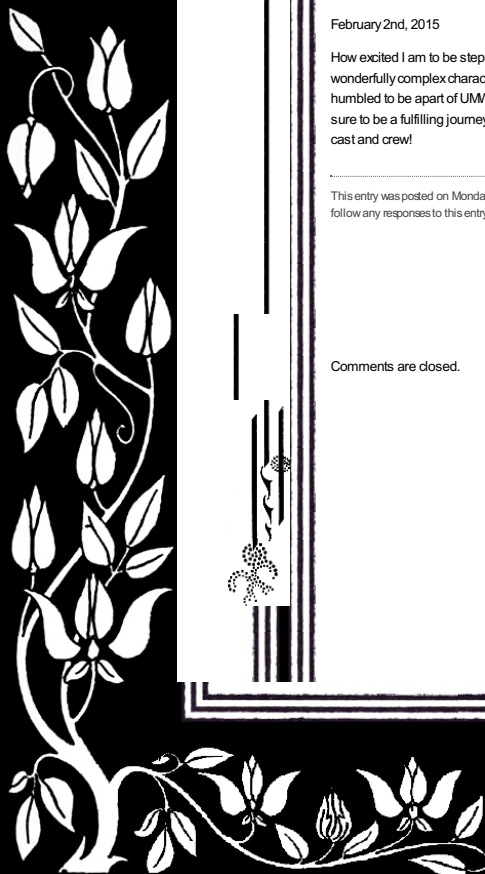
February 2nd, 2015

How excited I am to be stepping into the shoes of the Duchess of Berwick. I find her to be a wonderfully complex character living in a hilariously truthful piece of theatre. I cannot be more humbled to be apart of UMW's production of Lady Windermere's Fan by Oscar Wilde. This is sure to be a fulfilling journey, and I am looking forward to starting rehearsals with this amazing cast and crew!

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« [The Dear Duchess](#)

[What's in a Name?](#) »

Basic Character Research

February 7th, 2015

Given Circumstances: It is 1892, the Duchess is in London for Lady Wndermere's ball. The Duchess of Berwick is the wife of the Duke of Berwick, they have a son and daughter together. Their daughter's name is Agatha.

Research:

Google Dictionary states that the definition of a Duchess is "the wife or widow of a Duke." The definition of a Duke is "a male holding the highest hereditary title in the British peerages." Therefore my character is the wife of the man holding the highest hereditary title in Berwick, meaning they are very high class and are most likely rather wealthy. According to Wikipedia "Berwick is a village in the Wealden district of East Sussex, in England close to the border of Scotland... Berwick is first mentioned in the *Domesday Book* of 1086, where it appears as Berevice, a name meaning 'com farm.'" Being the Duke and Duchess of this village would mean that my character and her husband are well known and highly respected in the village of Berwick as well as in neighboring cities. I believe having a noble title gives the Duchess a grand opinion of herself. This causes her to constantly be on guard of her behavior, and the behavior of her family members, for fear of scandal ruining her reputation. The Duchess knows that if she were to get caught in a scandal and lose her husband then she would lose her title, her money, and the entire lavish life she has grown accustomed to. The Duchess does not mind remarking on the scandals of others in her social circles, but she herself would never want to be the topic of rumor or disgrace. This is why the Duchess disapproves of the actions of her brother Augustus and calls him "disreputable" and "a trial to us all." It is known that Augustus has been divorced a number of times and in high society divorce was considered scandalous. She does not want the actions of her brother to reflect negatively on her.

Sources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duke_of_Berwick

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berwick,_East_Sussex

<https://www.google.com/#q=duke+definition>

This entry was posted on Saturday, February 7th, 2015 at 9:32 pm and is filed under [Character Analysis Research](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0 feed](#). Both comments and pings are currently closed.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« [Basic Character Research](#)

[Rehearsal Feb. 9th 2015](#) »

What's in a Name?

February 8th, 2015

Upon closer inspection of the text I have discovered what I believe to be the Duchess' first name. In Act 1 when the Duchess is about to leave Lady Wndermere's house she says "And now, my dear child, I must go, as we are dining out." Then in Act 2 her brother Lord Augustus says "The women are very down on her. I have been dining with Arabella this evening. By Jove! You should have heard what she said about Mrs. Erlynne. She didn't leave a rag on her... Berwick and I told her that didn't matter much, as the lady in question must have an extremely fine figure. You should have seen Arabella's expression!" Later on the Duchess says "Augustus has been dining with us tonight. I really have had quite enough of dear Augustus for the moment." The quote of Augustus' following by the line from the Duchess later confirms that the Duchess' first name is Arabella. Also when Augustus says he was dining with Arabella he mentions Berwick being there, further proof Arabella must be the Duchess of Berwick. It also fits in with the other "A" names in the family, there is her brother Augustus and her daughter Agatha. It makes sense that she is Arabella. Augustus' line is also interesting because it shows that the Duchess continued speaking about Mrs. Erlynne after she left Lady Wndermere's house. This means she is very concerned about Mrs. Erlynne and the impact her actions are going to have on their high society. I think most of all Arabella is afraid of her own husband becoming infatuated with Mrs. Erlynne like her brother and many of the other men have. It probably makes the Duchess more worried that her husband is at risk when she hear's Lord Wndermere is seeing Mrs. Erlynne because all the woman think of Wndermere as a model husband. The thought of someone genuine falling for the charms of Mrs. Erlynne makes the Duchess doubt that her own husband could resist this woman if they were to meet. Of course the Duke being involved with other woman would be quite scandalous. A scandal would cause the Duchess' reputation in society to be tarnished, and the Duchess' standing in society is essential to her keeping a suitable life for herself.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« What's in a Name? »

Rehearsals Feb. 10th-21st »

Rehearsal Feb. 9th 2015

February 10th, 2015

I found tonight's rehearsal helpful to my progress with this character in so many ways. First we worked on the RP dialect with Helen. It was really nice getting to review the same techniques we used in her Stage Dialects course. I especially find the call and response method Helen uses to be very helpful to me. It was also great getting to ask her about specific words in the script that I was unsure of. Overall the dialects work was really fun and helpful.

After we were done with dialect work we moved onto table work. The whole cast and Cate sat in a circle and talked about characters, themes, relationships, and just the play overall. I found the conversation we had to be very informative and interesting. We spoke a great deal about this world of status and the facades people create to gain and maintain high status in this society. This is a large theme in this play and one that I think particularly resonates with the Duchess.

My character is a prime example of a person who feels the need to put up a veneer in order to maintain her reputation. For instance the Duchess says "I assure my dear, that on several occasions after I was first married I had to pretend to be very ill, and was obliged to drink the most unpleasant mineral waters, merely to get Berwick out of town. He was so extremely susceptible." This is a good example of a facade being put up in order to avoid a scandal. Rather than confront her husband and make a messy scene, the Duchess would rather tell a lie and get him out of town. This is simply because making a scene and fighting with her husband would not be considered socially acceptable, however there is no reason for anyone to gossip about them going out of town.

During table work we also spoke about the separate realms between men and women that exist in this society. In London in the late 1800's there were very different standards between men and women. It was thought in this culture that men were meant to work and create financial stability for their families and that women were meant to take care of the home and the children. This ideal of Victorian society is seen throughout Lady Windermere's Fan. I think this intense separation between the men and women is partially why the Duchess is so controlling over her daughter Agatha. The Duchess finds herself unable to control any man in her life. She finds her husband, son, and brother all to be reckless and immoral but she can't do anything about their behavior. Agatha however being the daughter is under the control of her mother. Since Agatha is the only thing in her life she can control she takes advantage of that. As a result she is a rather strict and over bearing mother.

I also found the table work with the whole cast to be really helpful because I was able to talk with others about their characters and determine details about our relationships. I especially found this helpful with Evan because he plays my brother Lord Augustus. We were able to determine that I am the older sibling, that I would be in my early 50's and he would be in his late 40's. I also talked with Emily about how close of friends Lady Windermere and the Duchess are. We came to the conclusion that both of our characters probably spend time with each other out of social necessity. It is proper to spend time with other ladies who are higher class. I know Lady Windermere is not a scandalous woman so if I must spend time with anyone it is probably better that I spend it with someone like her.

I really enjoyed tonight's rehearsal. I had a lot of fun talking and laughing with everyone, it was a great way to bond as a cast. I also felt my character grow so much just out of the conversation

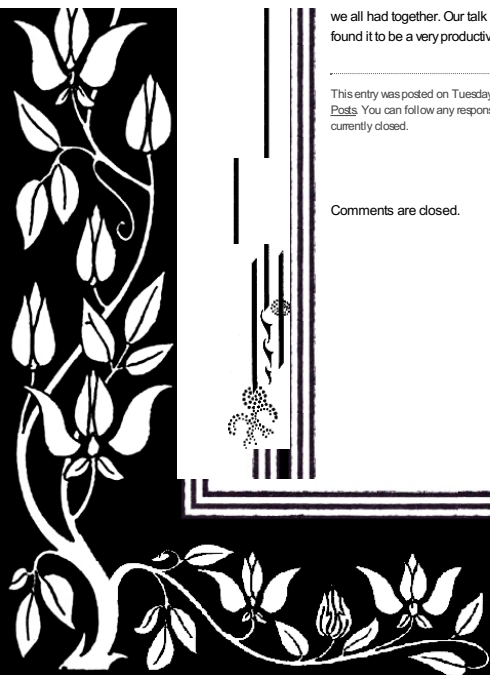


we all had together. Our talk really heightened my understanding of the entire play overall. I found it to be a very productive rehearsal.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« Rehearsal Feb. 9th 2015

Purpose »

Rehearsals Feb 18th- 21st

February 21st, 2015

In rehearsals this week we have been blocking out the show. It has been really fun working through this show. The dialogue is very witty and I find myself discovering new jokes in the text everyday. The more we work the show the more I figure out about the Duchess. I have developed a basic physicality for her. She is very upright in her posture, she uses her hands to express as she talks sometimes but not in a way that is boisterous or improper. Being a Duchess she would always adhere to the rules for good etiquette.

I have also had the chance to develop the relationship between Agatha and the Duchess more. I believe that the Duchess truly wants the best life possible for her daughter, but she does not trust Agatha to handle anything herself. Therefore the Duchess can be very controlling and overbearing of her daughter. Agatha probably does not appreciate how much her mother noses into her life, but the Duchess will always do what she thinks is best for her. That is why the Duchess wants Agatha to get married to Mr. Hopper so badly because his wealth can insure Agatha a good life. This can be seen in the line I say to Lady Windemere "I think a mother who doesn't part with a daughter every season has no real affection." The Duchess' recognizes that the only way for a woman to have a good life in this society is for her to marry a man who can provide for her. That is why I think one of the Duchess' main objectives in this play is to get Agatha married to Mr. Hopper. Of course the Duchess is overjoyed when he proposes to Agatha but she does not approve of Mr. Hopper wanting to take Agatha to Australia because she does not approve of their society. In this time Australia was not as established as England so the Duchess does not believe it to be a suitable place for her daughter to live.

I have been thoroughly enjoying working with this character so far. She is very expressive and funny and I think it is a character that I have the opportunity to have a lot of fun with.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« Rehearsals Feb 18th-21st

Contradictions »

Purpose

March 5th, 2015

I have always been taught in my theatre classes that everything the playwright does is purposeful. We are to trust that every character and every action has a purpose in moving the plot forward. So when analyzing a play and a character I try to figure out what that purpose is. I believe the Duchess has many functions within *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Most importantly she acts as the messenger. It is her monologue to Lady Windermere in Act I that reveals Lord Windermere's secret meetings with Mrs. Erynne, which then instigates the main conflict of the play. The Duchess also exists to show how one acts when they support the norms of this upper-class society. She serves as an example of the extreme elitist; this helps in contrasting the actions of Mrs. Erynne and showing why she is not immediately accepted into their society. The Duchess also serves the basic purpose of comedic relief. The way she is so controlling over Agatha can be very funny, and her overly pretentious demeanor provides a lot of comedic opportunity within the text. I'm finding that this character has a lot of layers I can work with. I'm really enjoying figuring her out.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« Purpose

Rehearsal March 14th »

Contradictions

March 13th, 2015

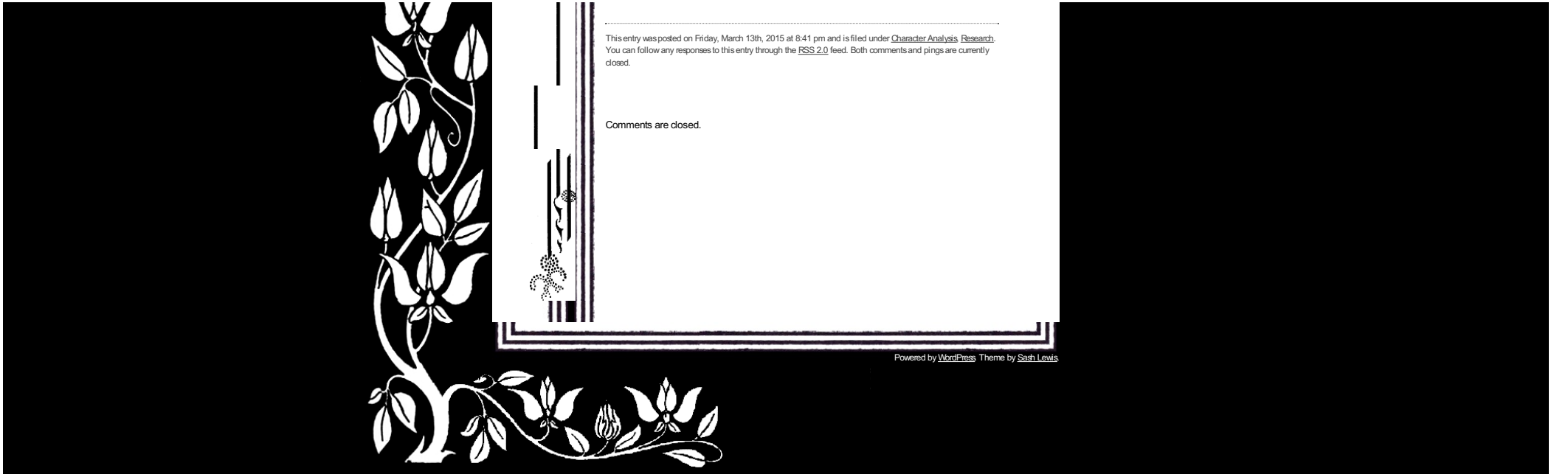
Throughout the Duchess' dialogue there are a hand full of examples of her contradicting herself. She often says one thing and then later in the text will say the exact opposite. For example in act 1 she is talking to Lady Windermere about her nieces the Saville girls. She says "such nice domestic creatures...they tell me Windermere goes [to Mrs. Erylne's] four and five times a week- they see him. They can't help it- and although they never talk scandal, they- well, of course- they remark on it to everyone." Then in act 2 at the ball the Duchess tells Lady Windermere about Mrs. Erylne "Can't imagine why people speak against her. It's those horrid nieces of mine- the Saville girls- they're always talking scandal." Another example of the Duchess contradicting herself is at the ball when she tells Agatha "You must pass the last two dances on the terrace with Mr. Hopper." Later in this scene the Duchess talks to Mr. Hopper and says "Mr. Hopper I am very angry with you. You have taken Agatha onto the terrace and she is so delicate." Also when talking to Mr. Hopper the Duchess says "Agatha and I are so interested in Australia. It must be so pretty with all the dear little kangaroos flying about." However later on after learning that Mr. Hopper wants to take Agatha to Australia with him, the Duchess says "Oh, don't mention that dreadful, vulgar place...I think on the whole Grosvenor Square would be a more healthy place to reside in. There are lots of vulgar people who live in Grosvenor Square, but at any rate there are no horrid kangaroos crawling about." I think that this habit tells us a lot about the Duchess. I believe the Duchess tends to be hypocritical because she tries to say what she needs to in order to get what she wants, but she has to be careful not to cross the line of being improper. A lot of what the Duchess says is simply tactics of manipulation, therefore if a situation changes then the Duchess' opinion on that situation will change depending on her objectives. The Duchess must always be careful of what she says out loud because it can effect her reputation, this is the major reason she contradicts herself so much.

The aristocracy in 18th century England was very exclusive and being part of the upper class meant having social obligations with other members of the upper class. Research shows that "British society was stratified in the 18th century, with a tiny aristocracy and landed gentry at the top and a vast mass of poor at the bottom. For the aristocracy, the 18th century was its greatest age. British lords who controlled large estates saw their wealth increase from a boom in agricultural production, an expansion of investment opportunities, and the domination of the government by the aristocracy. They built vast palaces and developed new areas of London, Edinburgh, and Dublin. The monarchy almost exclusively appointed aristocrats to the most important political offices" (Countries Quest). This quote shows that being part of the aristocracy meant having a great deal of power in the community. Having that power meant that you were essentially famous among your peers, that you were wealthy, and that you had the best living conditions/medical care. With all of the perks that come along with having the title of Duchess it is clear why Arabella would want to work so hard to maintain her status. Having that position also means her children having better opportunities for a wealthy life. It may seem like the Duchess just can't make up her mind, but upon closer inspection of the circumstances it can be seen that she is just saying whatever she has to in order to maintain her status and to ensure her children a good life.

Sources:

http://www.countriesquest.com/europe/united_kingdom/history/18th-century_britain/18th-century_british_society.htm





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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« Contradictions

Challenges of being the Duchess »

Rehearsal March 14th

March 16th, 2015

On Saturday's rehearsal we did two full run through's of the show. I found this extremely helpful as it was the first time I saw the entire show from beginning to end. It helped in giving me a more complete picture of the message we're trying to get across. I think this play has so much to say about the human condition. Wilde shows us that human's have both good and bad inside of us, and that no matter which side you act on others will always judge those actions. The best we can do in life is to be ourselves and to do as we see fit, because those who let other people dictate their actions will never be truly happy. Hearing Lady Wndermere's monologue in the last act about how the world cannot be split into good and evil really helped solidify the theme in my mind. I think this theme is reflected in my character in the way that she is so harsh to her daughter Agatha, she acts like that only because she thinks she knows what is best for her. Although the Duchess loves her daughter, she does not trust that Agatha is smart enough to navigate the world of high society. Therefore she is overbearing and slightly abusive to her daughter. Some people might look at these qualities and write the Duchess off as a "B word," but there is so much more to it than that. Wilde shows us in this play that the negative and positive things in life go hand in hand. He tells us that no human can be completely good or evil. This is a fine line I will have to walk while portraying the Duchess. It is important that she be harsh to Agatha and Augustus because how she treats her family is such a revealing part of who she is. However I also cannot make her totally unlikable because then no one in the audience will want to watch her. I believe it will be very important to have a balance of both sides in order to portray the Duchess successfully.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« Rehearsal March 14th

Scott Houk »

Challenges of being the Duchess

March 23rd, 2015

In my opinion one of the greatest challenges that comes along with playing the Duchess of Berwick is trying not to play up the funny parts of her lines too much. Cate has told us before that things are much funnier to an audience when you aren't trying so hard to make them funny. This is a challenge for me with the Duchess because I find her dialogue so hilarious. Sometimes it is hard for me to say things in a way that is natural rather than purposefully trying to make people laugh with my line read. I think what helps me most when I'm working on this is trying to find real motivation for everything the Duchess says. Rather than looking at a line and just writing it off as a joke I try to figure out a legitimate reason the Duchess says what she does. I think this tactic has helped me so far in overcoming this character challenge.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« Challenges of being the Duchess

Rehearsal March 24th & 25th »

Scott Houk

March 26th, 2015

"We must try not to sink beneath our anguish, but battle on."

– J.K. Rowling (Albus Dumbledore) *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*

This is the first time I have experienced the death of a friend. I always enjoyed being around Scott. He was so much fun to work with, whether it be in class or in a performance, he always put in so much effort. He had immense talent, he was kind and funny and I feel blessed to have known him. This is a very strange thing to try and process, but during this difficult time after Scott's death I have found the quote above to be helpful to me. The couple times in my life when I lost close family members I found that I became very passive. I lost my drive to complete daily tasks in school and at work. That very quickly proved to be counter productive. It made me feel worse realizing that I was not living to my full potential. After finding out about Scott I find myself wanting to slow down. Wanting to take time off. However I know that is not a good way to deal with the situation. As J.K. Rowling says in the quote above, we cannot sink, we must battle on. I truly love being in *Lady Windermere's Fan* and I want to battle on and put my full effort into the production. There is still a life to be lived here; I must remember that even if I'm doing other things, at the same time I can always remember Scott.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« [Scott Houk](#)

[Character Objectives](#) »

Rehearsal March 24th & 25th

March 26th, 2015

These last two rehearsals we spent more time working on the relationship between the Duchess and Agatha. We have tried out different things with this relationship, such as her being defiant of the Duchess and Agatha just being bored all the time. But the past couple days we started playing with the idea of Agatha being absolutely terrified of her mother. Of all the different things we have tried I find Agatha being scared of me to be the best. It gave me a lot to play off of and it reinforced the idea of the Duchess being controlling and overbearing.

Last night we also had costume accessories for the first time. Jackie and I both got matching boas and purses, and I also got a walking stick. Juggling all of the accessories for the first time took some getting used to, but I found that they really heightened my investment in the character. The addition of the props made me feel more in character and gave me more to incorporate into my performance. This helped me to find new opportunities within the script that I hadn't before. For example the Duchess has the line "The most dreadful people seem to go everywhere." I had always delivered this line as simply an observation, but last night I got the instinct to deliver the line towards Lord Darlington as a judgmental comment. Cate and I both felt the change to the line actually worked better. I felt myself getting even more inside the mind of the Duchess in last night's rehearsal. This is a great character to work with because she has many layers; it is a great feeling when I discover one of those layers for the first time.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« Rehearsal March 24th & 25th

Rehearsal March 30th »

Character Objectives

March 29th, 2015

Throughout this process I have thought a lot about what the Duchess' objectives are. It is obvious from the way she pushes Agatha toward Mr. Hopper that she wants him to propose to her daughter. In this society marriage and reputation are all a woman really has. Therefore getting her daughter married off to the rich Mr. Hopper is very important to Duchess. Though she is stern with Agatha, she still cares for her daughter and wants to insure her a good life. The Duchess is working toward this goal for most of the time she is seen. Some might think that her main objective is to get her daughter engaged. However that can't be the case because the Duchess is not fully satisfied after she finds out that Mr. Hopper does indeed want to marry Agatha. At first the Duchess is ecstatic but as soon as Mr. Hopper mentions taking Agatha to live in Australia she is no longer happy. If her objective was just to get Agatha married then she wouldn't really care where they lived. Therefore I believe the Duchess' main objective is to gain control over the people in her life in order to insure a respectful reputation for herself. Once the Duchess finds out about Mr. Hopper's plans she immediately suggests that Mr. Hopper come to lunch and speak with the Duke remarking that the Duke will have much to say to him. Knowing that she can manipulate her husband the Duchess knows she can insist that he make Mr. Hopper stay in England. James wanting to marry Agatha, and being of a lower title than the Duke, will surely not refuse once the Duke insists that they stay. Arabella also constantly remarks on her brother's actions. She cannot do much to control anything that Augustus does so instead she avoids him and remarks negatively on his actions to show her disapproval of the fact that he does not live how she sees fit. I think that the Duchess attempting to give Lady Windermere advice about Mrs. Erynne is also a tactic toward her main objective. The Duchess remarks that the Windermere house is one of the few houses in London where she can take Agatha and where she feels safe bringing her husband. She wants to give Margaret advice about Lord Windermere and Mrs. Erynne because she knows Lady Windermere is considered a good woman and wants her to avoid a scandal. If the Windermere's have a scandal then the Duchess can no longer go that house and thus there will be even fewer respectable places left that she can take her family to. These examples from the play are what lead me to believe that the Duchess' main concern is micro-managing those around her. I think the Duchess is over bearing of others (Agatha in particular) because she believes it is the only way to guarantee that she can maintain a high class lifestyle and her reputation, which were both essential to having a satisfying life in this society.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« [Character Objectives](#)

[Vulnerability](#) »

Rehearsal March 30th

March 31st, 2015

In last night's rehearsal we ran through the show in Klein Theatre for the first time. It was great getting to see the set and to finally have a full image of this world. Everything is very grand and beautiful. I think it is a wonderful representation of the world Oscar Wilde created in his text.

However, it was an adjustment moving from the acting lab to the stage. Even though we have everything tapped out in the acting lab, it still felt totally different being on the stage and having the actual furniture to work with. I think being in the new setting threw everyone off a bit. The scenes seemed to drag and things just seemed wonky overall. I think being in the different space meant me having to adjust blocking as well as projecting more; being focused on those things caused me to be sloppier in other areas such as my physicality, accent and playing tactics/objectives.

I have been struggling to fix issues with my RP accent because I have gotten myself into a pattern with my line reads. This is something I have always struggled with as an actor. The way I memorize the lines is the way I want to say them on stage, even if I know it's incorrect, it is very hard for me to break the pattern. Helen said I was making the same vocal mistakes last night that I was in the previous rehearsal she watched. I thought I had smoothed out these mistakes, but I seemed to have forgotten all of that last night and reverted back to my original pattern. When I got home from rehearsal I went through my script and circled all of the vocal notes Helen gave me last week. I read over the script several times attempting to correct the words I had memorized incorrectly. I hope that if I keep doing this frequently that I will be able to break the speech pattern that I have created with my lines.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« Rehearsal March 30th

Physical Warm Up »

Vulnerability

April 3rd, 2015

The Duchess is a character that has a big personality. She is very strong minded in her opinions and confident in her personality. But every human has insecurities and things that make them feel vulnerable. Figuring out the Duchess' sensitive side is important to making her character more dynamic.

I believe the Duchess is the most vulnerable when it comes to her husband the Duke of Berwick. She mentions in the text that she often has pretended to be ill just to get Berwick out of town and away from other women. She comments that "he was so extremely susceptible" and that after they got married he was still "running after all kinds of petticoats, every color, every shape, every material." She goes on to say "In fact before the honeymoon was over I caught him winking at my maid." I think the fact that the Duke is quick to flirt with other women makes Arabella self-conscious. The Duke couldn't even make it through their honeymoon without flirting with another woman, and one of a much lower class. Her husband's behavior lowers her self-esteem because he shows affection towards others when he has Arabella right in front of him. Their relationship also causes the Duchess to have a pessimistic attitude toward marriage and men in general. She remarks that "all men are monsters, the only thing to do is to feed the wretches well," and "they never grow any better, men become old but they never become good." These opinions are derived from how her husband treats her. The Duchess acts as if all men are born as immoral creatures and that women can do nothing but put up with their behavior. Women could not work or make money for themselves at this time so marriage was the only way for them to live reasonably. Therefore women had no choice but to endure whatever men did to them. The Duchess is dependent on her husband so she would not dare confront him about his behavior. Instead she finds ways to manipulate him in order to get what she wants, such as pretending to be ill to get him away from other women. Since the Duchess has two grown children one can assume that she has been dealing with Berwick's wandering eye for most of her life. Spending that many years feeling that she is not enough for the man she married has caused her to give up on romantic ideals. She is rigid in her belief that all men are bad because that is all she has grown to know.

I believe her husband's flirting also gets to her because it causes her to constantly be paranoid. After the Duchess speaks with Mrs. Erynne at Lady Windermere's ball she says that Mrs. Erynne is "a most attractive woman, and has such sensible views on life. Told me she entirely disapproved of people marrying more than once," but then she goes on to say "Still I should go to Homburg, dear, I really should. She is just a little too attractive." I think the fact that she wants to leave town again is proof that, even though she believes Mrs. Erynne is a good woman, she still doesn't trust her husband around an attractive girl.

If a scandal were to occur between the Duke and the Duchess then it would be especially devastating. They are of higher titles so they are very well known by many people in England. A scandal would mean everyone in society talking negatively about them, and gossip would be printed about them in the local papers. The Duchess is fully aware of the consequences of a scandal. I believe this would cause Arabella to feel an immense pressure to be perfect all the time. Therefore she gets paranoid about her family losing their perfect image and works overtime to maintain their reputation. Dealing with this constant pressure over the years is why the Duchess has a stern and commanding demeanor.

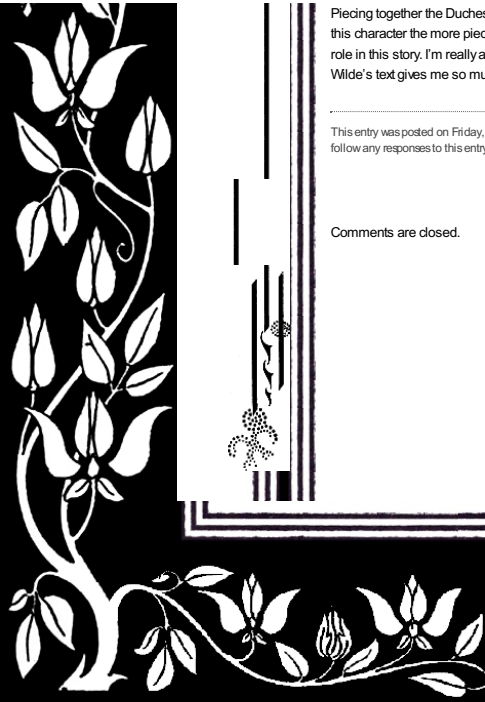


Piecing together the Duchess' life has felt like putting together a puzzle. Everyday I work with this character the more pieces of her I find and the more I start to see the bigger picture of her role in this story. I'm really appreciating all of the layers to the Duchess of Berwick. Oscar Wilde's text gives me so much to play with in my portrayal of this character.

This entry was posted on Friday, April 3rd, 2015 at 11:23 pm and is filed under [Character Analysis](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. Both comments and pings are currently closed.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« Vulnerability

Tech Week »

Physical Warm Up

April 4th, 2015

I have tried many different physical warm ups throughout my years as an actor but I have recently discovered that doing yoga is what my body responds to the best. Doing yoga allows me to stretch and warm up my muscles while releasing stress at the same time. I really enjoy all of the deep breathing that is required with yoga. It helps to center my mind and calm my thoughts while simultaneously working my muscles. I have found yoga particularly helpful to this show because of the costume pieces I am required to wear. Being in a corset for hours at a time can be very straining to the body, and carrying around the extra weight of the heavy costumes is a challenge as well. I think doing yoga before and after rehearsals has helped give my body relief from the physical restraints of the costumes. It is sometimes hard to believe that women of this time period had to dress like this everyday. It really makes me appreciate living in my own time period; it is not easy to maneuver in 19th century clothing. That is why I find it even more important for this show to warm up before hand. I think doing yoga as a physical warm up has helped throughout the rehearsal process and I will continue to use this physical warm up throughout the performances as well.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« [Physical Warm Up](#)

[Opening Night](#) »

Tech Week

April 7th, 2015

Tech week is a grueling process, but it is of course a necessary part of making theatre. It is not exactly a great feeling spending long hours in a corset and heels while sweating under hot lights, but it is my job as an actor to do so. As an actor I have had my time to experiment and create my art, now I must step back and let the designers create their art. The technical side of theatre is just as important as the acting and directing. So even though tech is uncomfortable and tedious for me as an actor I understand that the designers need a chance to explore their art as well. Although tech week is very beneficial to performers. Even though tech is exhausting, I have found it essential to my portrayal of the Duchess. For the first time throughout this process I got my full costumes, wigs, and props to use on stage. Using the new costumes and props caused me to have to adjust some of my physicality. The wigs, hat, and gowns are very heavy in weight so I had to accommodate for that in how I moved. The body's range of motion is greatly decreased by the clothing of this time period. Working with the technical aspects in the show made me feel more in touch with the Duchess than I ever have before. Especially because of her clothing and props. Having all of the fancy jewels, walking stick, and other extravagances felt like I was putting together two puzzle pieces. It felt as if the Duchess' personality finally joined her physical appearance. I think combining the two really strengthened my representation of this character.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

[« Tech Week](#)

[Remembering My Dad »](#)

Opening Night

April 9th, 2015

The audience for tonight's opening performance was very receptive and gave us a lot of good energy to feed off of. It felt gratifying to hear laughter and response from the audience, after months of rehearsing it feels good to hear the audience responding to our performances.

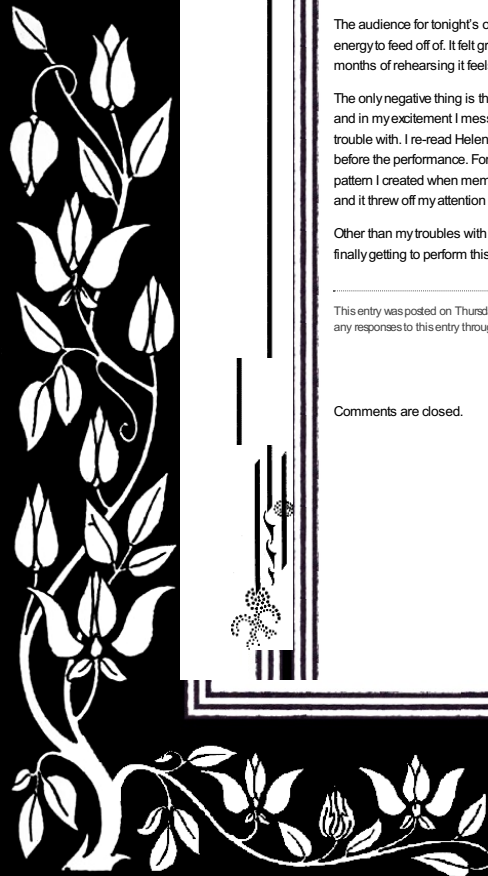
The only negative thing is that because there is an audience my adrenaline is pumping more and in my excitement I messed up the accent on some of the words that I have been having trouble with. I re-read Helen's vocal notes and practice them before every rehearsal and did so before the performance. For some reason I am having a lot of trouble breaking the speech pattern I created when memorizing the lines. I think I was more focused on the audience tonight and it threw off my attention to the accent.

Other than my troubles with the RP, this felt like a good performance and it was very exciting finally getting to perform this show for an audience.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

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First Weekend of Performances »

Remembering My Dad

April 11th, 2015

My dad, Ron Lane, was the person who first got me interested in theatre. That wasn't the only reason I did it of course. I did theatre because I truly loved the feeling I got from doing this art, but theatre was something my dad and I bonded over a lot. Acting in particular was something we loved to talk about together. All through middle school and high school, when I really started getting involved in drama and participating in shows, my father always supported me to the fullest. After rehearsals and performances he loved to hear me recount every detail of my work. He always told me how talented I was and how proud he was of me for working so hard in theatre. My dad was my best friend and we had a lot of things in common, and acting just always felt like a special connection we shared.

Unfortunately my dad passed away from cancer when I was 18 years old. He died one month after I left for college, the last time I spoke to him we talked on the phone about my first audition for a college play. Weeks later, I saw him the day before he passed away but unfortunately he was not well enough to speak. At the time that was upsetting to me, but now I feel that it is probably fitting that our last conversation together was about theatre, since it was such a central part of our relationship.

I'm writing about my dad in this blog because every show I have worked on after his passing I couldn't help but to think of him. The last time my father was alive to see me act was in my last high school production; so every show I have done here at UMW my dad has not gotten to see. I think about this often before I go on stage because, even though its been 5 years since he passed, I still wish so badly that he could be sitting out in the audience waiting to give me a hug after the show ends. Every performance I have done on the Klein Theatre stage I have thought of him. Before I start my warm up prior to a show I will recite my dad and I's favorite poem to myself and then I will say a small prayer hoping for him to watch over me. In these moments, saying these things before I go on stage, I feel such a strong connection to my dad. It has been some time since he past, so theatre is one of the only things in the world that still gives me that feeling of being connected to him.

I am happy I am able to preserve my dad's memory in this way, but I am also proud of myself for knowing when it is time to put those feelings away and become the character. These past two performances I have done my ritual for him as usual, but once it was time to become the Duchess I was able to pull my focus and put myself in the correct mind set to portray her. My father is so close to my heart, and this is why I cannot think about him when I am getting into character. He is so much a part of myself that thinking of him stops me from being fully invested in the character I am portraying. I feel proud of myself for maintaining the connection I have with my dad while still having the control to put that half of myself aside in order to be fully focused on the work. After he first died I wasn't sure if I would ever be able to have that control, I am so relieved that I have been able to get myself to this point.

I will forever love and remember my father. Ron Lane was one of the best actors I have ever seen. I will always be grateful to him for bringing theatre into my life. And forever more I will always be grateful to the theatre for bringing my father back to me.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« [Remembering My Dad](#)

[Thursday and Friday Performances](#) »

First Weekend of Performances

April 14th, 2015

I believe the first four performances went well. The audience we had on Saturday night was definitely the most responsive of all of them. I think that might have been because of all the girl scouts in the audience, it was nice hearing them laugh so much throughout the whole show. There was a small costume glitch during the Saturday performance though. My boa fell off in the first scene, and Jackie was already on the terrace so I didn't have anyone to help me get it back on. My jacket prevents me from being able to put it on myself, so I just draped it over my left arm and kept going through the scene. It wasn't really a huge deal, I just have to make sure to hold onto it better from now on.

The next day was Sunday and I felt that my energy was a little slow after the Q & A with the girl scouts that morning. I knew my family was coming to this performance so I didn't want to be dragging through the show. I listened to a lot of upbeat dance music while I was getting my hair and make up done so that I could get more pumped up. It seemed to have worked because I felt really excited before going on stage, and I felt that my drive throughout this performance was the best that it had ever been. After the show was over it was fun participating in the After Words. It was great hearing what the patrons had to say and answering all their questions. I really enjoyed having that experience and getting to talk with them.

Towards the end of rehearsals Cate and I started talking more about the idea of public versus private within this world. Meaning what the Duchess can and cannot say in public in spite of what she may feel privately. I think that in this first weekend of performances I was really able to explore that idea further. I found that the moments with Hopper when I'm insulting Australia were especially strong because I had that idea in my head. I was happy because all of my family members really enjoyed the performance. They said the show was hilarious, that all of the actors were very talented, and that the set and costumes were beautiful. So I think that overall it was a successful first weekend.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

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Thursday and Friday Performances

April 18th, 2015

It was strange having a three day break from the show and then coming back on Thursday and jumping back into things. I felt really off the whole time I was getting my hair, makeup, and costume on. When I was preparing to go on stage I did my vocal and physical warm up as usual, but for some reason I was having trouble getting into the mind set of the character. I did my best to keep my energy up and to drive the performance forward. Everyone else worked very hard to make it a good performance as well, and it was good, but it wasn't our best. I felt that throughout the whole performance I just had trouble getting connected to the character. I think something about taking a three day break from the show is what threw me off so much. I had been used to practicing everyday so it was a struggle getting into everything again. However there weren't any huge mistakes or anything so overall it was still a pretty good show.

I believe last night's show was much better than Thursday's performance. Everyone was back in the groove of things and we had a really responsive audience. When the audience is more responsive feel that it gives me so much more energy to feed off of and makes my performance better. And I also felt so much more connected to the Duchess in Friday's show. Throughout the performance I felt very engaged in the world of the play. I think that it made my drive much stronger which made my objectives and tactics clearer throughout. I felt like everyone had a great time with the show last night. It was a good start to the second half of the run. I'm really excited and also sad to finish out this show. I've been having so much fun portraying the Duchess. She's a great character to work with. Even after doing this for a few months I am still finding fun and new things about her. But I suppose it is true that all good things must come to an end. I am going to do my best in the performances to come and just enjoy what time we have left with this show. I know it will be over before I know it.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

[« Thursday and Friday Performances](#)

[Final Self Evaluation »](#)

Saturday and Sunday Performances

April 20th, 2015

Saturday was an interesting day because it was a double show day. Both performances went really well, but it was strange doing two shows in one day when I wasn't used to it. I had to try a lot harder in the second show to keep my energy up, but that was just because I was getting tired as the day went on. Maintaining the urgency was the only thing I really struggled with, but I think I managed to push through for the most part. All in all both performances were pretty good though.

Sunday was a great performance because everyone had really high energy. We were all excited because we knew we only had one more chance to perform the show. It was difficult getting into character beforehand because I was very aware of the fact that this was my last show and that thought was making me emotional. I did my best to push all of those feelings aside and stay focused on the show. I managed to get myself into the right mindset and I thought that it was a really strong performance from all of us. Of course during the bows I started crying and we were all really emotional back stage after the show ended. It was really difficult saying goodbye to this show. It was one of the best theatre experiences I've had in my life. I'm so grateful that all of the performances went as well as they did.

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The Duchess of Berwick

UMW Blogs

« Saturday and Sunday Performances

Final Self Evaluation

April 20th, 2015

I am so grateful that I got cast in Lady Windermere's Fan. Portraying the Duchess of Berwick in this production was one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had. I'm so glad that this part ended up being my senior project. Although I will be at UMW next semester, to take one class, I do not plan on auditioning for anything. I want to take time to work and save money, but I really do love acting. I've especially loved the work I've been able to do at Mary Wash. I could not think of a better way to end my career on the stage of Klein Theatre than with Lady Windermere's Fan. My first time on the Klein Theatre stage was when I got cast in Talking With three years ago, and a lot has changed in that time.

One of my biggest struggles that I've always had as an actor is my ability to take risks. I think in my time here at UMW Theatre I have improved on that skill. I felt that I was able to take more risks with the Duchess than I have with any character before. I think this is because Wilde makes her character so opulent within the text. From my first reading of this play I could see that she was a very grandiose person, and I felt that if I did not bring that sense of elevation then I would not be doing the character justice. This caused me to be bigger in my acting than I have ever been before. In the past I have been afraid of being too big in my portrayal of characters. I felt that if I over did it then no one would believe my performance. This is certainly true in some cases, but I think in the Duchess' case the choice to "go big or go home" was a risk that paid off in the end.

Another struggle that I've dealt with for awhile is my general self-confidence. For an actor confidence is key; if you do not have confidence in what you're doing then the audience won't either. I've never had a problem being able to act in front of people, but I've always had trouble being confident in the choices I make as an actor. I tend to second guess myself a lot; I start wondering if my portrayal is understandable and then I become anxious and ultimately lose all of my focus. I think the more experience I got with theatre the more I improved in this area. I have gained a lot of knowledge through my various theatre classes over the last three years. Becoming more knowledgeable about theatre has allowed me to be more confident in the choices I make as an actor. I think especially within this last year I have learned to trust my own instincts more because I feel I have gained a better understanding of this craft overall. With my portrayal of the Duchess I followed my instincts every step of the process. I felt that for the first time in my acting I was making choices that I was confident in. From the time I first read this play I thought that I had a good understanding of who the Duchess was, and I did not want to stifle that connection by underestimating myself. I am glad I followed my instincts with this character. The Duchess herself has a lot of confidence so it was essential to my portrayal that I not be second guessing myself the whole show. I am proud that I have been able to improve in these two things that have given me trouble as an actor in the past.

I believe that I put my full effort into this character and I am so proud of how she turned out. I know that no performance is perfect, there are always things that can be better, but I did my best with this work and I believe it was some of the best work I've done so far. I felt that I grew so much as an actor throughout this production. I found so many layers within this character; Wilde gave me new things to discover everyday and I am so grateful for that experience. It was amazing getting to explore all of the different elements that make up the Duchess. If I had more time I'm sure I could have found even more new things about her. I love this character, and this entire show, with my whole heart. It was so difficult taking the final bows on Sunday because it

was an experience that I did not want to end. I'm so appreciative that I could be a part of something so wonderful. I cannot thank Cate and UMW Theatre enough for this opportunity. It is one of the most memorable experiences of my life.

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