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# Me, Myself, and Hedda

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## Me, Myself, And Hedda An Analysis of How Personal Growth Opens Doors.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre

by

Gabriel J. Franco-Kull The University of Texas at El Paso Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre-Performance

## May 2023 University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for the recommendation to the Graduate Council.						
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Amy Herzberg, MFA Thesis Director						
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## Abstract

This thesis paper will focus on the process of creating my one-person show, relevant aspects of my life and history, my journey and growth in the MFA acting program, my thesis performance, and how therapy helped me grow not only as a person but artistically. Additional materials include headshot, resume, and a link to my website.

#### Acknowledgments

I would first and foremost like to thank my mother. She has been my biggest supporter since day one. Couldn't have done it without her. As well, thanks to my whole family and friends. I love you all. To the moon and back.

Secondly, I would love to thank my mentors from long past to today. They have seared and molded me not only into the full-figured artist I am today but the man I am now. I am now ready to take these lessons I have been gifted with and give them to the next generation of artists.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my cohort: Edwin, Grace, Ana, Riles, Jordan, and Leah. You all are the most inspiring people I have ever met and taught me so much. Taught me lessons in patience, acting, love, kindness, and what it means to be. Community. It has been an honor to see each of you grow. You all are so inspiring.

You are the future of the industry and the thought of that is not only exciting but inspiring.

## **Dedication**

For anyone who questions who they are, and why they are doing this. Follow your heart.

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#### **Statement of Artistry**

My acting philosophy is: We as artists are tasked with giving a voice to the voiceless through honesty, responsibility, love, and curiosity. Being a BIPOC artist, I feel this value deeply to my core. WE ARE HERE TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY. Even though I am a performance artist I see teaching as a part of who I am as well. I believe as an art educator it is my duty to foster the next generation through advocacy, kindness, and joy. If we as artists want the industry to be better, we must take the action and do it. I am a firm believer that we should leave people better than when we found them because you never know what someone is going through, so try and make their day if you can. Me as the artist, educator, and advocate are all one and the same.

Now these three philosophies or beliefs are so intertwined with each other and within me that this is not only how I approach my work, but my day-to-day life. This industry is hard. This business is so impersonal. There are so many more "no's" than "yes's". You're going to constantly be juggling so much on your plate, so why not try and make people feel like the awesome rock stars they are? Why not try and leave them better than you found them? I believe that is why one of the core beliefs of this program "it's all about your partner" stuck with me so well. That is already a value I have in my every day, so transitioning that to my acting was quite a joy and felt so natural to me. Now it is a second nature to me when I am acting. "How am I trying to make them feel?" is a motto that just runs through me. This is something I would naturally ask myself, but before school it was out of social awkwardness. Now I am applying this motto to my acting. One of the metaphors that I have come up with to sum up my training is "I have been given a shed full of tools. I don't need every tool for every job, but I have the ability to choose the specific tool for the specific job."

### **One Person Show Script**

Below you will find the script for my One-Person Show (OPS). This is a deeply personal topic for me. A topic I had not really talked about to anyone for about 28 years. This show helped me through many things, and I learned so much about myself through digging deep in myself, unpacking, tears, and most importantly allowing myself to be vulnerable. The act of being vulnerable and exploring the construct of masculinity are two huge things that are deep values of mine. This show helped me understand why these topics are so palpable and provocative.

I have not shared this with my mother yet, but this show is as much for her as it is for me.

Lights up on a casket and podium.

There are wreathes, flowers, etc.

Gabriel enters.

He goes to the podium.

Pulls out a speech from his coat.

NOTE: the speech he pulls out he will

completely abandon

at one point. The actor's choice.

#### Gabriel:

#### BEAT

Hello, I am Gabriel. Carl's Second son.

#### BEAT

I am 28 years old and a Professional actor.

I am here to say goodbye to carl. Thank you for allowing me to say a few words.

What does it mean to be a man?

Carl Kull is my father. 28 years ago he was married to Guadalupe Franco. And They made me.

I come from a non-traditional traditional family.

Yeah it makes sense. I was raised in a house by mother, my grandmother, two of my 3 uncles.

Well we were also the type of family that even if we weren't related I was raised to call these

people aunts and uncles. So non-traditionally traditional.

My Grandmother. Gloria. Shuggy. She was a bad mamba Jamba who raised four kids on her own. Who joined a convent. Who worked for the city. Who could out drink anyone I know. That's not an exaggeration. I remember on her deathbed she said she wanted 1 last shot but no more than that, she didn't wanna get a DUI on the way to heaven. How fucking wholesome and metal is that? She is one of my hero's. I wish I appreciated her more when she was alive. She taught me that family is everything. It was later in life that I come to respect and redefine that value.

My uncle Joseph is the definition of man. He is a mean mother fucker. I was and still am terrified of this man. He taught me how to box, how to shoot a gun, how to change a tire, how to be a dad. See he was just like "Achilles who was dipped in the ocean and held by his ankle" he was dipped in Machismo. This is not a jab or a trauma but he represents to me the most positive traits of manliness. Bold, brave, true, honest, and most importantly giving.

My uncle nacho was my gay superhero. I called him dad. He raised me. My grandma's youngest.

He taught me how to be a social fucking butterfly, how to drink, how to talk to people.

What does it mean to be a man?

This question is one that has followed me for my entire life.

So I ask you again what is a man?

Can you tell me?

See when I faced bullies Carl couldn't offer words of wisdom.

My uncle Joseph offered me wisdom. That's the day I got my first boxing lesson.

When I was called gay for the first time "gaybro" My uncle nacho taught me not only to turn the other cheek but to smile.

In fact, the running list of things that were taught to me from other men or I had to teach my self are: Swimming, boxing, shaving, drinking, dancing, dressing, home repair, lawn care, shooting, cooking, driving. The list can keep going.

Now I know what you may be asking "with such positive men in your life why are you so full of doubt"

I never knew my father.

To be frankly honest I never wanted to.

Carl Kull is my fear.

You know the idea of are people born bad or is learned? Is Badness genetic? That is my biggest fear in the world.

Carl was a wonderful talker.

Carl had money.

Carl was smart.

Carl was a man.

My mom was sick for a long time. She ended up having to go through chemo and long story short she was told that she could never have children.

She married carl.

Carl was working in Thailand, so my mom quit Levitt's, left Texas, and moved to Thailand.

They were happy. I want to believe that they were.

My mom got pregnant and what should have been a wonderful moment lead to him beating her half to death. 1 month later my bad fucking grandma shows up in Thailand. I'm convinced she had a 45 in her purse. And my she got my mom home.

I love my family. I fiercely love them. We may butt heads but they are my world. And my mother who literally gave up everything just to have me. My grandma had to CROSS THE FUCKING WORLD to save me. Who does that for someone that isn't even alive? Who does that for an if?

My fear is that everything that carl was is in me. And that one day I become him. See this is why the idea of masculinity is so hard. Do I have a monster in me?

Ironically the only gift Carl ever gave me was my brother. Josh. Josh is one of my best friends and he's like super old. Meeting him was an episode of "to catch a predator" he didn't have a Facebook so he used his wife's and sent 16year old me a "hey" he knew stuff about me, about the family, and like every alarm bell went off. I was like omg someone's trying to traffic me. So I told my mom and like nothing she was like oh yeah you have a brother. I swear its funny. It sounds super dramatic but its gold.

When Carl died I didn't know how to feel. I didn't. In fact, I think my exact response was "good". "Good". What the fuck. Talking about him fills me with so much hate. So much anger.

Anger and aggression that I don't live with in my every day.

If I'm being honest, the reason the idea of toxic manliness scares me is because I want to be a father. I am afraid that I will be my own father. Absent, abusive, violent, loud, misogynistic, antifeminist, homophobic. That is my deepest fear. I am so scared that it is in me. So imbedded in my DNA that when the conditions are met they are activated. Saying it out loud makes it sound silly but it's my fear.

This is why I am so provoked when I hear toxic things. Or see toxic men. I see my father. I see the potential for them to be my father.

So much of who I am.... I question.

I am here to say I will not become carl.

I will become like the men who raised me.

I was terrified of you. Like the boogieman. Terrified of an idea.

#### BEAT

If I am lucky enough to have children, they will grow in the image of the men who raised me.

In fact, the greatest honor I can give you is goodbye.

I will not live in fear of you.

BEAT

Goodbye.

Maybe there's a beat here

Slowly lights fade out.

"Yesterday" by Atmosphere plays

Maybe Gabriel says thank you.

END OF PLAY

#### The Sister One Person show

At first, I hated writing. I would fight it at every inch but, after this process of doing the OPS work, it changed me for the better. I found a new passion in writing, specifically about non-traditional family structures like the one I came from. I thought my upbringing was so unique: raised by a single mom, uncles, grandma, cousins, and family friends. Compared to the traditional family model, I have found out that non-traditional families are actually more common than I previously thought. For example, after the show I had many people come to me and tell me how it, in some way, shape, or form, related to them.

I have worked in children's theatre for the past four years. In working with these kids, I have a better understanding of patience, a deeper appreciation for kindness, and have learned just how complex and beautiful a family can be. Because of the lessons I learned there, the next play I started working on was a children's show---a children's show for adults dealing with the topic of non-traditional families. That show is *The Sister Play*. The following script is about Gabriel the day he is set to meet his biological half-sister. The following script is unfinished and is in early draft form.

Gabe stumbles on stage in a shabby suit (times are hard), He is hurriedly getting ready for something, He is low key high key freaking out.

Fuck, Fuck, Fuck.

Ok. Breathe.

What did she say?

Right.

Picture me.

Picture younger me.

Fuck... This..

Picture. Me.

Younger me.. what did i..

Fuck this is stupi...

Picture me.

Younger me.

What did I need?

Holy shit

It worked.

Hi!

Oh, you're here!

Oh, there's a lot of me.

And some others.

Welcome!

I'm getting ready to meet someone!

Do you like meeting new people?

I love it!

But it can be scary!

Sorry my therapist gave me advice to "vocalize and talk to my younger self."

Then all of you showed up.

Have any of you ever been scared before?

Raise your hand if you've been scared?

Pick a child from crowd that raises hand, Interact/Vamp

Wow!

What do you do when you're scared or nervous?

Can you teach me?

*Try child's ritual, Repeat with 1/2 other kids* 

Thank you all so much!

Since you taught me what makes you feel better, I'll teach you what makes me feel better!

Feel better song and dance

Ok since we are all best friends I'll tell you why I'm nervous!

I'm meeting my family for the first time!

Isn't that strange to hear! An adult meeting people for the first time!

It's kind of a funny, sad, exciting story!

Do you want to know it?

Well, how many people here have a mommy? Raise your hand?

Wow!

How many here have a daddy?

Ok!

How about a brother?

A Sister?

Grandma?

Grandpa?

Aunts?

Uncles?

Cousins?

Stepparents?

Step Siblings?

Wow!

All of you have such different answers!

Isn't that beautiful?

Some people have mommies and uncles.

Some just have daddies.

Some of us just half brothers

Some of us just have step-parents

Some of us are adopted

Some just have brothers or sisters.

I grew up with my mom, and my uncles.

My grandma

And a butt load of cousins!

I never knew my dad

Sometimes people's stories are different than yours!

And sometimes you meet your brother when you're 5

Or sometimes you meet your sister when you're 30

(Beat)

I'm 30

I'm meeting my sister for the first time.

And

Its ok.

Its ok to be scared.

Have you ever had a really bad nightmare and you know its not real or it cant hurt you but you cant stop thinking about it or trying not to think about it and it makes you think about it so much more

I am terrified.

This is even scarier than the time I moved all by myself.

What's the scariest thing you've ever done?

Interact with audience. Really listen to story/ Converse

Those are pretty scary things. YOU ARE SO BRAVE!

When I'm scared I talk to my grandma. She's in heaven. Or some place just as good!

Pananma

HA.

Gloria.

That's my grandma. My abuela. I talk to her when I'm really sad. Or when I'm really scared. Or when I'm happy. Ok I talk to her all the time. But it helps.

That's something I've learned as I have gotten older.

What helps you (as long as it doesn't hurt other people or yourself), let it help you.

I think I'm going to talk to her.

Want to try it to?

Heres how you do it.

You picture someone you want to talk to.

Anyone.

And you say hi X

And just talk.

Sometimes answers are given to you in words but in feelings.

I know it's silly, but its

It's something.

Here I'll play some music and we can all try.

If you want, if not its ok to just listen.

Hi Grandma,

Glor-I-A

How are you?

I'm at a crossroads and am not to sure what I should do

What should I do?

I am so afraid.

Light change (Maybe)

(Beat)

What if she doesn't like me?

My god it feels like I'm dating.

I'm worried about dumb things that are out of my control.

Like I have no control over who likes me.

I have no control over who talks to me.

I have no control in who chooses to stay.

(beat)

I think that is why I'm scared.

I'm afraid to meet her, because I'm afraid of her leaving.

I'm afraid of being left alone again.

Do you think it's possible to miss someone you've never met?

Seen?

Hugged?

I think you can.

Have you ever missed anyone?

Interact Section, Listen, Converse

I think it's really brave of you all to talk about your feelings. To talk about you. It's scary and it's hard to be vulnerable but that is what makes people so awesome and beautiful.

Being honest

Real

There

I am also so afraid of hurting my family family. The family that raised me.

I don't want to make them feel like they aren't enough.

Like I am replacing them.

Like I wasn't happy.

I love my Family.

But I have an opportunity to make my family bigger.

To learn more about my history.

Does that make sense?

Like picture a book.

See it?

Now tear come chapters out.

Yes, it's still a book but there's parts that are missing.

Do you ever feel like you are missing parts?

(beat)

I'm afraid

I'm excited

Is it brave for me to meet her? Or is it braver for me to not? What do you think is brave? Or What It means to be strong.? Interact Section, Listen, Converse I should talk to you all more. I am learning so much. I am still so nervous though. You know that feeling? Where it feels like your stomach is spinning And like your head feels heavy? Or your body feels tingly but not in the happy way?

What do you do when you feel that way?

(Gabe interacts with audience)
(Talks back with them/ maybe tries what they say)
Ok those are some great ideas! They helped a little.
I know when I'm nervous I try to breathe. I try to tell myself that things will be ok.
But right now I'm
Having a hard time doing that
Will you breathe with me?
(Sits, closes eyes, breathes)

(Maybe this lasts a few seconds or maybe this lasts a few minutes)

(Still seated)

I'm an actor. Part of what I've learned is how to chill. How to let go.

I have been told that my real life problems are my acting problems.

The more I get to know me, I'm realizing that it's true.

I'm afraid of connecting.

Ing

Ing as the active act of connection

Right now.

The idea of willingly letting putting my self at risk of hurt terrifies me.

But on the other side if I don't take that risk, I won't experience life.

Trust is something that is hard me

There's two kinds of trust.

The surface level trust: hey want to get a beer, want to go to a movie.
Then there's a deeper trust. This trust is the one that
Well it's the one that terrifies me.
The: can you help me. The: I have no food. The: I am not ok, Kind of trust.
(Pout)
(Beat)
(Gabe opens eyes, gets up)
(Goes to Mirror and fixes self)
Thank you.
I am feeling better.

You know I don't know if there is an answer to feelings?

	Like	either	path I	go	down	would	be	the	right	path.
--	------	--------	--------	----	------	-------	----	-----	-------	-------

I think that's how life is sometimes.

Like if I choose to build a relationship with the rest of my family. My sister. It would be the right thing. It would align with my values as a person. It would align with my optimism.

Or

If I chose to not meet them. I would be honoring my boundary as a person. I would be actively choosing who is or isn't family. I would be making choices for me.

What's the hardest choice you've ever made?

(This can take as long as it needs)

(Riff and work with audience)

Wow. That is some tough stuff.

You all are so brave.

My childhood was great. It had ups and downs but it was great.

The greatest one thing aside from kindness that I know I want from life is to be a father.

I want to be someone who wasn't in my life.

Now I am unapologetic about it.

I felt shame for wanting what a did for a while. I was with someone who was great,

but in the box of our potential life

Children was something that didn't fit in the box.

See everything really goes back to my dad.

By not being there. By being abusive. He built a value in me. 2100 miles away. He built a value of being better.

And if I'm going to be better

I am going to be there

I'm going to meet

BEAT

My sister

END OF DRAFT

## **Therapy**

I started therapy in early September '22. The seven-year relationship I was in had come to an end; it came down to values---a core element of our program. Our values are what drive us. One of my core values is children. I always knew I wanted to be a father (the past two plays kind of

cement that). She didn't want to have children. Those were her values, that's ok. We broke up because it was the right thing to do. But fuck, it destroyed me. I was not sleeping. Not eating. I lost almost 20 pounds. Started smoking again.

My mentor Amy recommended therapy to me. I took her advice, and it was a life changing experience. Now, why am I writing about this in my acting thesis paper? Well, in the course of therapy I made so many discoveries of things that were holding me back as an actor. These included things I have been battling since day one, such as imposter syndrome, people pleasing, self-sabotage, and fear of failing, opening up, and trust. The list could go on. But in the course of therapy, I not only learned to confront these things but was able to learn where these values were birthed.

I'm not going to sit here and say I'm "cured." No, I'm not. But I am equipped now with tools to identify things that are actually harmful and things that I'm quite honestly afraid of.

I have used these tools in my personal life, making decisions for myself rather than pleasing others. I have used it in my career, making choices that will benefit me in my acting, such as asking more specific questions because it is not enough to know who the character is, but also why the character is who they are. I know for a fact it has propelled me as an actor to new heights. I plan to keep climbing as well.

#### Hedda

I felt so lucky and honored to work on *Hedda Gabler*, my thesis show. It was my last hurrah to put all of the tools, lessons, and philosophies I have learned to the test. One big challenge I faced while playing Tesman was, well, Tesman in general. His obliviousness, one-track mind, and passion. I know rule one is not to judge your character. I used the "Folio Method" and read two other versions of the play. In the other two, Tesman was still very Tesmany but a little more sexist or treated Hedda like property or an object. That was the eureka moment for me. I discovered my way into Tesman. By finding out what our differences are I was able to find what we had in similarities. This discovery led me to be able to lend my heart to the character, and in the end, that is what we are trying to do.

Now my values don't align with him. I talked to my director, Lacy Post. The nugget I came back to was Hedda. Everything he did was for her. He loved and trusted her so much that he couldn't imagine anything else. This was the seed for me—what I was able to lend my heart to. I found it so much more tangible or "useable" to follow a positive than a negative or something less specific.

Below you will see photos from the process.



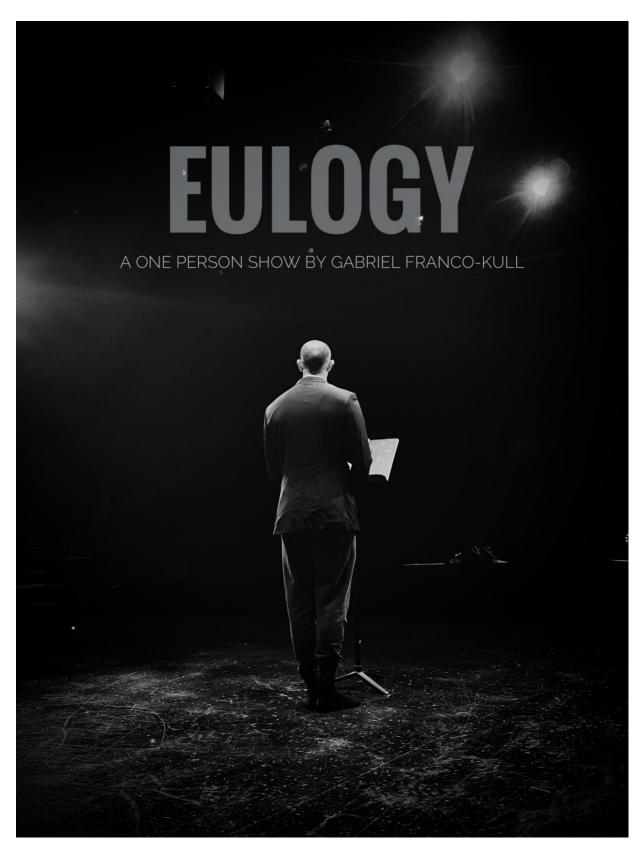
Photo by Xavier Smith, at The University of Arkansas Theatre, Gabriel Franco-Kull as Tesman



Photo by Xavier Smith, at The University of Arkansas Theatre, Gabriel Franco-Kull as Tesman



Poster by Ash Micheel.



Poster and photo by Huan Bui, at Nadine Baum Studios, Gabriel Franco in Eulogy.

#### Resume



# GABRIEL FRANCO-KULL

## Actor's Casting Agency

Email: Gjfrancokull@gmail.com Height: 6'o" Vocal Range: Tenor He, Him, His

#### **Professional**

\*The Chicken Play TBA TBA The Rev Theatre \*Carmen in San Sebastian Teo TBA The Rev Theatre \*The Tempest Sebastian Morgan Hicks Arkansas Shakespeare Much Ado About Nothing Verges Stacy Pendergraft Arkansas Shakespeare Gabriel Michael Landman UARK One Person Show Fest. Writer 1 (U/S) Tiny Beautiful Things Kim McKean TheatreSquared Tortuga and the Hare Tortuga Chris Tennison Trike Theatre Ashes of a Great Fire Father (New Play Festival) Tony Meneses TheatreSquared Invention of Time Prisoner (New Play Festival) Franky Gonzalez Inge Festival Discharged Oscar (New Play Festival) Charles K.K. Ranum Inge Festival Artifact Sebastian(New Play Festival) Robert Weibezahl Inge Festival Copy Shop Henry (Staged Reading) Brenden Beseth TheatreSquared Tornado Play Martin (Staged Reading) Sarah Loucks TheatreSquared Moment of Conclusion Don Louis (Staged Reading) Andrew Heinrich The Public Theatre

#### **Educational**

Hedda Gabler Tesman Lacy Post University of Arkansas Estefania Fadul This Bitch Teodoro University of Arkansas Ride The Cyclone Karnack Morgan Hicks University of Arkansas Love's Labour's Lost Holofernes Paul Barnes University of Arkansas The Laramie Project Greg, Ensemble Huan Bui University of Arkansas In The Book Of Bo Portman Sr. Michael Landman University of Arkansas Steven Marzolf Tartuffe Cleante University of Arkansas Hand of God Timothy Rebecca Rivas University of Texas at El Paso Lvdia Rene Kim McKean University of Texas at El Paso The Importance of Being Earnest Algernon Kim McKean University of Texas at El Paso Reasons to be Pretty Kent Miriam Mendoza University of Texas at El Paso Dead Man's Cellphone Dwight Jay Stratton University of Texas at El Paso

#### **Training**

University of Arkansas MFA in Acting Amy Herzberg, Steven Marzolf, Michael Landman University of Texas at El Paso BFA in Acting Rebecca Rivas, Jay Stratton, Kim McKean

#### **Special Skills**

Proficient in Spanish, Youth Educator, Combat (SAFD Certified in Rapier & Dagger with Recommendation, Longsword, Hand-to-Hand, Firearms), Ballet (3 years), Boxing and MMA Fighting (5 years), Fluent In Dad Jokes (29 years), Basketball, Olympic Weightlifting, Yellow Lab Energy, Registered Driver's License, Can Do Bad Accents Extremely Well.

## Headshot



Headshot by Margaret Murie, Edited by Samantha Has

## Website

www.Gabrielfrancokullactor.com

## **Appendices**



## Headshot Permission Inbox x



Margaret Murie <memurie@uark.edu>

to Gjfrancokull@gmail.com -

I give permission for Gabriel Franco Kull to utilize the headshots and pictures I took of him for all purposes. Margaret Murie

