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THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR: A UNIVERSITY ACTRESS'S APPROACH TO THE  
ROLE OF MISTRESS FORD

by

BROOK AKYA HANEMANN  
B.F.A. University of Central Florida, 1999

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
in the Department of Theatre  
in the College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## ABSTRACT

Art is too ethereal a thing to judge by tangible measure. There is no scale to weigh a performance on, no level to gauge a character's balance, no plumb line to measure its depth. No critic can appoint an allotment of stars to represent the worth of a production, and the audience, though a vital participant within the performance experience, cannot act as Jury and deliberate together to reach an absolute verdict of approval or disapproval. How then can an actor go about working towards giving a *successful* performance?

*The Merry Wives of Windsor* was written at a time when *wives* were not permitted to tread upon the stage at all. During Shakespeare's era the roles of women were played only by cherub faced young men. The version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* which was presented by the University of Central Florida in the fall of 2002 was not, however, set in those pre-femme days. The production was presented as if being performed by a traveling acting troupe of men and women with a repertoire of which *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was only a part. I was cast as Mistress Ford.

Embarking on a Shakespeare play is no small feat. Earnest research on the lives of the Elizabethans will offer up clues into the mindset, customs, beliefs, and theories of the age in which the play was written. Modern day actors preparing themselves to take on a Shakespearian role may also look also to the theories and theatrical trends of his or her own time and those that have led up to it. This research is the foundation on which a performance must be built.

The theatrical performer must act as his own instrument in the symphony of his performance. Stage acting is an art form which enfolds many forms of expressive artistic communication. The mind, the body, the voice, the emotions and in my opinion the soul must all come into play to reach the summit of an artistic theatrical performance and the actor's journey must be comprised of exercises to stretch and strengthen each area of the actor's instrument. A vigorous vocal regimen must be crafted and adhered to. An analytical investigation of the script is required. The actor's physicality must be tailored to portray the proper class, energy level and spirit of his character. The emotional life of the character should be thoroughly probed and the performer must find a way to fully embody the soul of the character and the age in which the character lived. In this particular case, I came to find that the usual modern day methods of performance preparation most commonly used by actors of our age were not in themselves enough to bring me to what I *felt* was a successful performance. I came instead to discover that a Brechtian approach to Shakespearian acting solved many of the challenges I faced when coming up short in my prior attempts to use a more Stanislavsky based method.

Although the very nature of art makes it impossible to judge by tangible measure, there are very tangible ways to go about preparing for a role upon the stage. No single approach can work for every piece. One must exercise the mind, voice, body and soul to perform a role as weighty as a Shakespearian character. Proper research, analysis, and a regimen built upon exercises for the body and voice are the tools available for the serious actor. This thesis outlines a University actress' use of these tools and details how the discovery of Brechtian elements within the UCF production of *Merry Wives* opened doors to a new way of handling the portrayal Mistress Ford.

This work is dedicated to my parents Danny and Marcelle Hanemann. I will never understand why fortune lavished me with such a rich life. You are my heart, my soul, the blood that rushes in my veins. Thank you; bless you for giving me such passion, such reverence for art. As Pablo Neruda once said: "I want...to do to you what spring does to the cherry trees." That is certainly what you have done for me. And to the man who was there in my heart the whole while I went through this process, Anam Cara, you are bliss to me. Thank you, Rus. I love the three of you more than even Shakespeare has words to express.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is a man who has believed in me since before I first stepped foot on this campus, a man who I have come to love, a man who has helped to raise me. Doctor Seay, without you this process of higher education would have been a hollow pilgrimage. The department lost its North Star when you went away. Thank you for your love, your guidance, your excellence. I would also like to thank two beautiful and immensely talented women, Julia Listengarten, my advisor, and Kate Ingram. You both have been inspiration to me. You are what I believe women should be...strong, passionate, inspiring and talented. Finally, I would like to thank Natalie Cordone, a rising star, Yvonne Belle, my guardian angel of education, Whitney Goin and Stephanie Williams for generously lending a hand and a prayer whenever I was in need, and Jim Cali, a man who took so much talent and brightness with him when he left us. Last, but farthest from least, thank you God, life is good! Thank you all for your gifts. I will do my best to repay them by endeavoring to pass on some of the fire, the passion and the love that you all have given to me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE JOURNAL .....	3
CHAPTER THREE: SCRIPT STUDY .....	40
CHAPTER FOUR: APPROACH AND THEORY .....	87
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	108
APPENDIX A: PRODUCTION REVIEW FROM THE CENTRAL FLORIDA FUTURE.....	109
APPENDIX B: PRODUCTION REVIEW FROM THE ORLANDO SENTINEL.....	112
APPENDIX C: CAST LIST FOR THE 2002 UCF PRODUCTION OF “THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR” .....	117
LIST OF REFERENCES .....	119



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This pilgrimage, this educational pursuit, has unfolded in a way most uncharacteristic of that which I would have expected from a traditional conservatory education. While this has been a struggle for some of my fellow classmates, I have endeavored to embrace the experience and I do believe that the balance has served me more than a department solely based on performance training ever could have done. Because of this, I feel it would be remiss to focus this work solely on the performance aspects of my work on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. It is my desire instead, to exhibit through the outlet of this thesis, the journey of an actor who has, for better or worse, chosen to experiment with a blend of the cerebral and the visceral. It was my aim to take the skills I have begun to hone as a dramaturge and as a student of theatre theory and to actively use those skills in the process of preparing for and performing a role; to combine performance skills gained through the UCF MFA experience and marry them with the academic.

In the fall of 2002, I was cast in the role of Mistress Ford from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in the University of Central Florida's first Shakespearian production. Throughout the rehearsal process I became aware of some Brechtian elements in the script as well a number of Brechtian conventions positioned into the production by Kate Ingram, the production's powerfully talented director. It is important to note that these characteristics were never spoken of in the course of the production. There was no directorial concept in place that specifically called for the use of Brecht's methodology, and since Bertolt Brecht himself was born hundreds of years after Shakespeare's time, the bard certainly did not go about writing a "Brechtian Play." As a student of theatre theory, however, I believe that there is compelling evidence that The UCF production

of *Merry Wives* contains many of the thematic and practical elements which Brecht once used as the cornerstones of his dramatic theories.

## CHAPTER TWO: REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE JOURNAL

The following pages are taken directly from journals which were kept throughout the rehearsal and performance periods of our UCF production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Since these journals were intended as a tool and outlet to assist me in the course of my personal journey, the writing style and subject matter varies. At times I used my journal as a place to record research information offering up clues about Shakespeare and his era. At times I discuss my vocal and physical process. Sometimes I discuss text, sometimes I discuss theory, and sometimes I discuss my own human experience as my days during the process unfold. In the interest of staying true to the reality of the experience I have refrained from altering entries in the interest of merely making them more appropriate for this thesis. Reader's discretion is advised.

October 6, 2002-I remember the exact moment I was first exposed to Shakespeare. It was a rainy night in Covington, Louisiana in the parking lot of what was at that time the A&P grocery store. I must have been around eight years old. I remember pulling down the gravel service road and bouncing around the cab of the cream colored 197-something Ford pickup truck as the wheels popped in and out of those infamously treacherous Louisiana pot-holes. The truck climbed up into the parking lot and we pulled to a stop.

*Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this son of York...*

I was young and so many of the details of the memory have softened, faded, and fallen away. For instance, I have no idea what caused my father to perform the monologue in that parking lot for

his only child who was no doubt too young to really understand what it was about. I have no idea why Shakespeare came to him on his way to pick up groceries. I do, however remember the magic that was there. I remember the poetry, the music, the power in that rich voice and in those blazing blue eyes as he showed me the pain, the rage, the bitterness of this Richard III. I felt it. I understood. Maybe I didn't understand all of the words, maybe I didn't have enough life in me to understand what cancerous blackness gnawed at the noble's deformed heart, but I knew that the words I heard were alive.

That was the first meeting I had with William Shakespeare. My papa introduced me to him. We did not meet through a reading list appointed to me by a bored high school English teacher; we met on a rainy night in a parking lot in southeast Louisiana. Since that night, my love, my awe and my respect for Shakespeare's magnificence have grown.

And so...the very second that my ears were privy to the UCF Theatre season of 2002 I knew exactly which show I most wanted to do. There was no question in my mind. I snatched up my handy copy of Shakespeare's complete works and I read and re-read *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, with an eye on Mistress Ford and Mistress Page.

October 7, 2002-This evening, at 7pm, the entire cast and much of the crew met for the very first time in the blue rehearsal space in UCF's Research Parkway theatre home. Sketches of the costumes and set plans were presented after everyone was introduced and information folders were distributed. I must admit that I was taken aback by the size of the gathering. This cast is huge.

Our first read-through was quite fun. It is always interesting for me to experience the energy of a cast meeting for the very first time in a university production. Some of the younger actors edge shyly into the room, almost apologetically, while other actors, the ones with a few UCF shows under their belt, swagger in as though brandishing their experience like a banner. I find it humorous that big college fish forget how small the university pond really is. It seems that the “superstars” of college often have the most difficult time finding their footing in the outside world.

Audition week at UCF is also a fascinating place to study human behavior. I have to say that the audition process for this show was really quite fun for me. I remember rushing around, trying to fit in all the callbacks without botching my schedule or anyone else’s. The scheduling of the callbacks was laid out in a way that made it difficult for many people to stay on track. When I got to the trailer for the *Merry Wives* callbacks, I could hear people in the audition room reading scenes already. I grabbed the sides I was supposed to be looking at and I sat against one of the doors to the room and leaned my head against the wood. I followed the words across the page of my script as they were being spoken from behind the door. I had a feeling in my stomach that grips me on occasion when I’m in the audience of a play or on the sidelines in class. There is an energy that wells up inside of me sometimes that makes me want to leap up on stage and play the material that I’m watching. In the audition process it is a huge ally because when it comes, it supersedes any nervousness or fear that I may have. That is not to say that I have this feeling all the time when faced with an audition. In fact, the feeling comes only every so often and it occurs only when I really want a role badly and have thoroughly studied the material and made myself as prepared for the audition as possible.

Sitting outside that door, that evening in the UCF rehearsal trailer, I definitely had that feeling. I wanted to read! I wanted to play! It wasn't that I was sitting there feeling superior to the people I heard reading, I just wanted to get in there. I got the chance to read for both of the wives, and I got the opportunity to read with both Lara Mainard who was cast as Mistress Page opposite my Mistress Ford, and I got to read with JJ Ruscella who was already cast as Falstaff. Lara and I had fun reading. It became obvious to me, though, when we read the scene where Falstaff was hiding behind the curtain, that she didn't realize that the wives were putting on a show just to fool Falstaff. We read the scene through twice, though, and traded roles, and in the course of the reading we eventually got on the same page. I had fun reading with her, regardless of the content lapse. We got along well. The chemistry was good. JJ was a blast to read with. The scene I read for with him was the scene where Falstaff first meets with Mistress Ford in her private chambers. We played very well together. He chased and flirted and I flirted and ran away. I left the audition hall knowing that regardless of whether Kate Ingram chose to cast me or not, I had thoroughly enjoyed auditioning and I did the best that I could have done. I am not one of those actors who laments not getting a role. As long as I enjoyed the process and did my best, I am fairly happy. On the other hand, I abhor the feeling that creeps into the pit of my stomach when I walk away from an audition knowing that I allowed nerves to get the best of me...when I know I could have done better if I'd not been afraid. The nervousness that accompanies acting, performing, auditioning, or public speaking in general infuriates me to no end. I despise the quaking, shaking, pointless little torture that the mind puts actors through sometimes. Tension like that is death to expression. The jaw clenches, the voice becomes constricted, and intentions are overshadowed by self-consciousness. Fear kills beautiful performances. I watch it happen in young students all the time.

This particular process, though, was blissfully free of fear. I was hungry to read, and because of that I felt open and available for the people I read with. I left the audition happy. That is usually a good sign.

October 11, 2002-Today's Self Appointed Assignment is to go through and record some possible active verbs for each scene. Some choices may be appropriate, some not. I'm doing this just to give myself a well to pull from.

Act I, scene 1-(Entrance sans speech): To dine, to entice, to greet, to flirt, to parade, to present, to make merry.

Act II, scene 2-(The Letter Scene):

At entrance, on the way to show Mrs. Page the letter:

To herald, To Impress, To Gossip, To Brag, To show off, To notify, To shout, To bellow, To tantalize, To shriek, To Implore

During the dialogue leading up to the swapping of the love letters:

To seek advice, To whisper, To confide, To solicit

To bait, To Lure, To entice, To hint, To taunt

To joke, To play, To make light of, To goad,

The monologue to Mistress Page:

To hasten, to motivate, to hustle

To unearth, To reveal, To expose

To insult, To rebuff, To scorn

To mull over, To think about, To Recall, To replay, To consider, To pontificate, To banter, To muse, To weigh (no pun intended), To reflect, To deliberate, To search, To detect, To question

To exclaim, To expose, To wonder, To Blast, To call out

To call names, to make fun of, To ridicule, To lampoon (not harpoon...pun intended!)

To seek revenge, To Plan, To ruminate, To organize payback

To Conspire, To Devise, To congratulate

To question, To commiserate

The revealing of the identical letter and the plan for revenge:

To exclaim, To Marvel, To pout, To rage, To vent, To fume, To thunder

To banter, To agree, To mock, To Discover, To say it like it is

To devise, To rile up, To get on board (Puns are just overflowing here!), To band together, To make a pack, To swear, To unite, To seek vengeance,

Upon sight of our approaching husbands:

To confess, To commiserate, To conspire, To sneak away

Speaking to my husband:

To greet, To cheer, To hail, To salute, To call out, To question, To detect, To Inquire, To snap,

To nip, To disdain, To scold



Upon sight of Mistress Quickly:

To formulate, To devise, To lure, To ensnare, To enlist

Act III, scene 3-(The FAT Knight's first visit)

The calling and instructing of the servants:

To hearken, To Call, To order, To gather, To send for, To implore

To vent, To pace, To worry, To falter, To question, To take control

To order, To reiterate, To pound the message home, To instill, To threaten, To flirt

To calm, To gain control, To take the wheel, To steady the ship

To prepare, To bolster, To threaten

Upon entrance of the FAT Knight:

To pose, To entice, To flatter, To flirt, To lead on, To strut, To fawn, To lure, To prance, To lie,

To deceive, To prate, To *hornswaggle* (Does this word really exist?), To dupe, To butter up, To

baby-talk, To coo, To seduce, To turn him on, To gush, To blush, To milk, To preen, To show

off, To Indulge

To recoil, To cover, To mask, To flinch

To accuse, To demand, To feign, To prompt

To banter, To menace, To indict, To prosecute, To mask, To lie

At the re-entry of the hidden Mistress Page (As Falstaff hides behind the curtain):

To vent, To act, To parade, To clown, To mock, To perform, To put on a show, To giggle, To ham it up, To fake, To posture, To exclaim, To prompt, To scare, To alarm, To worry, To panic, To surprise

As the FAT knight dives into the buck basket:

To ensnare, To embarrass, To trap, To disrespect, To humiliate, To punish, To be revenged, To shame, To get even, To abuse

At the actual entrance of my husband and his guests:

To wheel, To cover, To posture, To conceal, To mask, To Cover my arse!

To Mistress Page:

To gloat, To congratulate, To Bond, To make a pact, To Vent, To swear, To muster, To revel, To Recover, To conspire, To motivate, To scheme

Act IV, scene 2-(The FAT Knight's second attempt)

Entrance of Falstaff:

To coo, To lure, To pout, To gush, To swoon, To lie, To deceive, To feign

The *arranged* entrance of Mistress Page:

To perform, To con, To act, To posture, To ham it up, To taunt, To threaten, To trick, To frighten, To alert, To traumatize, To revel, To exact revenge, To abuse,

To scare, To gloat, To punish, To torture

Falstaff comes out of hiding:

To threaten, to bully, to terrorize, To rile up, To torment, To fool, To poke, To chase, To warn,  
To follow, To gang up, To cohort, To bait, To intimidate, To exact revenge, To ensnare, To  
misuse, To emasculate, To castrate

My jealous husband returns with his men:

To Poke, To prod, To goad, To mock, To underhand, To claim innocence

In reaction to the incident with the *old maid*:

To jeer, To howl, To congratulate, To celebrate, To explode, To revel, To cheer, To praise, To  
bask, To goad, To rile up, To decide to come clean, To confess, To pursue, To chase

Act IV, scene 4 (The kiss and make-up scene)

After confessing to our husbands:

To poke my tongue out & say Nanny-Nanny Boo-Boo (Okay, so maybe this one's a little much),  
To forgive, To kiss and make up, To pardon, To entice, To flirt, To stroke

Telling of our "*Herne the Hunter*" plans:

To intrigue, To propose, To impress, To reveal, to harmonize, To urge, To sell, To tantalize, To  
prompt, To enlist, To paint a picture, To pitch, To Instruct

Act IV, scene 3-(The “*Counseling the Doctor to elope with Nan*” Scene)

To motivate, To rile up, To egg on, To urge, To propel

Act IV, scene 5- (Humiliation at the Oak scene)

At first meeting him “alone” in the woods:

To snare, To hunt, To expose, To capture, To lure, To hook, To dupe, To unveil, To bare, To capture, To bait, To seduce, To ensnare

When Falstaff is exposed to all:

To make sport of, To mock, To embarrass, To Prove, To josh, To joke, To torment, To tickle, To humiliate, To vindicate, To exonerate, To taunt

Mistress Ford’s final words...a request for all to be forgiven of the FAT Knight:

To mend, To heal, To right, To forgive, To reconcile, To pardon, To repair, To settle, To love  
(Because LOVE conquers all!)

October 12, 2002-I have to take a break. Not from this show, but from school. I have got to fortify myself. I have never been so consumed with work. World without end work! Just an hour to rest my weary head and I must get back to it. I have got to do something that is not required of me by job or University or I will be of no use to anyone. Graduate studies are not like undergraduate studies in the least. This seems more like boot camp. I cannot come home and

pour a bowl of cereal without feeling immediately guilty if I am not at the same time reading some required text or writing or memorizing a scene, sonnet, monologue or the like.

That being said...I was reading Joseph Papp's *Shakespeare ALIVE!* And found a delightful story in the last chapter. Apparently, some time in the 1840s a traveling band of Shakespearian actors were attacked by a band of Seminole Indians who robbed them of their goods. The Indians were allegedly arrested wearing the costumes of Othello, Hamlet, and Julius Caesar. I find that story to be insanely charming. I think I'll write a play about it!

October 13, 2002-What a treasure chest this weekend has turned out to be. My love and I made a Grand find for lunch...a little New Orleans café called Jokamo's. We shared a shrimp po-boy and a roast beef po-boy & a side of gumbo. It made me feel like I was back home...Zydeco music playing, Barq's root beer on tap and Zap's potato chips! Afterwards we went to a little spiritual bookstore called the Spiral Circle where my love told me to pick out a present for myself. I got sandalwood oil which I tested in a hot bath immediately when we got home. Took an hour to relax and then off together to the SoulFire dinner theatre to do a production of *Tony N Tina's Wedding*. After the show the cast gathered and did Karaoke and drank wine. The night winded down and I headed home with my love for conversation and commiseration on our stressful weeks. We lit candles, dimmed the lights and listened to every song on the new Dave Matthews album we'd bought. He played guitar and made up blues songs as I sat laughing and lounging luxuriously on the futon we'd pulled to the floor.

He fell asleep in the curve of my body and slept the whole night through peacefully for the first time in weeks. I'd be amiss to claim that my heart did not swell a bit...as though I somehow gave him serenity to rest without waking as he has for so long now.

There is a saying I have taped to my computer that I try to think of as often as I can. I have no idea who wrote it but it instructs us each to "*Delight in the immense blessing that is your life.*" I thought of that as I listened to the sound of my lover breathing and the feel of his heart beating against my back. I do hope that the intimacy of that moment isn't compromised because it made me think of the theatre as I drifted off to sleep. This, I thought, is exactly what must be in us as actors. We must take note of our lives. We must weave memories not just out of images or words we file away...but of our senses. We must be wholly present in the moments of our lives. We must feel the breath of our lover wash in waves against our skin, we must breathe in the sent of the room, the candles, and the smell of perfume on a pillow...we must feel the breeze waft in through the curtains. We must hear the night teeming with frogs and crickets. We *must* use all of our senses. As a human it wakes our souls and grants us riches regardless of financial wealth. As actors it trains us to be fully in the moment on the stage. Living life on the surface will cause an actor to create characters of superficial worth. There is an old saying that one must live life...that it is not a rehearsal. For non-actors that may be true, but for actors this is false. Life is the most profound rehearsal of all. Life is where we draw our art from. This does not mean that for an actor life is cheap...on the contrary, life is the very thing that brings richness to our experience as humans and it is *that* richness that gives us a well from which to draw from in the creating of our characters.

I have much to learn as an actor and I have much to unlearn. I am nowhere close to being a master of this craft. I have however been blessed with a staggeringly rich life. In the short time I have walked this earth I have been exposed to beauties and pains of which I am humbly grateful for. There has been no dearth of passion, adventure, love, darkness, spirit or of wild journeys. I am blessed. And I needed this weekend to remind me of that. I'd forgotten how important it is for me to use all of my five senses...I guess that is an easy thing to do when work takes up such a colossal part of your day to day. I'm inspired to get back to rehearsals. And...tomorrow I begin my fast!

October 15, 2002-Tonight's self-appointed homework is to list adjectives...to describe what dwells within Mistress Ford's heart at different times:

Strong, independent, restless, bored, mischievous, chaste, virtuous, scheming, playful, intelligent, unfulfilled, monogamous, flirty, jovial, tempestuous, fed up, well bred, attractive, poised, controlled, calm, witty, lively, a spitfire, capable, creative, inventive, committed, humorous, smart, responsible, collaborative, persuading, flattering, enticing, gossipy, insatiable, strong willed, sneaky, non-submissive, saucy, sharp, dependable, faithful, romantic, scheming, supportive, wealthy, well-read, statuesque, graceful, jaded, amusing, clever, steady, yearning, unsatisfied, competitive, matter-of-fact, flip, resourceful, crafty, suggestive, curious, take-charge, sensible, jaunty, bold, spirited, temperamental, annoyed, spunky, practical, sensual, pleasant, take-charge, unabashed, confidant, reasonable, lively, prankster, upright, brazen, unashamed, unpretentious, straight-forward, logical, realistic, respectable, amusing.

I guess I have a few contradictions here, huh? Ah well, I don't know anyone who doesn't.

October 17, 2002-I read in a book by Wesley Van Tassel entitled *Clues To Acting Shakespeare* that many people tackle character study before they tackle language study and that when doing Shakespeare that is a recipe for disaster. Many people go to town deciding the inns and outs of their characters before delving into what it is that is being said. I never thought about that but the danger of preparing in that order makes clear sense to me. No serious self respecting actor would ever attempt to start making character choices before reading the play. With Shakespeare the language is heightened & so merely reading the script without delving into the patterns, the imagery, and meaning of the words can be quite harmful. I think that is an important thing to teach fledgling Shakespeare students. Do not cozy up to your script wondering how you might go about playing a character, cozy up like a detective and first find out what the language is doing and what action that language implies. If not, it would be easy to blunder into the embarrassing mistake of deciding *how* you will say your lines prior to having a real understanding of what you are actually saying. It is frightening to think how often that is probably done...especially on college stages! Van Tassel says that your first task is to discover what you are saying and your second task is to use your voice well. There is a fabulous quote by the author that reads: "If you are not willing to learn the skills, avoid Shakespeare, spare the audience the boredom, spare yourself the bad acting, and don't insult the author."

I think that if I ever teach Shakespeare, and I hope I some day that I do, that I will frighten my students with that quote on the first day of class!



October 19, 2002-I noticed in rehearsals this week, while sitting against the wall waiting to enter as the “traveling acting troupe” at the opening of the show, that we’ve inadvertently worked a rather Brechtian convention in by beginning the show as actors coming into a new space to put on a *show* for the audience. We’re setting the stage to let the audience know not to be sucked into the reality of the play. We even use a mock stage manager to enter during the curtain speech and measure the stage, count the audience, and check the playing areas. The forward motion of the play is interrupted twice right at the start of the show. An actor rushes in after “arriving late.” Once the disturbance he causes by his tardy entrance is quelled and the play resumes, the forward motion is once again stopped immediately by that same actor who has apparently *forgotten* which play he was doing and has begun the prologue for *Romeo and Juliet*. The idea is pretty interesting to me. I think I’ll delve into it further.

October 23, 2002-It has always been a curious thing for me...watching romances stir through the course of a rehearsal process. Ryan and Annie seem to have taken quite a shine to each other. Coy smiles and playful glances dart back and forth. Inter-cast romances have always been an issue that seems to illicit conflicting ideas between people.

In most places of business employees are discouraged from sharing relationships. The rollercoaster of emotions that issue forth from budding love affairs can be quite distracting. If the love affair is quite good, the rosy emotions and rising passions between the lovers often tempt the two from their duties. On the other hand, if the relationship sours and takes a turn for the worse, the quarrels, jealousies and sorrows that result often tear the two from their work as well.

The theatre is no regular place of business, however. Here we walk lines that cannot even be seen by the human eye. The demands of this ethereal art does not fit into a standard operating procedure manual...no neat and exhaustive employee handbook can be drawn up for an actor because an actor's job description shifts and morphs from character to character and from stage to stage. And so...it stands to reason that the question of the appropriateness of inter-cast lovers is one that must be tested on a case by case basis.

In this particular case I find the romance in question to be a help rather than a hindrance. Annie is fresh to the stage comparatively speaking. She is quite young in age, in life experience, and in stage experience. A true and new affection blossoming between the actors gives depth to her well to pull from on stage.

Shakespeare once was quoted as having said that the true purpose of the theatre is to hold a mirror up to nature. What could be more convenient than not having to even walk outside to find the nature to which the mirror is to be held?

October 26, 2002-Perhaps I should be ashamed to say this, but I have found it impossible to put together a character analysis for Mistress Ford that isn't nearly completely created from conjecture. I have been diligent. I have scoured each scene and highlighted each remark spoken about my character whether by herself or other characters. I can find details about her present situation, but there is next to nothing to lead me to her past, her family life, her education, her schooling, her likes, dislikes. I took the character analysis template that I have used since undergrad and I began as I always do, by filling out only those questions which I could answer

resolutely from the material given to me through the script. What I ended up with was a nearly blank document. I am accustomed to filling in blanks here and there...creating details which I gather from the information the playwright has given me. I have never in my life, however, come up with so few facts after mining a script. And I could understand this being the case if the role I was playing was an incidental one, but Mistress Ford is one of the title characters. I've since tried to sit and knit together a created character analysis, but I keep coming up feeling silly...as though I'm trying to help Shakespeare write. I would never presume to be so skilled. Very frustrating.

October 28, 2002-I read some interesting stuff in Joseph Papp's book entitled *Shakespeare Alive!* About superstitions and I've found some fun stuff that seems to fit in with this show. For instance, there a number of supernatural elements in the show...we've got fairies, Herne the hunter, sprites, and even talk of the devil. The old woman of Brainford, who my husband thinks is a witch, evokes a most violent response in him. First off, you get the information that he has forbidden her to be in our home even though she is the aunt of our maid. Secondly, you see him fly into a rage and beat Falstaff because he mistakes him for the old woman. Granted, his temper was high because of his belief that his wife was cheating on him, but Mistress Ford says before he even arrives home that if he sees Falstaff in the guise of the old woman he'll beat her. Obviously the man is prey to some pretty hefty superstitions. And from what I read in Joseph Papp's book, he was certainly no exception. Old or unaesthetic men and women were constantly being accused of witchcraft. Anyway, I've got an eye to the script looking for supernatural elements. I imagine Master Ford is unbearably superstitious which I assume, would drive the rational Mistress Ford absolutely mad.

November 1, 2002-“Is it Halloween YET?!” Well, maybe the question wasn’t exactly in keeping with the Elizabethan theme but it was one that was whispered furtively back and forth between Mistress Ford and Mistress Page at each and every halt in the rehearsal last night. After all, we had a night of revelry planned that involved a group of four of us dressing up like Catholic schoolgirls and running around downtown Orlando like fools. In fact, we were donning our plaid skirts beneath our long rehearsal skirts and my hair was already up in pigtails. I could say that we planned the outing in the interest of forging a bond between us to help our characters find the friendship they display but that would be a lie. The fact is that I already enjoy Lara’s company. I guess that is a bonus for us. I find it interesting to learn of situations where actors who despise each other must play friends or lovers. I guess in those situations one is called to *act* a little harder. It seems to me that Lara Mainard *is* the character that she plays. She carries many of Mistress Page’s traits within her inherently. Knowing her, it isn’t difficult at all to imagine the good spirited gossiping and silly fun-loving shenanigans that go on between the merry wives.

There is a scene not written into the script which I am certain takes place between Mistress Ford and Mistress Page. Something about Lara’s imitation last night of the fat knight when he is ensconced behind the curtain trying not to be discovered made me think of it. During the scene she puffed out her cheeks and galumphed around like Falstaff during the line where she shouts out how she hopes the fat knight not to be in the house. It dawned on me later that after the calming from the near catastrophe of Ford’s actual arrival during Falstaff’s visit, the two wives undoubtedly amused themselves thoroughly by recounting the outrageous series of events to one another in private. I am certain that Mistress Ford regaled Mistress Page with all the lurid details of Falstaff’s amorous pursuit and there was probably much imitation of the knight by both

parties. That imagined scene is one that I plan to take on as part of Mistress Ford's experience. I think it serves as a lovely example of the merriment shared between the women and will help to bolster the knowing smiles and "inside joke" spirit of their relationship.

November 3, 2002-I picked up a dog-eared copy of a book by one of my favorite authors entitled *Anam Cara* from a shelf in my room this afternoon just before rehearsals and thumbed through it. The book was written by John O'Donohue, an Irish professor of Philosophy and Theology. Though the subject matter does not revolve around acting per se, I strongly urge anyone with a love for acting, directing, or writing to sit down and read it. I have purchased countless copies and distributed them to friends throughout the years. I have since read a number of his books but *Anam Cara* was the first. It was also the first book I ever found myself unable to read without scribbling in the margins, highlighting passages, and taking notes from. His writing has inspired me to write monologues, sketch outlines for plays, and to create stories and children's books, it has caused me to sit and compose a ten page letter to my parents thanking them for my life and upbringing, and it has sent me to look up poems by Pablo Neruda, sonnets of the bard, mythology, songs, and snatches of writings by Rabindranath Tagore.

I'm not sure why I picked up the book, but it fell open to a page streaked like so many others with a yellow highlighter. The section marked spoke of the human face. I had marked the passage originally because I thought that it was something that all actors should recognize and honor. In the passage O'Donohue talks about how each of us as individuals carry within us an inner world unlike any others. Within our being we house very specific fears, desires, prejudices, dreams and beliefs. An entire world of likes and dislikes, thoughts and ideas, humor, rage,

forgiveness, and curiosity boils within us. This inner world is one that can be truly known to none other than the individual. The human face however is the frontier...the place where our inner world meets the outer world. This is an incredibly important thing for the actor to understand. The exposed face is the gateway to the world within.

I took that thought to rehearsals with me this evening. I confess that it turned me into a voyeur. I watched everybody...actors, our director, the stage manager, teachers I passed in the hall. Strange how much we take each others faces for granted. We tend to look at each other without truly looking I think.

I witnessed a lot more vulnerability than I usually do...perhaps because I was looking with eyes that were open to the fact that the faces they beheld were the thresholds to the souls and worlds within. I watched Annie and Ryan pretend to speak nonchalantly to each other during a break. The vulnerability and the timid affection were almost palpable. They seemed so young at love, so eager to please while being painfully self-conscious and trying failingly not to seem too eager. I then doubled my vision, strange as it may sound, and looked not only with eyes focused on the thresholds of their faces, but also with the eyes of Mistress Ford. I watched them as if I was watching the daughter of my best friend who has found love for the very first time. That double vision led me to some new discoveries. I realized that I, as Mistress Ford, secretly disagree with Mistress Page's desire for her daughter to marry Doctor Caius. I see the love between Anne and Fenton and see that the love between them is true. I yearn for that love in my own marriage. Each time I see the two of them together my heart melts a little and when I discover with everyone else that Anne and Fenton have secretly been married I rejoice. I was there since

Anne's first day on this flat earth. She is the closest thing I have ever had to a child. Though the play offers no interaction between Anne and Mistress Ford there is a great history between them. Not to honor and own that would be to give superficial weight to these people. The end of the final act carries much joy for me.

I have struggled with this play a bit. The difficulty I have had is an awkward one to admit for I fear that it exposes a weakness in me. I have felt that many of the characters in *Merry Wives* lack the depth that is found in nearly all of Shakespeare's other plays. (Did I just say that out loud?!) This is a painful thing for me to own up in view of the fact that it is my responsibility as an actor to *find* the depth and complexity in these characters. Embarrassingly, I seem to have had lost sight of that until my double vision exercise this evening. Quite a valuable rehearsal it was today. I am glad to be back on track and endeavor to work feverishly to make up for any lost time my unawareness has caused.

At any rate, this evening's discovery has strangely brought me home to Mistress Ford and filled in some of the specifics that have eluded me thus far. It is such an immensely important thing to know how your character feels about each and every person he or she comes into contact with. Though I share not a word with Fenton or with Anne in the duration of the play, my feelings towards them and the actions they take must be precise and full.

November 5, 2002-A simple truth struck me this afternoon regarding my life. I realized that whenever I feel restless or dissatisfied, it is invariably because I feel a dearth in one of five areas of my life. I need to love, I need to take care of my body, I need to actively nurture my soul, I

need nature, and I need to act. Whenever I am unhappy I find that it is almost always because I have neglected one of those things. I guess this discovery isn't as simplistic as I at first thought. We search for a balance our whole lives through of health for our body, mind, heart, and soul. My five needs serve that same purpose. As for acting, I suppose that everyone has different methods of accomplishing in their lives what acting accomplishes for me. Why do I act? Now that is a question I am surprised to say I have never dialogued with anyone about. That can't be possible. I am sure that in the course of my life, that I have indeed spoken with fellow actors or with my parents or friends about what it is that motivates me to act. For the life of me, though, I cannot remember any discussion simply about that. Strange. What a vast subject to explore. I'm sure I could never even scratch the surface, but let me try.

There is something inside of me that is difficult to name. It has an energy of enormous proportion. When I witness the world's beauty, pain, mystery...when I feel the force of my own life...I find that I am taken by an overwhelming need to sing it aloud. I often write. I journal. Writing is an outlet that brings me release often. Acting, though, opens up my heart in a way nothing else ever can, aside maybe from dance on occasion. Acting opens up a faucet that keeps me from exploding. Acting keeps me from filling up past my limit. I am miserable without the stage. Truly. The stage is where I celebrate all that is dark and bright in my experience of this world. It is prayer and acknowledgement. I am blessed with every opportunity I have. I am blessed each role I am given, each monologue I speak, each scene that I share. I am blessed and I am exceedingly grateful. My gratitude is boundless. My good fortune is without end. I was born into a family that opened countless doors to creativity. I never had to fight to justify my passion. My parents nurture, feed, fuel and celebrate my art. I live in a free nation, uncensored and



allowed to speak at will. I have been educated by inspiring, impassioned and talented teachers, directors, artists and peers. I have a gift for what I do. I have much to learn, but I have a solid base of ability to build on. I was blessed with a form that allows me to do much of what I want to do. I have a huge well of life experience to pull from even though I am still relatively young.

What bliss. What fortune. What gifts I have been given. I am most humbly grateful for this life of mine. I pray that I can serve through this medium; I pray that I never cease to grow, and I pray that my eyes are always open to the blessings this path continues to bring me to.

November 7, 2002-Tonight was our very first full run-through of the show on stage. I am utterly exhausted. I got to UCF at 8:30 this morning, had class until 1pm, then got in my car and sped out to SoulFire and worked until 4pm. After work I dove into my car and sped back to UCF for a photo shoot. After the photo shoot we had a dress parade. After dress parade we rehearsed crossovers. After crossovers we rehearsed fight sequences and physical bits. And after fight call we started our full run-through of the show. It has been a fifteen hour work day thus far. I am dazed and drained. It has been a non-stop whirlwind and I am now curled up on my bed with leaden eyelids. I am half considering leaving the light on all night just so I don't have to get down off of this bed and shuffle over to turn off the lamp.

One week left before opening. We're going to be fine. Timing was a little off this evening because we are adjusting to having to actually climb stairs and open and close doors. We bumbled around the stage but I think we adapted splendidly all things considered. We need to work the entrance of Mistress Page and Ford at the top of the show but it will be easy to fix. I am

interested to see how Shakespeare goes over with a UCF audience. I think this is the first Shakespeare play to grace the stages of UCF. I am exceedingly proud to be a member of the cast of the first Shakespeare play at this school. And what more appropriate play to be premier than *Merry Wives*, a play of firsts itself? I read that *Merry Wives* was the first play ever to be set in Shakespeare's own modern-day Windsor. Prior to *Merry Wives of Windsor* all of Shakespeare's plays were set in foreign lands, or distant cities or in times past. *Merry Wives* was also the first play to be written almost entirely in prose.

Also, the very first performance of our production of the play will be November 14<sup>th</sup>, while the very first performance of the play ever to grace the stage was held November 4<sup>th</sup>.

Okay, I am no longer making sense. Time to put my merry butt to bed.

November 9, 2002-I stumbled across a book from the downtown library called *Shakespeare's Women* by Angela Pitt. In her chapter on the comedies, Pitt comments that the comedies of Shakespeare generally revolve around the idea that all difficulties can be overcome if the people involved could only come to a proper understanding of the situation they are in. This statement is absolutely true in the case of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

November 11, 2002-I found in rehearsals today that the Witch of Brainford scene has evolved into something new and interesting. I had been feeling a little off during the beating portion of the scene. I was thinking it was the blocking that had me feeling strange because I was pinioned in the stairwell area right on top of Mistress Page. Tonight a new vigor emerged that solved my awkwardness. I found a surge of energy brought on by an intense and insatiable red hot desire for

revenge. I was almost crazed with a thirst for violence when my husband began to beat the Fat Knight. Images of bear baiting came to mind. This also created a very nice bridge into the scene following that one where Mistress Page and I tell our husbands of our carryings on. I'd been feeling a bit disjointed there as well because of the lightning quick turnaround for Mistress Ford to have gone from bitterness and exasperation with Ford immediately into forgiveness and collaboration. Of course, the last scene of this play proves beyond a starved shadow of a doubt that Shakespeare was not terribly concerned with creating realistic causes and effects. Within four inches of dialogue on the page, Master Page and Mistress Page go from being furious and confused at the elopement of their daughter to a man neither approved of to complete forgiveness, acceptance and congratulatory love. Still, as an actor playing the part of one written into an unlikely turnaround, you must find a natural bridge somehow in order to make it seem real. I was completely at a loss for that bridge until my discovery this evening. When Master Ford hurled himself at the FAT witch I locked into his madness and fed off of it. Instead of feeling pinioned and inactive in the stairwell, I let Mistress Page be the force holding me back from leaping from the stairs to join in the beating. It brought to mind the scene from Quentin Tarrantino's film *Natural Born Killers* where Woody Harrelson's character helps Juliet Lewis' character kill her parents. The frenzy that she had when she jumps up and down howling and shrieking with delight was the same type of frenzy I found in Mistress Ford. Seeing him beat Falstaff riled me up. I was on my husband's side for the very first time in the course of events shown throughout the play. This allowed me to re-connect with him. He was no longer the enemy. We were on the same team...the anti-FAT knight team! This new ferocious energy also breathed new life into the dialogue Mistress Page and I shared before we confessed to our husbands. When I asked Mistress Page if we could in good conscience further pursue the night

with torments I was still bubbling over with the hyper-predatory energy my husband stirred in me with the beating. GOOD rehearsal tonight! I love how one little discovery can open up a world of new possibilities. I feel much better about that section. It was an epiphany.

Theatre is such a brilliant thing. My papa told me something about theatre once that has stuck with me all my life. He said that acting is like being in a room in a building with many floors. The more talented you are, the higher your story is. You begin on the floor, it is the lowest level in the room, but as you grow and experience new things, you rise higher. Hard work, exploration, improvement and discoveries raise you higher and higher in the room of your talent. Eventually you will reach the ceiling and you can go no further...you have reached the height of your ability on that level.

It is my opinion that many actors look down around them once they've reached the ceiling and remain there...content to be at the top looking down at the others who are still trying to climb. Some actors keep working though. They pay no heed to the fact that their face is pressed to the ceiling and they seemingly have no higher to go. Eventually that actor will stumble upon a treasure. An epiphany will come to him. Maybe he will discover something in a scene that opens up doors throughout the script, maybe he'll hear something differently one night in rehearsals and a new wave of understanding will wash upon his shore wiping the clutter away and leaving behind pearls...maybe he'll just be walking down the street one afternoon and see something so human in a stranger that his concept of the character he's playing sheds its walls and comes into a new light. That actor will then be shot upwards...past the ceiling and into a whole new room one story up from where he was. In that new room he is on the floor, but the floor there is an

honorable place to be. It is above the ceiling where he once was stuck. He has a whole room to conquer. And it never stops.

I desire to be the actor who never stops at the ceiling. I desire to be kind enough to myself to allow myself to recognize and enjoy my growth but still wise enough to know that the ceiling is only the threshold of what I have yet to achieve.

November 12, 2002-Chris Hall was killed in a car accident this weekend. He was my childhood friend, son of my father's closest friend. He is gone. His new wife is a widow. He was my age. He had sandy brown hair and a devilish beautiful grin. Gentle and strong. When I was younger I used to think we should have been married. Beautiful boy, sweet boy. His father Tom will bury him and he and his mother will grieve him forever.

November 13, 2002-So much pain wedged unexpectedly into the final stages of a rehearsal process. Strange how things like this distance you from your day to day routine. I feel like I am watching myself walk through my hours. Part of me feels that this theatrical experience is just frivolous in the face of what is happening in the lives of people I care about, but the truth I feel in my heart goes adamantly against that. This stage we've made is a place of prayer...a place to honor all of God's creation. This is where we tell the stories we need to tell. My papa is taking this hard. No father should have to bury his son. He's watching his best friend do it. It isn't the natural order of things. I spoke to my pa on the phone this afternoon. I sat on the floor crying and asked him what I could do. Live. That's all you can do. Enjoy, taste, savor. Just live. That's what he told me.

November 15, 2002-My traditional warm-up varies day to day depending on my mood and any special needs I have for the day but it generally revolves around the same rough outline. Before leaving my home, on the days I have time to go home between classes and call, I begin my pre-show regimen with relaxation exercises. There are a number of relaxation techniques that I like to choose from...some are more traditional performance type techniques and some I have tailored for myself from what I know makes me personally relax.

Today I chose an exercise that begins with me lying on the ground in a neutral "A" formation on my back with arms at my side. First I take a moment to get in touch with my breath. I take a few deep breaths making sure that I am breathing to my center using my diaphragm. I gently roll my head from side to side with eyes closed. When my breathing has fallen into a natural and even rhythm, I begin taking inventory of my body. I take note of how my skin feels on the floor. I notice where my body touches the ground and where it does not. I notice the alignment of my spine along the floor; I pay attention to the weight of my body sinking into the ground with the help of gravity. All the while I breathe deeply in through the nose and out through the mouth, making sure that my jaw is loose and slack.

Starting with my right foot I tense all the muscles there with all my might. I curl my toes and tense my ankle all the while keeping the rest of my body relaxed. I tense my right foot for seven full seconds and then I let the foot drop to the floor releasing the muscles and allowing the energy to just melt away. I imagine that the foot has turned to wax instantly and that the muscles just melt off my bones into the floor leaving only the clean skeleton behind. I then move to the left foot and repeat the entire process. I continue on with this, alternating from the right side to

the left side while moving up my entire body. From the feet I move up to the calves, then to the thighs, the buttocks, the abs, then the shoulders, the upper arms, the lower arms and finally the muscles in the face and neck. When I have completed all of this I then tense all the muscles in my body for a full ten seconds and then allow my whole body to just melt into the floor like hot wax. For just a few moments I do nothing but breathe, then I allow my head to rock lazily from right to left a few times and then let it settle comfortably in the center. Placing my hand on my diaphragm just below my bellybutton I allow just a drop of sound to originate from the diaphragm and release it in a barely formed “huh.” I repeat this a few times graduating the sound to a “huh-huhhhh.” When I am ready I slowly roll over into a fetal position...generally I linger there for a little while, then I gradually come to a squatting position with my torso, arms and head drooping to the floor in a rag doll position. I then build my body up vertebrae by vertebrae taking special care to allow all muscles in my face, arms and upper body to remain perfectly limp until being built back up. This process is done extremely slowly. The very last thing to rise up is my head. I then roll my shoulders forward a few times, back a few times and then I raise them to my ears and place them properly back down. Finally I place my hand on my diaphragm just below my bellybutton and I breathe into my hand as I mentally take inventory of my alignment. Sometimes I do head rolls at this point but today I did not.

Another relaxation technique I use is one that begins in a neutral standing position. With feet shoulder width apart and knees unlocked, I stand paying close attention to my alignment. Gently I allow my right ear to drop to my right shoulder while maintaining spinal alignment. Without using any more effort than necessary, I keep my head in that relaxed, dropped position and take my right arm and gently drape it over the top of my head allowing the weight of my arm to

lengthen the stretch in my neck without craning my neck at all. After I feel the stretch settle, I gently take my left hand and reach towards the floor, elongating my neck further. After that stretch settles, I relax my left arm and remove my right arm without moving my head. Taking my right hand, I reach around and gently massage out any remaining tension from the exposed left side of my neck. When I am satisfied with that, I drop my right arm back to position and I allow my head to drift back to center, taking note of how my body seems lopsided. I repeat the entire process on the other side and then again by dropping my chin gently to my chest and massaging out the tension in my shoulders. This technique is one I not only use in my theatre work; it is a favorite for me in my battle against day to day stresses as well. It's the next best thing to having a personal masseuse; you just have to concentrate on the breath to maximize its effect.

November 18, 2002-Oh joyous day. This is our first day off in over two weeks. NO journaling today...just an announcement of gratitude at having a free day!

November 20, 2002-There is a little torture that we schedule into our runs on the UCF main stage...it is an ordeal we brook as a tradition. This distressing bit of misfortune, this vexing trial is what the box office and the student government refers to as *student night*. Student night is a performance which is set aside solely for the droves of students who unwillingly trudge to the theatre to watch UCF shows which they are required (forced) to see by their theatre survey class teachers. Mind you, some students who sign up for theatre survey do so because they endeavor to one day be theatre majors, many however sign up for the class because their prospective majors require them to complete a certain number of electives and they think that theatre survey would be an easy one to get through without having to put forth too terribly much effort.



I have never, in the almost twenty shows that I have done for this theatre, ever had a less enjoyable time performing on a student night than I did this evening. There were more people in the cast than in the audience. This is not the first time I have been on the losing end of the cast/audience ratio. One must take those opportunities to rise above unfortunate circumstances. One must rally the troops, bolster the spirit, rile up the cast & climb atop the make-up counter and shout to the heavens that the show MUST go on!

Well, the show did go on...and on...and on. It seemed as though we were swimming in wet cement. Dialogue came out as though from a record being played at the wrong sluggish speed. Lines were botched, scenes fell flat. The only thing that seemed to keep a rapid pace was the humor of the play which drained thoroughly and speedily away. At curtain call I peered out to the five or so audience members to see one of my students who in the course of the show had propped his head on his hand, closed his eyes and had begun drooling into his palm. I assume the ushers woke him and told him it was over before they locked up. For all I know he's still there at this very moment. If he isn't in class tomorrow I'll have someone open the theatre and look for him.

Ah well, tomorrow will be brilliant!

November 22, 2002-We found reprieve in last night's show! We had one of our best performances ever in my humble opinion. Of course there were a few in the cast who disagreed, but for me everything seemed to be right on task. The energy in the buck-basket scene with Falstaff was particularly good. We were awarded roaring laughter from the generous audience

and Falstaff responded so heartily that for a split second I feared I may be tossed over the basket when he was in hot pursuit to cuckold Master Ford.

This evening I think we were still riding the high of having such an attentive and vocal audience the night prior and so the more silent audience we had tonight brought some of our players down. The show felt identical to last night's in terms of energy and commitment from the cast, the audience just did not seem to be riding the same wave.

Right before Lara and I launched into our traditional behind-the-scenes quibble that drives us out to stage for the preparation scene for Falstaff we looked into each others eyes and made a vow to dedicate that evening's performance to each other. Our goal for the evening was to truly enjoy the friendship between Mistress Ford and Mistress Page and to crack each other up and have as much fun as we could in character. We shook hands in agreement to seal the deal, launched into our regular pre-scene banter, burst onto the stage and proceeded to have one of the most enjoyable shows yet. It was a hugely successful show in my opinion. I noticed things I'd never before noticed. And I took away the experience as a tool to use later in rehearsals for the shows I will do in the future. There was much knowing eye contact darting between the merry wives...more so than usual. There was a sport to the goings on. A spirit of liveliness, competition, and play grew to a new and more highly developed level.

November 23, 2002-The family that one builds during the course of a theatrical production is a very extraordinary and specific thing. In many ways it resembles a normal extended family unit...there are people you love and would endeavor to be close to even if you were not related to them, and then there are the people you are bound to somewhat against your will but whom

you try to love just because it is the best thing to do. I have grown quite fond of this particular creative family.

Witty banter and scathing but playful repartee never ceases to zing back and forth over the make-up wall. At least once every evening there is a gathering around Fenton back stage in his tights where merciless teasing ensues regarding his almost nonexistent rear end (He loves it). I will cherish many moments from my time spent with this cast. For instance, I will always remember the songs that erupted from our gatherings. Once we took to the theatre and our gatherings began to be held in the black-box, a few members of our cast took to playing the piano as we gathered for our pre-show warm-ups. Raucous renditions of “Lean on Me” were bellowed out. Other favorite tunes included “Stand by Me,” and my personal favorite, “Chantilly Lace.” I also have a wonderful souvenir from the show of video footage from a tape I made this week to send to my fabulous momma who is celebrating her birthday in a couple of days. I shot some back-stage documentary type footage for her that culminated in a huge full cast rendition of “*Happy Birthday To You*” which was highlighted by some memorized interpretive dance moves by Pistol and Nym. Have I mentioned how much I love this cast?

Though we have had a wild and entertaining time working on this show, much serious work has been done by everyone involved. There is an order to the pre-show preparations. Women are called in first as they need ample time to do their hair and make-up and to be corseted and dressed. Men are called later. Fifteen minutes or so prior to places the entire company is called together. As the cast gathers, individuals mill about doing vocal and physical warm-ups. Finally, we all gather for a brief full cast warm-up which gets everyone connected with one another.

Prior to the full cast warm-up, I do my own vocal and physical warm-up. It generally starts at home with my relaxation exercises which I wrote about earlier. When I am at the theatre, fully dressed and corseted, I like to get into my pre-show routine which begins usually with stretching. I am a huge advocate of stretching.

Movement in my corset is slightly limited, so spinal alignment is very important. I do rag doll rolls dropping my chin to my chest and allowing the weight of my head to pull me over loosely vertebrae by vertebrae. The corset dictates much of my success here. It isn't possible to drop the middle set of vertebrae, but I get the top and bottom ones in and then allow myself to hang with my fingers grazing the floor. I pay close attention to my knees and I keep them soft and unlocked. After hanging freely for a few seconds, I do some full body *elephant shrugs* and then I carefully I build myself back up. Shoulder rolls and head rolls follow. I then move on to my face. I tighten every muscle while tensing my shoulders, arms, legs, abdomen, including each every muscle from my head to my toes all at once. I allow myself to tense for a full count of eight and then I immediately release every muscle. I repeat this three times. At this point I am ready to move on to my jaw.

I take my index and middle fingers of both hands and massage deeply into the hinge on each side of my jaw in a circular motion for a few moments and then I reverse the direction. I then take the heel of each of my hands and wipe my jaw open starting at the top and finishing with a slack and open mouth. I complete my jaw work by firmly grasping my hands together in a closed praying position in front of me, dropping my jaw loosely with my tongue lolling naturally, and I vigorously shake my clasped hands allowing my jaw to shake uninhibited.

After this, I do the Linklater voiced “Buh-Duh-Guh-Duh” repetitions starting slowly and deliberately and picking up in tempo until the repetitions reach auction caller pace. I do approximately fifteen repetitions in all. After I get through these, I do the unvoiced version of the exercise using the “Puh-Tuh-Kuh-Tuh” repetitions in the same exact manner. I continue with an enunciation exercise I like to do where I run through the alphabet in groups of two. I start with well articulated repetitions of the first two letters of the alphabet. I do this four times. After the fourth repetition, I drop the first letter of the pair and pick up the next letter in the alphabet. I repeat this pair four times as well, dropping the first letter after the fourth repetition and picking up the next to start the process all over again. I do this at a rapid pace, paying careful attention to enunciation, projection, and breath support. The exercise begins like this...”A-B, A-B, A-B, A-B, B-C, B-C, B-C, B-C, C-D, C-D, C-D, C-D, D-E, D-E, D-E, D-E, E-F...” and so on, until getting to “Y-Z, Y-Z, Y-Z, Y-Z.” This has been part of my vocal warm-up for years.

There are a few tongue twisters and enunciation recitations I do after my alphabet exercise. Generally I run through the “Modern Major General” drill about three times in total. I try to be sure to wrap my mouth around the vowels and taste the consonants. I also use “She stood upon the balcony inexplicably mimicking him hiccupping and amicably welcoming him in.” I do this about four times through and I like to play with the delivery of it and change my intention each time. For instance, I may say it once as though I am scolding the listener. The next time I go through it, I may be letting the listener in on a shocking secret, or I may deliver it as though I’m Marilyn Monroe singing *Happy Birthday* to Kennedy. I switch it up every time.

Before I am done with my vocal warm-up, I do some Lessac *Y-Buzz* work. I begin with a sustained *Y-buzz* and move into a pulsing *Yeee-Yeee-Yeee*. When doing this, I begin focus on the resonating in my forehead, nasal bone, cheekbones and hard palate. I also like to do siren calls starting with a high pitched *Y-buzz* that slides down until it reaches my lowest register. Though I use this as a vocal warm-up, I often revisit it right before performances and just prior to auditions to soothe my nerves. I cannot express enough how very much I love having discovered the wonders of *Y-buzz*.

My vocal regimen is one that I do not skimp on. I have always been the type of actor who will warm up thoroughly regardless of whether or not my director requires it. Shakespeare, however, calls for especially diligent vocal work. Some of the words which actors are called on to speak in Shakespearian theatre are words we are not accustomed to speaking in modern day speech. Further more, Shakespearian text is something that modern day audiences are not used to hearing. It is imperative, therefore, that we use good diction, support our voices, project, and breathe properly.

November 24, 2002-And now the stage is bare. The set has been struck, the props and costumes are put away. Sometimes the process of closing a show is a little bittersweet, sometimes it is a relief. I don't feel sad at the close of this one but I wouldn't have traded the experience for the world. I had a grand time and will carry with me wonderful memories. I'm ready to do the next one! I'm ready to play Richard III!

June 27, 2004-Ok...please forgive me as I indulge myself here. The first entry of this journal was written on October 6, 2002. I love when things come full circle, and since this journal began with an entry explaining how the origin of my love for Shakespeare began with my father's introduction of him, I would like to close this journal with something that my father wrote in his column in the Bogalusa newspaper, *The Daily Sun*. Perhaps this display of his passion can help to explain my own. Here is his quote:

In an effort to inculcate my love of William Shakespeare's works in my readers, I've decided to close each weekly column with one of my favorite quotations. This may represent a complete thought or simply a brilliant turn of phrase. You will find that many are aphorisms still in use today. This first one might have been written to my wife.

Shakespeare quote for the week:

She is mine own,  
And I as rich in having such a jewel  
As twenty seas, if all their sand were pearl,  
The water nectar, and the rocks pure gold.

Two Gentlemen of Verona. Act ii. Sc. 4.

The above was published in the March 19<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Daily Sun*, printed in 2004. I just found it appropriate way to close all this talk of Shakespeare, family support, love for communication, and my history with the bard. Isn't Shakespeare, life, and love grand?! We are blessed who love this art!

### CHAPTER THREE: SCRIPT STUDY

The following scene by scene break-down of the script was inspired one evening late in the rehearsal process. We were at the stage where we were doing full run-throughs of the play. On the evening I speak of, I asked a fellow actor what they thought one of their lines meant. I thought that the line in question could imply a few different interpretations and was curious and interested as to what the actor had come up with. The actor, who shall remain nameless, smiled sheepishly, giggled and confessed that they had no idea what it was that they were saying.

Through the rest of the rehearsal process and through the end of the run I knew when that part came up that the actor was simply saying words with a chosen inflection that had nothing at all to do with that character's truth at that moment. I suspect that actor was not alone.

That evening, once I returned home from rehearsals after that initial confession, I decided to sit down and slowly go through the play sentence by sentence until I understood what each word meant. The act was not heroic; in fact it is shameful to think that any actor would tackle a Shakespeare play without combing through to find the meaning of each and every word. Sadly, I think that many actors do not. I had been guilty of sifting through my own language and the language of my scene partners, but not sitting down and translating those passages in which my character did not appear. I of course read through the play a number of times in its entirety and I did understand what happened from scene to scene, but there were exchanges within those scenes which were foreign to me.



It seems that the modern actor is often quite removed from the classical way of speech of Shakespeare's age. Words that were once commonplace, are now often found to be exotic, antiquated, lofty, or sometimes simply deceiving. In this modern day we sometimes look at words in Shakespeare's text and believe that because we recognize the words from modern language that the word carries the same modern day meaning that we are familiar with. This is not always the case. We often lose the richness of the text and overlook double meanings, play on words, and witty banter because we mistakenly take words at face value. Delving into the text is as necessary to the actor as breathing between lines when endeavoring to do Shakespeare's work.

It is often noted that each actor as an individual brings his own life experiences into the character that he or she plays. All of us have vastly different wells from which to pull. This is true not only in the performance of a role, but in the tackling of the text as well. Who we are greatly affects what we see in Shakespeare's works, just as who we are greatly affects how we look at certain paintings, works of art, even life itself. I am fortunate in my experiences with Shakespeare. It seems that there are a great deal of people who suffer from some sort of bard-phobia. I image it is something akin to the anxiety that grips me when I am asked to decipher mathematical equations on an aptitude exam. For me however, the fear of Shakespeare's work has been overwhelmed by my awe for Shakespeare's genius. I look at his complete works as if it were an ocean. I know there will never be a time when I will have experienced it in its entirety. I will never unearth all the treasures; I will never conquer it all, nor would I want to. I could spend my whole life immersed in it without glimpsing more than a fraction of its worth. That, I believe is

one of the reasons it is so attractive. There are sensory experiences bounding between the covers of his books that span the most exalted peaks and the most abject valleys of the human condition.

The following scene break-down began as a simple accounting of the *Merry Wives of Windsor* on a scene by scene basis. Those who are followers of Stanislavsky's methods may note that. Many of the "given circumstances" are mapped out in the following pages. Since its crude beginning I have revisited it throughout the rehearsal, production, and post-production stages. I have inserted notes of my own observations and ideas. I have pointed out possible origins of modern day slang. I have noted speech patterns, double meanings, and allusions to historical and mythological references. I have also attempted to note some of the instances where you can witness expressions through the dialogue of some of the commonly held political, domestic, social, and religious beliefs held by the people of Shakespeare's time. Lastly, I have mapped out in detail the scenes featuring my character and have inserted notes recording my thoughts, choices, struggles and ideas regarding specific actions and portions of the dialog. At the end of each scene, I have highlighted the material that will affect my character specifically, be it directly or indirectly.

I am not suggesting that this is an exhaustive listing of what is hidden in Shakespeare's work. I find the possibility of the idea laughable. I am simply listing some of the observations made by a modern day actor in her own journey through the text.

Act I, scene One: Act One, Scene One finds Shallow, a county justice of Windsor, lamenting injuries put upon him by the rogue Knight Sir John Falstaff and his men. Shallow and his cousin,

Slender, banter and blunder as they volley titles of importance to each other, scrambling Latin and making a mess of the rights of status Shallow claims by birth right.

Sir Hugh Evans, a local Parson with a staggeringly thick Welsh accent offers his assistance as a man of the cloth to bridge any discord between Shallow and Falstaff and proclaims his desire to help the two come to peace. Evans adds that it would be in the best interest of all if they would forget fighting and turn their attentions instead to arranging a marriage between Sir Slender and Anne Page, holder of a hefty dowry and daughter to George and Mistress Page.

Master Page enters and exchanges niceties with Shallow who compliments and prates, and with Slender who botches the genial exchange by insulting Page's dog. The conversation is interrupted by the entrance from the Page household of Sir Falstaff and his dodgy men Bardolf, Pistol, and Nym. Shallow immediately accuses Falstaff of beating his men, poaching his deer, and of breaking into his lodge. Falstaff admits his treachery but makes no move to make amends. A verbal fight erupts between Falstaff's men and Slender which is interrupted by the passing through of Mistress Page and Mistress Ford. Falstaff comes forth to kiss Mistress Ford's hand and extend her a pretty compliment. The women exit into the Page house and all of the men follow them to dine except for Shallow, Evans and Slender who linger behind. Slender's manservant, Simple, enters and is sent off. Shallow and Evans sound out Slender in hopes of discovering his willingness to marry Anne Page but Slender reassures them only that he will do his cousin Shallow's will in the matter. No declarations of possible love are even hinted at.

Scene one ends with a rather awkward exchange between Sir Slender and Anne Page. It is illustrated that not only is there no spark of desire or intrigue to bind them, but they seem to be unable to communicate smoothly on even a platonic level. Master Page calls them in and all enter the Page home to dine.

Pertinent Information: This scene sets the stage for Falstaff's "courtship" of the merry wives. It is important to note that the behavior Mistress Ford and Mistress Page display towards Sir Falstaff will be the very behavior he will justify pursuit of the married two upon. In this brief encounter with the fat knight, I felt it important to show no overt signs of interest. Keeping with this will highlight the absurdity of Falstaff's claims to his men in Act I, scene three that the wives showed lusty signs of interest in him. I speak more on this at the end of Act I, scene three.

Act I, scene two: This is a very short scene in which Sir Hugh bids Simple to deliver a letter to Mistress Quickly, servant of a Doctor Caius and acquaintance of Anne Page. Hugh explains that the letter is intended to enlist Mistress Quickly to lobby on Slender's behalf for Anne Page's hand in marriage.

Pertinent Information: I found this small scene to bear no direct influence over the portrayal of the character of Mistress Ford.

Act I, scene three: Scene three takes place in a room in the Garter Inn where Falstaff and his cronies have taken up temporary residence. Falstaff laments his poor financial position and announces his need to let loose some of his entourage to cut expenses. The host of the Garter

offers to hire on Bardolph to work his bar and all agree to the idea. Pistol balks at his crony's eagerness to stoop to such a low profession and Nym explains that Bardolph was begot in drink and therefore is at home with his new position.

Falstaff then unveils a plan to seduce both Mistress Ford and Mistress Page. He explains to his men that Mistress Ford is known to hold sway over her husband in regards to the household funds. He claims that he has noticed her giving supposed signs of interest in him and is convinced that she is desirous of an affair with him. He claims also that Mistress Page has given him hungry glances of lusty intent and as she also is said to hold the purse strings in her household, he intends to bed her as well. Falstaff confesses that he plans to make love to them both in the aim of conveying their estate riches from them and he orders the two men to deliver letters to them both.

Pistol and Nym steadfastly refuse to take part in the fat knight's devious scheme. Falstaff counters by taking the opportunity to dismiss them both from his charge and instead sends his young page, Robin, to do the deed of delivering the letters to the merry wives. After Falstaff takes his leave, Pistol and Nym vow to be revenged on the lascivious knight. The two men promise to disclose Falstaff's crooked plans to both husbands of the targeted wives and to incite Ford and Page to retaliate violently.

Pertinent Information: In this scene we discover that Falstaff's wooing will not be sincere. When gathering information from Falstaff's dialogue, it is important to note that much of what he says is an outright lie, therefore, when looking for clues from his speeches that may deliver insight

into the character of Mistress Ford, I had to pick and choose carefully what I would believe to be true. For instance, I decided early on that all of Falstaff's claims within this scene of my character's supposed interest in him were an outright lie. In the brief encounter I had with him in Act I, scene one, I accordingly showed absolutely no interest in him and was oblivious to his advances altogether. This changed in the course of rehearsals. I noticed by studying Falstaff's dialogue, especially the dialogue with Master "Brook," that he often takes small truths and blows them prosperously out of proportion. I took into account this penchant of Falstaff's for exaggeration, considered my character's disenchantment with her husband, coupled that with Falstaff's flowery greeting in Act I, scene one, and came up with the decision that my initial greeting with the knight should by no means be flirty, but should couch the slightest hint of appreciation at his apparent appreciation of me.

Another item I took from Falstaff's speeches in this scene was his claim that my character held the purse strings of her husband's wealth. Again, it is important to note that a claim of Falstaff's does not constitute a fact. I very briefly toyed with the idea that Falstaff was mistaken in his belief that I held sway over my husband. The story is much better served, however if his belief is true. Because there weren't enough facts to pluck directly from the script that would build Mistress Ford's past in any solid way, I decided to create her situation based on these lines of Falstaff's. In this case, I deemed Falstaff's information to be spot on. I decided that Mistress Ford does indeed hold the purse strings. Master Ford's erratic behavior throughout the course of the play bolstered that idea. Obviously the man is rash and given to fits. I cannot believe that my character would allow the man to be in charge of the household assets. I found further evidence to support the possibility of this being the case in Joseph Papp's book entitled *Shakespeare*

*Alive!*, where he explains that women often were the keepers of the books in upper-class homes. It isn't beyond the scope of believability that my character would be in charge of the bills and accounts.

Act I, scene four: Mistress Quickly, Simple, and Doctor Caius' manservant, Rugby, are gathered in front of the doctor's home. Quickly sends Rugby to be a lookout and to signal her if their master should be seen approaching. As Rugby stands watching, Simple delivers the letter from Hugh Evans asking Mistress Quickly to lobby on behalf of his friend Slender in the marriage he hopes to facilitate between Slender and Anne Page. The conversation is cut frantically short as Rugby heralds the approach of the ill-tempered Doctor Caius. In a panic, Mistress Quickly shuffles Simple into the doctor's closet to hide him but the doctor discovers him and becomes extremely agitated. Caius demands an explanation for Simple's behavior who responds that he was merely delivering a letter on behalf of Parson Hugh asking Mistress Quickly to aid him in arranging a marriage between Slender and Anne Page. In a fury Caius sends Rugby with a letter challenging Hugh Evans to a duel to the death since he is also in love with Anne Page. The doctor exits as Mistress Quickly assures him of Anne's love for him. As soon as Caius is gone, she promises Simple that she will do her best to sway Anne Slender's way.

After the men exit, the young Master Fenton approaches and greets Mistress Quickly warmly. He asks of Anne Page. Quickly declares to him that she alone knows of Anne's true feelings and that Anne's love belongs to him and him alone. Fenton gives Mistress Quickly money for her word that she will lend her voice on his behalf to Anne Page that he may win her hand in marriage.

The close of the scene finds Mistress Quickly alone on stage as she asserts that though Fenton be a true and honest gentleman, Anne's love was not his.

Pertinent Information: In the beginning of the rehearsal process I hadn't yet discovered that I had a strong opinion about Anne Page's marriage. As outlined in my journal, I gradually came to realize that I was a deep yet silent supporter of Anne and Fenton's courtship. Caius's short temper, which is displayed in this scene, gave me partial justification for this. My husband is apt to fly off the handle; I don't want this for Anne. Also, there is an English sentiment held commonly in this era that holds citizens of the country in suspicion of outsiders. It is against my own nature to be racist, but I believe that Mistress Ford, on a relatively small level, is put off by anyone who cannot speak "good" English. This is why Master Ford will say to Hugh in the last scene of the play, that he will never suspect me again of unfaithfulness until Hugh himself can woo me in good English. That line will become partially an inside joke between my husband and myself.

Act II, scene one: The act opens with Mistress Page pacing in front of her home and reading the love letter sent to her by the fat knight Falstaff. As she reads on, she fumes and rants at the indecency of the knight's overtures and is appalled to find that he mistook in her some sort of carnal interest. She vows to be revenged.

Mistress Ford enters hurriedly begging for advice. Mistress Page asks her what she is doing and tells her that she looks ill. Mistress Ford responds that she has proof to show to the contrary and waves a letter in the air. Mistress Ford asks her friend for council and then attempts to peak her



friend's interest by saying that she could be "knighted" if not for the fact that she'd have to go to Hell for the deed. She offers Mistress Page the letter she carries with her and tells her to read on to discover the manner in which she may be brought to such honor. As Mistress Page reads the letter, Mistress Ford fumes and raves at the indecency of the knight's overtures and is appalled to find that he mistook in her some sort of carnal interest for him. She marvels at the falsity of the previously convincing show of modesty that Falstaff postured and she vows to make retribution. She decides that the best method for revenge would be to lead him on until the sinful fire of lust melts him in his own grease. Mistress Page cuts Mistress Ford's rant short by revealing in amazement that the letter Falstaff sent to Mistress Ford is identical to the one he sent to her. The two examine both letters and deduce that only the name of Ford and Page differs in the otherwise indistinguishable letters.

Mistress Page declares that unless Falstaff knows some inner part of her which she herself was not acquainted with he would never have deigned to "board her" in this fury. Mistress Ford quips that if "boarding" is the term they were using for what it truly was that Falstaff was hoping to do, she will make a point of keeping him above deck. Her friend responds in agreement and vows never to sea again if he should come beneath her hatches.

After this bawdy banter the two vow to be revenged upon the fat offender. Mistress Page offers up a plan to lead Falstaff on, carefully avoiding any possibility of having to reciprocate his lust, until he's stayed so long that he is forced to pawn his horses to the host of the Garter Inn.

Mistress Ford agrees to do anything to humiliate the greasy knight as long as it did not endanger their reputations. She goes on to marvel at how enraged her jealous husband would be if he knew

of the knight's overtures. At this, Mistress Page looks up to see that their husbands are both approaching. The two retire as Mistress Page remarks on how far her husband is from jealousy. Mistress Ford laments her husband's jealous humors and announces that she has the worse lot because of it.

Enter Ford, Page, Nym, and Pistol. The men split up and speak in pairs. Pistol speaks to Ford and Nym to Page. Both husbands are warned of Falstaff's impending plans to cuckold their wives. Ford responds to Pistol's caveat that he hopes the information to be false but Pistol counters that "hope" is a dog unfit for the hunt. This turn of phrase is likely the origin of the modern slang saying "that dog just don't hunt." Ford protests the idea of Falstaff's treachery further by pointing out that his wife is no spring chicken but his hopes are swiftly dashed again as Pistol explains that the fat knight's raging lust seeks out the old, the young, the rich, the poor, the high, and the low. He urges Ford to take action or to tuck tail like the mythological Prince Actaeon whom the goddess Diana turned into a stag, the stag being a horned symbol of cuckoldry. He urges Ford to be wary, to keep an eye out for mischievous goings on. At Pistol exits, Ford stands reeling in his jealousy.

Nym speaks on with Page, advising him to watch closely for dishonesty. Nym then exits and the two husbands are left mulling over their thoughts on the strange counsel they both just received. They react in diametric opposition. Page remarks on how affecting and mistaken his cautioning visitor is while Ford remarks on Pistol's integrity. Page says that he'll not believe a word of Nym's forewarning even though the town's priest calls him honest, while Ford vows to seek out Falstaff and come to the bottom of this suspicious behavior. The two are cut short by the

entrance of Mistress Page and Mistress Ford. Page and his wife share an affectionate greeting but Mistress Ford's warm salutation is met with hostility from her husband. Mistress Ford tells him that he's suffering from perverse conceits and asks her friend Mistress Page if she will accompany her in her exit. As the two leave, they spy Mistress Quickly and cunningly agree that she will serve as an excellent accomplice in the baiting of the fat knight. The women whisk Mistress Quickly into Page's home so that they may spend the hour enlisting her services.

Master Ford turns to Page to ask his advice on the warning given to them by Pistol and Nym. Page assures Ford that the two spoke falsely and that they were merely seeking revenge upon Falstaff for having been relieved from his service. Page laughs at the idea that Falstaff should attempt his wife and says that even if it were true he'd let his wife do as she wished. He expresses confidence that he'd meet with nothing more than scolding from her should he solicit her affections. Ford claims to trust his wife but adds that he detests the idea of letting her and Falstaff alone together. He asks of the fat knight's whereabouts and is told that he resides with his men at the Garter Inn. Page looks up to see the host of the Garter approaching and claims that the man must be drunk or have money in his pockets to be looking so merry.

The host and Shallow enter jovially and invite the two husbands to join them in some sport. They are on their way to a duel between Parson Hugh and Doctor Caius. The host has measured their weapons and in the interest of keeping them both from bodily danger has sent them to opposite spots to fight one another. Shallow boasts nostalgically that in his youth he was a master swordsman. Ford pulls the host aside and offers him a bottle of wine in return for access to the fat knight. He asks to be introduced as Master Brook for a jest and claims not to have any ill will

towards the knight. The host cheerfully agrees to grant him full access to Falstaff and promises to introduce him to the knight as Master Brook. He then invites the husbands once again to join them to make sport of Hugh and Caius. Page agrees and exits with Shallow and the host.

Ford remains behind and rebukes Page's naiveté. He notes that his own wife was with Falstaff at the Page's house and that he did not know what transpired there between them. He vows to disguise himself and visit Falstaff to get to the truth of the allegations of adultery and says that if he finds his wife innocent his labor isn't for naught and if he finds her false, his labor is well spent.

Pertinent Information: I call this scene my "Relationship" scene because within its pages lie many clues about the two most important relationships in my character's world; my relationship with Mistress Page, and my relationship with my husband. The strength of the friendship shared by the wives is illustrated beautifully in this scene. There is a charming *double-entendre* way of speaking that the two share. Though they are of an upper class, their speech is quite racy when the two are alone in each other's company. I have noted that this way of talking is absent entirely in the presence of others, though they may, behind closed doors, chat bawdily with Mistress Quickly. This suggests to me that Mistress Page and Mistress Ford are extremely comfortable with each other and that they serve to entertain each other more than any outsiders seem to. I harvested many clues as to my relationship with my husband in this scene as well. There is an obvious strain between the two. My character tries to reach out to him, but is quick to withdraw affection when he lashes out at her. This leads me to believe that he lashes out in jealousy or with a general bad temper often. My character is open with Mistress Page in her unhappiness.

The portion of this scene between my character and Mistress Page came to be one of my favorites in the show. I was blocked to enter through the audience right door at the back of the house and run to the stage bearing the letter I'd just gotten from Falstaff. At first I would wait outside the house door, listening for my cue and then run in, but as we progressed, I'd start running from the lower lobby so that I would be breathless at my arrival. I had a great deal of fun hitching up my skirts and bounding through the theatre. If I arrived too early for my cue, I'd do little laps in front of the box-office until it was time.

Act II, scene two: This scene takes place in a room at the Garter Inn and opens mid-argument between Falstaff and Pistol. Pistol has asked for a loan which Falstaff has refused viciously. The two fight as Falstaff claims to have endangered his honor by lying to all that Pistol was a man of good-standing. Pistol claims he did that only to get his fair share of what he pick-pocketed. Falstaff agrees and says he'll not offer his treachery gratis. Pistol exits as Mistress Quickly is admitted by Robin, Falstaff's Page.

Mistress Quickly flirts with Falstaff, revealing that she's not married when Falstaff greets her as "good wife." Quickly asks permission to have a word with him and is granted leave to do so. She baits Falstaff by speaking of Mistress Ford. She mentions her name and then cuts her news short by asking Falstaff to step closer for privacy. She begins to speak further but cuts short her divulging to once again ask Falstaff to come nearer. He assures her that only his own people could hear and bids her continue. Mistress Quickly then proceeds to tease Falstaff by waging on about Mistress Ford's qualities. She tells him how the letter he sent her put her into a tizzy. She drones on about how droves of high ranking, noble, attractive men have wooed her without

response. She explains that men have ceaselessly flocked to Mistress Ford, offering gifts of the highest quality, only to be turned away without so much as a wink. Quickly interjects that she herself was even offered a sum of money that very day, but Like Mistress Ford turned the love seeking gifts away.

Falstaff impatiently bids her to come to the point and flatters her by calling her “good she-Mercury” in hopes that she will emulate the mythic messenger of Jove’s who was known for his unmatched speed. Mistress Quickly gratifies his request and promptly reveals to him that Mistress Ford read the letter he sent to her and desires his company between the hours of ten and eleven when her husband is scheduled to be away from home. She warns Falstaff that Mistress Ford’s happiness is much abused by her husband’s seething jealousies. Falstaff vows to meet her at the appointed time.

Before her exit, Mistress Quickly further seduces Falstaff with yet another message sent to him, this one by Mistress Page. Quickly praises Mistress Page’s modesty and virtue but adds that though her husband is seldom out of the house, she hopes that there will be a time soon that the two may meet in private. She claims never to have seen the woman so desiring of a man and says that she suspects Falstaff to have charms sine he is powerful enough to sway the hearts of such chaste women. The flattered Falstaff replies that other than his good looks he holds no charms at all. He asks if the two women know of each others love for him and Quickly assures him that the idea is laughable. She goes on to say that Mistress Page has requested that Falstaff send his little page between them so that they may communicate without alerting her husband who favors the modest messenger. Mistress Quickly and the page exit as Bardolph enters to announce the arrival

of a man by the name of Master Brook who wishes to be seen. Bardolph tells Falstaff that the visitor has brought an offering of wine as a gift and Falstaff replies that any Brook overflowing with gifts of liquor are welcome.

Ford enters in disguise and apologizes to Falstaff for approaching him with so little warning. Falstaff excuses him and sends the servant away so the two may talk. Ford announces that he comes not to charge Falstaff but admits instead that he has a lot of money which has emboldened him to approach Falstaff and ask his assistance. He quips that when money goes before a person doors tend to open. Falstaff agrees and urges his visitor to speak on. Ford uses a promise of money to lure Falstaff into his service. He claims to have a bag of money too heavy to lug about and invites Falstaff to help bear the heavy load by taking all of it or half. Falstaff graciously accepts the offer and inquires as to how he may come to gain rights to do so. Ford promises to divulge this to him but first asks the fat knight to not look too harshly upon him as he will have to make known his faults in order to clue him into his plans.

Ford then confesses that he is in love with Mistress Ford. He claims to have lavished her with many gifts and to have even spent a fortune paying off people close to her in the interest of finding out from them what type of presents she'd best like. He tells fat Falstaff that though he has pursued her with vigor, she has never given him so much as a promise of satisfaction. He claims that she uses the excellence of her honor to shield his advances.

He then goes on to lavishly compliment the knight's reputation. He crowns him as being a gentleman of the highest breeding and one unmatched among men. He claims that no other man

could sway Mistress Ford from her husband and offers him more and more money if he will but make war against Mistress Ford's virtue. When Falstaff balks at being asked to conquer the very prize "Master Brook" is seeking, Ford explains that the woman's one defense is her honesty. Ford claims that if Falstaff sullies her righteousness, she will be forced to give into the advances she has for so long spurned in the name of chastity. Falstaff heartily agrees to the challenge. He divulges that he already has a scheduled secret appointment with the woman between the hour of ten and eleven when her green-eyed scoundrel of a husband is away from home. The disguised Ford asks Falstaff if he knows Master Ford. Falstaff replies that he can hang. He says that he doesn't know him but he knows that he is rich and jealous and a cuckold. He vows to use Mistress Ford as the key to her husband's treasury. When Ford snaps that he wish that Falstaff knew what Ford looked like so that he could avoid him, Falstaff unleashed a diatribe against the man he unwittingly is speaking to. He calls Ford a low-class scoundrel and boasts that he will awe him with his cudgel. He threatens to upset his stile and promises Master "Brook" that he will have sex with Ford's wife.

Falstaff exits and Master Ford is left alone to seethe in his anger. Ford reels at Falstaff's impudence. He calls the man an Epicurian rascal. He exclaims at how valid his jealousy is. He laments the misery of having a false woman as a wife. He obsesses over the idea of his bed being abused, his fortunes being molested and his reputation being gnawed upon. He fumes at the title of cuckold being thrust upon him. He sneers at Page's foolish trust in his own wife and claims that he would rather trust a Flemish man with his butter, a Welsh man with his cheese, an Irish man with his booze, or a thief to walk his prized horse than to trust his wife with herself. Ford



vows to catch the two red handed before the wicked act so that he may condemn his wife, get revenge on the fat knight, and laugh at Page's naiveté.

Pertinent Information: Lies, Lies, Lies! This scene is so crammed with lies that fishing out truths to build a character on is a treacherous undertaking. Quickly lies, Falstaff lies, and my husband lies. Quickly, who is there at my request, is obviously doing my bidding in her talk of my many spurned would-be lovers. I had to decide whether she was exaggerating or lying outright about my suitors. Since I found no hints at all to support her claims, I decided that the accounts of my pursuers are entirely unfounded. I imagine that Mistres Page and Quickly and I had a ball conjuring the stories up, though. I imagine the talk got a little bawdy too.

My husband's willingness in this to throw himself without hesitation into a deceptive role to find out about my actions instead of coming to me personally gives me much insight into our marriage. There is a large lack of trust between us. Neither of us feels comfortable coming to each other the way a married couple should. We both seem more at home being completely deceptive. Interestingly, neither one of us are being unfaithful and if we would simply communicate our truths, there would be no conflict between us at all. I read in Angela Pitt's book entitled *Shakespeare's Women*, that almost all of Shakespeare's plays revolve around this theme. Worlds are thrown out of balance by some disturbance and the balance cannot be re-established until all parties are open in their communication of what is going on. I was floored when I read that because it holds true for every Shakespeare plot I know of, and it definitely holds true here in this script. People disguise themselves, deceive, and hide, but all is well the moment everything is out in the open. The rift between my husband and I is healed immediately

when we tell him of our abusing of Falstaff and explain the letter, Anne and Fenton are instantly forgiven the moment they explain that they snuck away and got married, Hugh and Caius forgive each other and the duel is called off at once the moment the host explains that he tricked the two into meeting at separate locations. This concept holds true in Shakespeare's comedies as well as his tragedies the only difference is that in the tragedies, everything *could* have been solved by open communication, but was not. If Romeo had gotten the letter, he would not have killed himself, if Othello had known the truth, Desdemona would not have been murdered. In the comedies, however, truth does set everyone free. And so it seems to me that what Shakespeare is saying in this comedy is that truth really does set us free and love really does conquer all. Flipping through my complete works, I find this to be true of many, if not all of his comedies.

Act II, scene three: Doctor Caius is discovered pacing and fuming in Windsor Park where he was told to meet Hugh Evans for the duel. He rages at the Priest's cowardice and tells his servant Rugby that the yellow Hugh did well not to show his face for he would have doubtless been killed. He orders Rugby to pick up his rapier so that he may show him exactly how he would have killed Parson Hugh had he shown up. Rugby claims not to know how to fence and is saved from having to face off with the irate doctor by the timely entrance of the Host, Shallow, Page, and Slender. The Host claims that they have all arrived to witness the doctor's valiant fighting. The Host makes up nonsensical titles of heroism which he bestows on the confused French doctor. This section of the script is rich with illustrations of the fact that foreigners were not exactly celebrated during Shakespeare's time. French immigrants often faced higher taxes and petty regulations not placed upon English citizens such as ridiculously elevated rent, curfews, and excessive taxes. Though the exchanges between Caius and Host show evidence of the

Englishman's propensity towards harassing foreigners, it is done in good jest. The Host tricks Caius into bellowing that he has just as much mock-water as the absent Hugh Evans and he dupes him into adding that he insists on being clapper-clawed by Evans!

Shallow points out that Evans is the wiser of the two would-be duelers for having not shown up for the fight. He explains that because the doctor is a curer of bodies and the priest is a curer of souls, a fight between the two would contradict their very professions. Page puffs Shallow up by mentioning that though he is a man of peace, he once was a valiant fighter. Shallow responds fervently that his finger itches at the sight of a drawn sword and that though he is peaceful, a fire still stirs within him.

Host quietly commands Shallow, Slender and Page to go through the town to Frogmore where he secretly told Evans to appear for the duel. He bids them find what mood the Parson is in and wait for him there as he tricks the doctor into accompanying him there as well. The men agree and exit and the host invites Caius to follow him in the ruse of going to meet Anne Page at a country estate where she was supposedly scheduled to dine.

Pertinent Information: I found this scene to bear no direct influence over the portrayal of the character of Mistress Ford.

Act III, scene one: Sir Hugh Evans sits quaking in fear as he awaits the tardy arrival of Caius to Frogmore where the host told him the duel was to take place. As Evans sings nervously, weapon in hand, Master Page, Slender and Shallow enter and tell him of an angry man nearby looking for

a duel. Believing it to be Caius, Evans hurls accusations upon the absent doctor and calls him a coward for not showing up to the duel he challenged him to.

Doctor Caius then enters into the scene followed by the host of the Garter and by his servant Rugby. It is revealed to both men that the host has secretly sent both Caius and Evans to different locations for the duel and announces that since they did indeed both show up to where they thought the duel was to be held, they therefore both held their honors in tact. The host suggests further that as men of spiritual and bodily healing, they were both indispensable and should resolve their differences verbally and not through bloodshed. All agree and exit amicably. The doctor and the parson vow to befriend each other in the interest of revenging themselves on the host of the garter for making a mockery of them. Throughout the scene Slender interjects cries of Anne Page's sweetness as though for the benefit of Master Page.

Pertinent Information: This scene bears no direct influence on the playing of my character, but I'd like to point out that the scene does exhibit an instance of the theory in action which I described earlier regarding the fact that open communication leads directly to a solving of all previous problems. As soon as the host explains that the two men have been tricked and that they both therefore hold their honor and should resolve all hatred previously harbored, the men forgive each other and call off the duel. This immediate forgiveness will be mirrored when the rift between my husband and I is instantly healed after all is brought out into the open regarding Falstaff, his letters, and our attempts at revenge upon the fat knight.

Act III, scene two: On a street in Windsor, Master Ford runs into Mistress Page who is on her way with Falstaff's young servant to see Mistress Ford. Mistress Page tells Ford that she is on her way to see his wife. He responds that they would marry if their husbands died. She assures him that they would marry but it would be to two new husbands and not to each other. Ford asks where the young servant boy in her company came from and she feigns ignorance, asking Robin to remind her of his master's name. The boy replies that his master is Falstaff. The two leave as Ford is left behind seething.

Ford again marvels at Page's ignorance, vows to catch his own wife in her folly, promises to dominate Falstaff, to torture his wife, and to strip Mistress Page of her false mask of modesty. The guarantee of Falstaff's unlawful presence in his home guarantees him to be praised for his acts rather than mocked for false jealousy. Just as he turns towards his house, Page, Shallow, Slender, Caius, Evans, Rugby and Host enter the scene. Ford bids them to accompany him to his home and promises good cheer. Slender and Shallow beg off to attend a meeting with Mistress Anne Page. Page admits that his consent belongs to Slender while his wife's belongs to Caius. The Host enquires as to his feelings towards Fenton as Anne's suitor and Page responds that the young youth held company with the wild Prince and therefore was unsuitable. Shallow and Slender exit, Caius sends Rugby home, and the Host leaves for the Inn to drink wine with Falstaff. The rest of the men follow Ford to his house where he promises to show them a monster.

Pertinent Information: Master Ford's comment about the two wives marrying each other once again drives home the fact that the two women are extremely close. The depth of friendship

between the wives cannot be questioned. Any hinting at a romantic relationship between the ladies is swiftly done away with as Mistress Page assures Ford that they would indeed marry...two other men.

Act III, scene three: Within the house of Ford, Mistress Ford and Mistress Page hurry to prepare for the arrival of Falstaff. Mistress Ford calls her servants in; They enter with a large buck basket. At the urging of Mistress Page, she gives them their instructions once more. They are told come immediately when summoned, take the basket on their shoulders without appearing to strain, and take it quickly to the bleacher in Datchet mead and there empty it in a muddy ditch nearby the Thames riverside. The servants exit and Robin comes in to announce Falstaff's arrival by the back door. Mistress Page demands to know if Robin has kept his secrecy about her presence. He swears that he has. Satisfied, she goes to hide herself. Mistress Ford tells her friend not to miss her entrance cue. Mistress Page suggests she hiss her should she forget.

As Mistress Page exits, Mistress Ford remarks at how they shall teach the obese scoundrel to recognize the difference between women of honor and adulteresses. Falstaff enters oozing compliments. The following dialogue ensues:

Falstaff: Have I *caught* thee, my *heavenly jewel*?

Why, now let me die, for I have lived long

Enough; this is the period of my ambition: O

This blessed hour!

Mistress Ford: O sweet Sir John!

Falstaff: Mistress Ford, I cannot cog, I cannot

Prate, Mistress Ford. Now shall I sin in my wish.

I would thy husband were dead; I'll speak it

Before the best lord, I would make thee my lady.

Mistress Ford: I you lady, Sir John! Alas, I should

be a pitiful lady.

Falstaff: Let the court of France show me such

Another; I see how thine eye would emulate the

Diamond: thou hast the right arched bent of the

Brow, that becomes the ship-tire, the tire-val-

iant, or any tire of Venetian admittance.

Mistress Ford: A plain kerchief, Sir John: my brows

Become nothing else; nor that well neither.

Falstaff: Thou art a traitor to say so: thou wouldst

Make an absolute courtier; and the firm fixture

Of thy foot would give an excellent motion to

thy gait, in a semi-circled farthingale. I see

what thou wert, if fortune thy foe were not: nature

is thy friend. Come, thou canst not hide it.

Mistress Ford: Believe me, there's no such thing in me.

Falstaff: What made me love thee? Let that persuade thee.

Come, I cannot cog, and say thou art this

and that, like many of these lipping hawthorn

buds that come like women in men's apparel,  
and smell like Buckler's-bury in simple-time; I  
cannot: but I love thee; none but thee; and thou deservest it.

Mistress Ford: Do not betray me, sir; I fear you

Love Mistress Page.

Falstaff: Thou mightst as well say I love to walk

By the counter-gate; which is as hateful to me  
as the reek of a lime-kiln.

Mistress Ford: Well, heaven knows how I love

You; and you shall one day find it.

Falstaff: Keep in that mind; I'll deserve it.

Mistress Ford: Nay, I must tell you, so you do, or

I could not be in that mind.

At this point in the dialogue Robin enters announcing the frantic arrival of Mistress Page.

Pertinent Information: As this scene is quite long, and contains much information affecting the character of Mistress Ford, I have interjected commentary throughout the break-down of the scene in favor of saving it for the end.

Looking back over this last section of dialogue we begin with Falstaff's entrance. The second line in his first bit of dialogue may or may not refer to the European use of the word "die" which is sometimes used as another word for "orgasm." In France, which Falstaff later makes mention



of, the orgasm is sometimes called “le petit mort” which translates into “the little death.” Though I have found nothing in my research to suggest this play on words, I decided to use it in the scene during production and react as though my character did catch the double meaning. The choice helped me to find some of the incensed disgust Mistress Ford was merrily hiding from her fat pursuer.

Falstaff goes on to compliment the arch of Mistress Ford’s brow, claiming that it would be becoming in conjunction with a ship-tire which is a fanciful hat made into the shape of a ship, a tire-valiant which is also a type of whimsical hat, or with any other clothing of Venetian origin. During Shakespeare’s time, it was quite rare for a civilian to be well traveled. Only the upper crust could afford the luxury of trekking about. With this knowledge, it seems that Falstaff is most likely mentioning his familiarity with France and Venice as a subtle means of displaying his rich feathers the way a peacock would do for his mate. I chose to have my Mistress Ford notice his strutting and “name” dropping. It undoubtedly is something she laughed to Mistress Page about after the scene took place and the two were safe somewhere in only each others company.

When Mistress Ford denies her brow to be anything special, Falstaff calls her a traitor to say so and woos on claiming that she would make an absolute courtier. In our university version, the line where Falstaff compliments her fine formed foot was cut. Hopefully the cut was made for the sake of trimming the run-time and not because my feet failed to convincingly illicit a compliment, though many may argue this to be true. As an actress I find humor in the fact that Falstaff claims he cannot cog and cannot prate, yet he spends almost the entire scene doing so. I

chose to allow Mistress Ford to find incensed humor in this as well. Again, this is something I am sure Mistress Ford and Mistress Page gossiped over later that evening.

After Falstaff finishes claiming to Mistress Ford that he cannot smooth-talk like the droves of affected unmanly suitors who posture and fawn, he professes his love for none but she. Falstaff reels in faux incredulity at Mistress Ford's curt response that she fears he loves Mistress Page. He claims that thought to be as likely as saying he loves to walk by a prison gate which is as loathsome to him as the stench of a furnace where stones are burned to lime.

In her response to this, Mistress Ford's cunning can be witnessed in her choice of words. Rather than to lie and claim that she loves him too, she says that *heaven knows* how she loves him. Meaning in truth that heaven knows she loves him not at all. She adds that one day Falstaff will know how she loves as well. Here she equivocates and leads Falstaff into the trap of believing that she does love him while she is really saying that she despises him and that though only heaven can see it now, one day Falstaff will be privy to the truth of her heart. Falstaff is blind to the fact that her heart's desire is not for him but for revenge. Humorously, Falstaff urges her to keep in that mindset and says that he will one day deserve her feelings for him. Mistress Ford assures him that he already deserves her feelings for him or else she'd not house them within her. At this, Robin enters and announces the arrival of Mistress Page who appears to be in great distress. Mistress Ford commends Falstaff for moving to hide himself behind a curtain, saying that Mistress Page is a very tattling woman.

Mistress Page enters in mock alarm and the two wives play out the scene they rehearsed for the abuse of the fat knight. Mistress Ford repeatedly pretends to feign innocence as Mistress Page

bellows woefully that she is a fallen woman. Mistress Page then announces that Ford is fast on his way to search the house with all the officers of Windsor for an adulterer he heard had snuck into his home to prey on his wife in his absence. Mistress Ford whispers urgently for her friend to speak more loudly which she does for the benefit of the obese knight. She reiterates that Ford is indeed on his way with a search party and tells Mistress Ford that if she is innocent then all is well, but if she is hiding a lover she must pull herself together and somehow remove him from the house immediately. Here we witness Mistress Ford taking control of the situation. Mistress Ford directs her friend and takes charge. At first I took this as a sign that Mistress Ford was the more take-charge of the two. I felt this to be true because of her leadership role during both of Falstaff's visits to her home. A later discovery led me to find that Mistress Page was taking control in the scenes concerning the marriage of her daughter. This caused me to come to the conclusion that the power exchange between the women is pretty balanced.

Coming back to the scene, Mistress Ford confesses her guest, claims to fear more for his safety than her honor, and declares that she'd rather give up a thousand pounds than have him within the house. Mistress Page urges her to leave off pining and to take action immediately. She points out the large buck basket which the servants had left and suggests that if her lover be of reasonable mass, he may hide himself in the basket and be carried to the laundry station by the river or to the bleaching station in Datchet mead. Mistress Ford says he's too big to fit in the basket but Falstaff who has been eavesdropping in alarm behind the curtain leaps out and shrieks compliance with the plan. As he flings himself towards the buck basket Mistress Page confronts him with the two identical love letters, asking if he indeed wrote both of them. As Mistress Ford calls in her servants, Falstaff ducks into the foul basket and whispers to Mistress Page that he

loves her and none but her. Just as the servants begin to trudge towards the door, Ford enters with his entourage and demands to know where they are going with the buck basket. The wives reel in shock as the false story they created for Falstaff's terror unfolds unexpectedly before them. Mistress Ford steps in and asks why he is concerned with where the laundry is going. She tells him not to concern himself with buck-washing. This sends him into a fury as he explodes with the following dialog:

Ford: Buck? I would I could wash myself of  
The buck! Buck, buck, buck? Ay, buck; I warrant  
You, buck; and of the season too; It shall appear.

Here Ford uses a play on words. While Mistress Ford refers to buck as laundry, Ford refers to buck as a male deer, a symbol of cuckoldry. He then calls to the buck within his house and remarks that it appears to be of the season, a remark which no doubt implies that it is rutting season. Ford offers his guests keys to search his house high and low. Page regards the behavior as unstable and urges his friend to be calm and stop making a fool of himself. Ford does not heed the advice but urges the group to search with him upstairs. As they all exit after Ford, Evans remarks that the man is crazed with irrational jealousies and Caius agrees saying that men don't act that way in France. Finally the wives are left alone.

Mistress Page remarks that the shaming of Falstaff turned out to be twice as entertaining as they had planned. Mistress Ford agrees and states that she doesn't know whether she enjoyed Falstaff's demise or her husband's tricking better. In our production, the two lines following that

were omitted and Mistress Ford picked up the scene by saying that it seemed somehow that her husband had some special inkling that the Fat knight was hiding within his home. Never before had she seen him take his jealousies to such an extent. Mistress Page announces that she will try to find out if this is true or not and she suggests that the two ladies may make further sport of Falstaff. Just before the re-entry of Master Ford, Sir Hugh, and Caius, Mistress Ford suggests that they send Mistress Quickly to Falstaff to beg pardon for the offenses he endured and lure him back for more abuse. It is agreed that they will set another meeting the following day at eight o'clock.

At Ford's entrance, he is overheard by the wives in saying that the knave perhaps bragged at something he could not do. The women take note of the comment. Mistress Ford agrees with his wife that he has "used her well." Mistress Ford calls on heaven to make him better than his thoughts, her husband turns her phrase into a prayer by responding with an "amen." This exchange between husband and wife is interrupted by their guests who take turn reprimanding Ford for his wild behavior. Mistress Page tells Ford that he wrongs himself by acting so foolishly. Hugh exclaims that he himself in trouble at heaven's gate if any person remains hidden in the house after their intense search and Caius agrees with him. Finally Master Page steps in and scolds his friend soundly. Page exclaims that the man should be ashamed and goes on to say that he wouldn't take on Ford's erratic behavior for all the wealth of Windsor Castle. Both Evans and Caius point out Mistress Ford's exemplary honesty and virtue. The barrage is cut short by Ford himself who invites them all in for dinner as he promised. He ushers the women in, begging their pardon all the way.

Page lingers a moment to confer with the men. He urges them to dinner and says they'll mock Ford for his spleen. He invites the men to join him for breakfast and hunting in the morning. Hugh replies that if there is one present, he'll make two. Caius, in his thick accent says that if there be two present, he will make the "turd." The scene ends with Hugh and Caius reminding each other to snub the Host of the Garter for mistreating them earlier.

Act III, scene four: The young lovers, Fenton and Anne enter and discuss, nearly in verse, their predicament. Fenton tells Anne that he cannot win her father's favor. He claims that his case against him is that he comes from too great a birth and that his squandering of his fortune has led him to seek Page's fortune through Anne. He cites also his riotous past and his wild societies and goes on to say that Anne's father believes Fenton unable to see Anne as anything other than property. When Anne suggests that her father may be correct, Fenton replies honestly that her wealth was the first motive that caused him to woo her, but that the richness of her personality soon outshone the riches of her purse. He vows his love true.

Shallow, Quickly, and Slender enter. Shallow orders Quickly to interrupt the lovers so that Slender may woo for himself. Quickly agrees to risk it and does so. Anne sees Slender and confides to Fenton that he is her father's choice in suitor. She laments the unsavory favorite and claims that the man's ill features are only attractive to her father because of the money he brings. Quickly pulls Fenton aside as Shallow tried desperately to make up for his nephew's lack of charm by speaking for him each time he is addressed by fair Anne. Anne finally asks Shallow to allow Slender to woo for himself. When Shallow steps aside, Anne asks what Slender's sill is. He quips that he's far too healthy to have made up his will. And corrects him by asking what his

will with her is, and he confesses that he really has no interest in her aside from the fact that his Uncle and Master Page want to arrange a marriage between them. He claims that she can get more information on the status of things from her father who enters with Mistress Page. Page reprimands Fenton for still hanging about his house when he has already told him that his daughter will not be permitted to wed him. He rebukes all of Fenton's attempts to speak with him and to drive the point home, he calls Slender his son as he invites him into his home. Fenton attempts to gain the support of Mistress Page and Anne begs her mother not to marry her to the fool, Slender. Mistress Page promises to marry her to a better husband, and to Anne's dismay, sites Caius as the intended match. Mistress Page tells Fenton that she is neither his friend nor his enemy. She then urges her daughter inside before provoking her father's anger. Fenton and Quickly are left alone on stage. Fenton gives Quickly a ring to deliver to his beloved, he pays her for her trouble, and then he leaves. Quickly blathers on for a spell and proclaims her desire for each of the three suitors to win Anne. She vows to support them all in their pursuit as she has promised them each individually to do. She then hurries off to do Mistress Ford and Mistress Page's bidding concerning the further abuse of the fat knight.

Pertinent Information: Though my character is not present in this scene, I do believe that much of the information that comes from it is information which gets back to her. I have come to feel strongly that Mistress Ford cares a great deal for Anne Page. Anne is the first child of my very best friend. I think that my marriage would be much better if I had a child of my own, but since I do not, I think that I dote on Anne and love her as though she were my own. This belief connects me to much of what happens in the sub-plots of the play which I would otherwise be completely unaffected by. I do think Anne confides in her love of Fenton with me.

Act III, scene five: Falstaff is found at the top of the scene in the Garter Inn, lamenting his recent ill fortune. He scorns being thrown into the Thames like a sack of unwanted parts from a butcher's shop and he vows that if he ever plays victim to another such trick, he will take out his brains and have them buttered and given to a stray dog as a New Year's treat. He points out that his immense size makes him quite prone to sinking and that if the shore hadn't been shallow he would have plummeted to his death and as drowning tends to bloat a man; he would have swelled to mountainous proportions.

Mistress Quickly enters begging pardon on Mistress Ford's behalf. Falstaff claims to have had enough of Ford. Quickly tells Falstaff that Mistress Ford laments the misfortunate events that took place which barred them from their tryst. Quickly soon succeeds in luring Falstaff to another covert meeting with Mistress Ford between the hours of eight and nine while her husband is away bird hunting. Quickly exits and Ford enters disguised as Master Brook. Falstaff reports to Brook that he was nearly caught red-handed by Mistress Ford's shifty cuckold of a husband. He exaggerates his success with Mistress Ford and claims to have embraced her, kissed her, and "spoken the prologue of their comedy" just before being interrupted by Ford and his entourage. He explains that Mistress Page warned then of Ford's imminent approach. Falstaff then moans on about having been crammed into a buck basket with the foulest of linens and carried in scathing heat through town only to be tossed into the river with the dirty laundry. The furious Ford tells Falstaff to cease pursuit of Mistress Ford but Falstaff assures him he'll not be swayed from his aim. He confesses that he has already been propositioned to meet Mistress Ford again that morning between the hour of eight and nine while her husband is bird hunting. Falstaff



leaves for his rendezvous and the disguised Ford is left alone reeling in his amazement. He vows to catch the adulterous pair in the act for once and for all.

Pertinent Information: Here we have another scene packed with lies and it seems to follow the same outline as Act II, scene two. Falstaff Lies, Quickly lies, and my husband lies. Falstaff exaggerates the extent of his success with me by saying that he embraced and kissed me and he goes on to claim that the *prologue had been spoken* between us, a claim that in my opinion refers to foreplay having been indulged in. This false information certainly fuels my husband's fire and I will undoubtedly feel the fury of his energy because of it.

Act IV, scene one: Mistress Quickly walks with Mistress Page as she hurries to drop her son off at school on her way to rendezvous with Mistress Ford for the second shaming of Falstaff. Hugh Evans enters and informs Mistress Page that school has been dismissed for the day and Mistress Page informs him that her husband believes that their son is learning nothing at all in school. She asks him to quiz her son to prove to her otherwise. Hugh and the boy William trade kitschy witticisms which Quickly repeatedly interrupts with bawdy double entendres.

Pertinent Information: It is important to note that while this scene is taking place, I am at the mercy of Falstaff's visit unaided by the hidden presence of my friend. I am having to fend for myself at this very moment. The longer Hugh, Quickly, and the child ramble on, the more danger I could be in.

Act IV, scene two: The following scene takes place in the home of Ford. Falstaff has already entered and is in the process of professing his forgiveness. Falstaff says that Mistress Ford's sorrow has chased away all his bitterness. Her zealous love for him motivates him to promise that her affections will be requited but before delivering he asks again if she is sure that her husband is safely away. Mistress Ford assures him that he is bird hunting. The two are then immediately interrupted by the approaching voice of Mistress Page. Mistress Ford urges Falstaff to hide once again behind the curtain and the merry wives collaborate once again to scare the fat knight into falsely believing that Ford is on his way.

Mistress Ford urges her friend to speak louder so that Falstaff can hear her. Mistress Page then goes on to pretend to warn her that her husband had gone mad again and is raving to Page that Falstaff was carried out in a buck basket last time he searched for him and that he is once again dishonestly in his home. She says that Ford has distracted Page and his company from their sport and has convinced them to return with him to search the house for Falstaff. Mistress Page responds in mock-confession that Falstaff is indeed within the house. Falstaff leaps terrified from his hiding place and asks if he may not escape the way he came in but Mistress Page warns him that Ford's brothers are guarding the door with pistols, ready to shoot any intruder who attempts to escape. Falstaff suggests a number of hiding places but Mistress Ford assures him that her husband will check each place. Mistress Page warns Falstaff that if he leaves as himself he is a dead man and suggests that he go out disguised. The two wives then trick Falstaff into agreeing to don the clothes of the maid's fat aunt from Brentford. Mistress Ford urges the fat knight to go up and put on the gown while she and Mistress Page find linen for his head. Once he is gone, Mistress Ford confides in her friend that she wishes her husband would find Falstaff dressed as

the fat woman of Brentford, as he believes her to be a witch and would surely beat “her” for entering his house after being forbidden to do so. Mistress Page warns that her husband really is on his way and that he speaks knowledge of the basket. Mistress Ford sends her up to help dress the rogue knight and stays behind to direct her men to carry out the bucking in her husband’s presence just as they did the last time. She then runs upstairs to help prepare Falstaff.

Enter Ford, Shallow, Caius, and Hugh Evans. Upon seeing the servants hurrying out with the buck basket Falstaff had previously been spirited away in, Ford demands the basket to be put down. He calls forth his wife and circles the basket, yelling for the man in the basket to come out. Mistress Page enters and tells him he’s gone mad and that he should be tied up. Evans shares the woman’s sentiments and states that Ford has turned into a lunatic. Shallow agrees. Master Ford agrees as well but is cut off from expounding on the subject by the entrance of his wife. Master Ford facetiously calls her virtuous, modest and true and asks her if he suspects wrongly of her infidelity. Mistress Ford replies that as heaven is her witness, he does. Ford then rips the top from the basket and confidently tears through the clothes to pluck the fat knight out. The crowd reprimands him for his madness and Hugh tells him to pray and cease his unfounded jealousies. Ford begs the entourage to search the house once more for his wife’s lover. Mistress Ford then calls Mistress Page to come down with the old woman so that her husband may search the chamber. When Ford asks what old woman she speaks of, she replies that it is the old woman of Brentford, their maid’s aunt. Ford unleashes his rage at the “old woman” and calls her a witch. Mistress Ford asks that the men keep him from striking the old woman but Ford beats her down the stairs and out of the door. Hugh remarks that the woman must have been a witch indeed for he saw a great beard beneath her kerchief. Ford ignores Hugh and urges his men to follow him

throughout the house in search for the hiding man. Page suggests that they humor Ford in his madness once more and they all exit to search the house as the wives are left again to revel in their victory. Mistress Page warrants that he beat Falstaff soundly but Mistress Ford suggests that by the mass, he did not. Mistress Ford asks if they should further Falstaff's abuse by Mistress Page feels that the lust has probably been beaten out of him and doubts that the fat knight would attempt them ever again. The two agree to tell their husbands at last of their deeds if nothing else but to put an end to Ford's ravings. They agree to be the inflictors should the husbands desire further punishment of Falstaff. Mistress Ford remarks that the two will probably have him publicly shamed and guesses that if they didn't have him publicly shamed, that the period of continuous revenge would be without end. Mistress Page suggests they go to their husbands while the matter was still hot.

Pertinent Information: This is a scene of high stakes. Since this scene takes place as the meeting between Mistress Ford and Falstaff is in progress, the stakes are already pretty high. Mistress Ford is alone. On the one hand, she must lead Falstaff on convincingly. On the other hand, she must remain chaste until Mistress Page arrives to save her. This is a tricky balance. She has two conflicting actions which she must balance expertly. On false step in either direction will lead to a dangerous situation. Keeping in mind the fact that Mistress Page is late to the meeting allows Mistress Ford to express a great relief when she finally does arrive. This relief may be peppered with aggravation at having been left alone with the lusty Falstaff. Again, Mistress Ford takes charge and directs Mistress Page in her delivery. It is important to honor the moments where the stakes are raised even higher. The next time this happens is when Falstaff has been sent upstairs and Mistress Page confesses that Ford really is on his way and really did know of Falstaff's

having been spirited away previously in the buck basket. The energy level is kicked up a notch as soon as this information is understood. There is quite a bit of adrenaline rushing here. The stakes are raised continuously throughout the scene and do not begin to dip until the moment Falstaff, disguised as the old woman, is *safely* out of the house.

Act IV, scene four: The merry wives enter with their husbands just after being told of the Falstaff shenanigans. Hugh comments on the women's good work. Mistress Page explains that the letters were sent to them both within a quarter of an hour. All is mended with Mistress Ford and her husband when Ford promises to allow her henceforth to do as she wishes, vowing to suspect the sun of being cold before suspecting her of unfaithfulness. Page tells Ford not to overdo his submission as much as he overdid his jealousy and suggests they get to the task of further punishing Falstaff. Evans suggests that after being thrown in the Thames and beaten as an old woman, the lust must surely have been drained from him but Mistress Ford suggests that they leave that to the women and it shall be done. The wives tell of their idea to lure him into meeting them at Herne's oak at midnight. An old tale tells of how Herne the hunter haunts Windsor Forrest with great ragged horns atop his head. The wives suggest that they dupe the fat knight into dressing in the specter's horned likeness and meet them in the woods. At the instant that they meet, Anne Page and a number of children will surround them dressed as fairies. The wives will flee, leaving Falstaff to be pinched and burned with tapers by the fairy's until he answers them in truth why he trespasses upon their fairy revelry. Upon his confession, the wives and husbands will make themselves known to Falstaff, remove his horns, and mock him home to Windsor. Evans offers to teach the children their parts and devises to dress like a sprite himself. Ford offers to buy the masks, Mistress Page suggests that Anne be dressed in a gown of white

and Page offers to go and buy the silk, quietly announcing that in that outfit, he will arrange that Slender steals her away to be wed. Ford suggests he go to Falstaff once more in the disguise of Brook to ensure he meets the ladies. AT the close of the scene, Mistress Page sends Mistress Ford to call on Falstaff while she calls on Caius to arrange that he steal Anne away at the fairy revelry.

Pertinent Information: This is what I call the Reversal Scene. Here we have a perfect example of all being righted at the moment of truthful communication. The wives confess and all is forgiven. Those looking for the type of modern day realistic character reactions one would expect in a man or woman of today's day and age will be looking for a long time. This immediate reversal, though unlikely in the real world, is total and unwavering. All anger is quelled, all jealousy is sloughed off, and all suspicions are buried. Love and trust rush boldly in to fill up the large and gaping holes that black emotions once filled. The wives and husbands are now on the same team. A spirit of camaraderie is instantly put on like a cape and worn with ease.

Act IV, scene five: At a room in the Garter Inn, the Host and Simple share a brief exchange. Simple announces that he is sent by Master Slender to speak with Falstaff. Host waves him up to Falstaff's quarters but Simple explains that he saw a fat woman ascend to the chamber and will wait until she comes back down since he has business with her. Alarmed that Falstaff may be being robbed, the Host calls out to Falstaff who answers back. The host calls out to inform Falstaff that Simple awaits the fat woman that went into his chamber. He urged the knight to send her down saying that his chambers are honorable. Falstaff enters and explains that the fat woman had already left. Simple confirms that it was the "wise woman" of Brentford and says

that his master, Slender, sent him to ask her if she could tell him if Nym still had a chain which he recently beguiled of him. Falstaff claims that he spoke with the woman on that very subject and that Nym had indeed stolen the chain. When Simple expresses his desire to have asked her other things as well, Falstaff threatens to murder him if he not be forthcoming with the subjects upon which he wished to enquire. Simple confesses that his master asked that he find out whether it was his fortune to have Mistress Anne Page as his own or not. Falstaff tells him to report to Slender that Anne would be his-or *not* and tells Simple to say the wise woman decreed it so. Simple exits to report back to his master. When the host enquires as to whether there really was a wise woman, Falstaff assures him that there was and that she taught him more than he'd ever known before, and instead of charging him for the lesson, he was paid for it instead.

Mistress Quickly enters and announces that she comes from the merry wives. Falstaff curses both parties and states that he has suffered more at the hands of the two women than any man could bear. Quickly claims that they have suffers equally and that Mistress Ford was even beaten black and blue by her husband so brutally that not even a white spot could be found on her body. Falstaff claims to have been beaten into all colors of the rainbow and says that if it were not for his sharp wit and ability to emulate the movements of the old woman of Brentford, thus fooling his pursuers, he'd never have survived. Quickly entreats Falstaff to allow her to speak privately with him in his chamber. They disappear behind closed doors.

Pertinent Information: Here we see Quickly telling lies at my bidding. The fact that the information she give is exaggerated gives yet another reminder that one must look carefully at the integrity of the character speaking when looking to other's dialogue to find clues about your

own character. On a humorous note, I made a type-o while writing the sentence “Falstaff curses both parties and states that he has suffered more at the hands of the two women than any man could bear.” I accidentally misspelled the word *hands*. When I went to use the auto-correct function on my keyboard, my computer suggested that I use the word *hinds*. I find that to be completely appropriate. Falstaff *did*, in essence suffer much at the hinds of Mistress Ford and Mistress Page. Of course, if he had not been so inappropriately pursuing our *hinds*, he’d not be in any trouble at all!

Act IV, scene six: In another room in the Garter Inn, Fenton entreats the Host to assist him in an urgent matter. Fenton tells of the gathering scheduled to take place between midnight and one around Herne’s Oak. He explains that Anne Page’s father has arranged that she be dressed in white so that Master Slender will recognize her and spirit her away to Eton to be married at once. He explains further that Anne’s mother has arranged for her to be dressed in green so that the doctor Caius will recognize her and steal her away to the deanery instead where a priest waits to marry them straight away. Though Anne consented secretly to follow both her parents’ wishes, she means to deceive them both and wishes to instead elope with Fenton. Fenton offers to pay the host one hundred pound in gold if he will arrange for a vicar to be present between the hour of midnight and one to marry the two in secret. The host agrees and Fenton exits.

Pertinent Information: I have no script based information to suggest this, but I have chosen to believe that my character knows of Anne and Fenton’s plan to elope. It is my belief that Anne confessed it to me and that I have promised to intervene on her behalf should her mother appear



unforgiving. I carry this secret within me when Mistress Page and I meet Caius and I carry it with me when we are witnessing the fairy attack on Falstaff by Herne's Oak as Anne runs away.

Act V, scene one: Falstaff and Mistress Quickly reappear from behind Falstaff's closed chamber doors, obviously having come to an agreement. Falstaff has agreed to the meeting and Quickly assures him that she will supply his horned costume. As Quickly exits, Mater Ford, disguised as Brook enters and Falstaff assures him that the matter of Mistress Ford would be taken care of that evening. He invites Brook to be present at Herne's oak at midnight and assures him that he will witness wonders. Falstaff tells him of how he had to escape lunatic Ford's home disguised as an old woman and was beaten harshly by the mad and jealous husband.

Pertinent Information: Yet again, we come across another scene packed with lies which seems to follow the same outline as the one in Act II, scene two. Falstaff lies, Quickly lies, and my husband lies. Motives are different here and my husband deceives on my behalf. We are finally on the same team.

Act V, scene two: In this brief scene, Slender explains to Shallow that he has spoken to Anne Page and that she has promised to come to him dressed in white. Slender will cry "mum" and she will reply "budget," and by that they will know each other. Shallow suggests that the white outfit should be enough for them to recognize each other by. The page urges the men to follow to the oak and claims that they will know the devil by his horns.

Pertinent Information: This short scene bears no direct impact on my character.

Act V, scene three: In this brief scene, the merry wives meet with Caius whom Mistress Page instructs in his elopement with her daughter. She tells him that he will recognize her by the green gown she wears and that when he sees his opportunity, he must take her by the hand and rush her straight to the deanery where they will immediately be wed. She shuffles the doctor off telling him that she and Mistress Ford must go alone into the park. Upon his exit, she comments that her husband will not be so amused at Falstaff's abuse as he will be angry at the marriage of their daughter to the doctor. Mistress Ford enquires as to Anne's whereabouts and is told that she and the fairy troupe are hidden in a pit close to Herne's oak with obscured tapers which they will present to the night in the instant Falstaff comes to meet them. The two revel in the prank they are preparing to pull. The following dialogue closes the scene:

Mistress Page: Against such lewdsters and their lechery,

Those that betray then do no treachery.

Mistress Ford: The hour draws on. To the oak, to the oak!

Pertinent Information: In the UCF production of this play, Lara Mainard and I swapped lines so that my character, Mistress Ford, spoke the rhyming couplet. In this scene, though I do not speak to Caius, I hold within my heart the knowledge that Anne will not be his. I find joy in this. I also find great joy in the collaborative effort going into tricking Falstaff one last time.

Act V, scene four: This brief scene consists only of Hugh's direction for the fairies to remember the parts they were taught and to follow him quickly to their hiding place.

**Pertinent Information:** This extremely short scene bears no direct impact on my character.

Act V, scene five: Falstaff enters, disguised in the horns of Herne the hunter, and speaks a lusty monologue to the gods. He calls on all hot blooded gods to assist him and reminds Jove that he once took the shape of a bull for Europa and reminds Jupiter that he once took the form of a swan for the love of Leda. He boasts that powerful love turns men into beasts and beasts into men. He brags that he is the fattest Windsor stag in the forest and asks that the gods send him a cool rut time so that he does not piss his tallow, or become lean, as deer sometimes do, because of the strain of rutting season.

The merry wives enter. Mistress Ford calls out to Falstaff, calling him her male deer. Falstaff replies calling her his doe with the black tail and embraces her lustily. She tells him that Mistress Page has come with her. He replies that cupid is a child of conscience and has made restitution for the woes he forced upon him earlier in his pursuit. He offers to divide himself equally among the ladies and cuckold both their husbands. At that instant, the fairies take their cue and begin to make a fearsome noise. The two wives cry out begging forgiveness of their sins and Falstaff remains frozen in fear. Hugh enters disguised as a satyr, leading on Quickly, Pistol, Anne Page, and a host of others all decked out and disguised as fairies. Mistress Quickly calls the fairy troupe together. Pistol silences them all and sends the fairy Cricket to leap down Windsor chimneys to pinch maids who have left dirty homes. Falstaff lays down hiding his face so that he'll not be put to death for spying on fairy business. Hugh orders Pede the fairy to pinch sleeping maids who have neglected their prayers and Quickly rallies a group of fairies to spread good luck to every sacred place in Windsor. Hugh begins to send all fairies to their posts but

stops them short, claiming to smell a man of middle earth. The group pretend to discover Falstaff for the first time and Quickly decrees that they hold a trial to determine his heart's nature. She suggests that they burn him with their tapers. If the man's heart be chaste the fire will leap back into the candle but if the fire burns him, it is the mark of a tainted heart. Falstaff cries out in pain as he is burned and the fairies surround him as they sing a song against lust, all the while continuing to burn him and pinch him soundly. During this song, Caius moves in and spirits away a fairy dressed in green, Slender spirits off a fairy dressed in white, and Fenton runs away with Anne Page. At the end of the song, the fairies run away and the merry wives and their husbands descend upon the quaking Falstaff. The following dialogue ensues:

Page: Nay, do not fly; I think we have watch'd you now;

Will none but Herne the Hunter serve thy turn?

Mistress Page: I pray you come; hold up the jest no higher:-

Now, good Sir John, how like you Windsor wives? See you these, husband? Do not these fair yokes become the forest better than the town?

Ford: Now, sir, who's a cuckold now? –Master Brook, Falstaff's a knave, a cuckoldy knave; here are his horns, Master Brook: and, Master Brook, he hath enjoyed nothing of Ford's but his buck-basket, his cudgel, and twenty pounds of money, which must be paid to Master Brook; his horses are arrested for it, Master Brook.

Mistress Ford: Sir John, we have had ill luck; we could never meet. I will never take you for my love again, but I will always count you my deer.

Falstaff: I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass.

In this small bit of dialogue, the wives and husbands revealed the truth of their intentions, explained their trickery, and brought Falstaff to an understanding of the jest. Hugh Evans reprimands Falstaff for his treachery and reprimands Ford for his jealousy. Ford vows never to mistrust his wife again until Hugh is able to woo her in good English. The group goes on to berate Falstaff soundly for believing that he could ever be the object of the merry wives' desires. Ford suggests Falstaff be brought to Windsor so that he be forced to pay back Master "Brook" the money he cozened but Mistress Ford instructs him to forgive the debt so that everyone may be friends once again. The revelry is cut short when Master Page invites Falstaff to his home to dine and celebrate his daughter's marriage in secret to Master Slender. Mistress Page corrects her husband telling him that Anne has been spirited off and Married to Caius. Slender enters howling and explains that he was tricked into running off with the postmaster's son who was disguised in the white gown Page told him to identify Anne by. Caius is close behind and enters furious that he was tricked into marrying a boy who was disguised in the green gown which Mistress Page told him to identify Anne by. The confusion is soon cleared by the entrance of Anne Page and Fenton who immediately begs pardon from the two irate parents and explains that the two were married and that the offense committed was a holy one and one that could not be broken. Master Page and Mistress Page forgive the newlyweds instantly and invite everyone to their home to feast and dance around a country fire. Master Ford closes the play with the following rhyming couplet:

Ford: To Master Brook you yet shall hold your word;

For he, tonight, shall lie with Mistress Ford.

**Pertinent Information:** This scene ties up all loose ends with a nice, neat bow. I find it interesting to note that this is the third “performance” the wives put on in the interest of leading Falstaff on and into a trap. The difference here is that the stress of being found out by their husbands is gone, however the stress of actually performing in front of an audience is added. Never before have there been witnesses hiding in the wings. The fairy act is a bit of magic. With my secret knowledge, the pageant is bittersweet...I am watching the child I’ve witnessed all her life, turn into a married woman. The baby bird is leaving her nest to make her own. Finally, the scene and the play are both wrapped up when all information is laid out on the table. The entire Falstaff debacle is brought to peace as soon as everyone unmask and pokes a little fun at the knight, and the problem of Anne Page’s competing suitors is instantly solved as the second Fenton explains the honorable reasons why they tricked Caius and Slender into running away with decoy Annes. Information set us all free and love really *did* conquer all!

## CHAPTER FOUR: APPROACH AND THEORY

We modern day actors approach Shakespeare as we do, not because it is the natural way to handle Shakespeare, and not because we are emulating the actors who were first to tackle his material, but because we have been trained to perform in a realistic, subtext-driven manner. In this Post-Stanislawsky, Post-Chekhovian era, we actors are instructed to investigate our scripts and our characters with detailed precision. We are expected to create a lengthy and thorough character analysis that probes into every conceivable nook and cranny of our character's psyche and past. In fact, every decade since Shakespeare's time, we have been made to change the way we look at and approach the playing of his works. Freud caused us to take heed of the complexity of the human condition and taught us not to take things at face value. Realism challenged the actor to do away with presentational acting and called on actors to emulate genuinely lifelike human behavior and to create a ways of speaking that would imitate the conversational tones of the common man. It wasn't until I came across a number of dead ends through my conventional modern acting approaches that I realized how very removed contemporary acting techniques have become from the classical theatre.

I approached my role by first reading through the script in a single setting. In my case, this was not actually the first time I had read *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Prior to auditions I had read the play at least once before. When auditions came along I read the play again in its entirety and went back to read all scenes which highlighted the wives a number of times. Upon landing the role, I did go back prior to our first rehearsal and sat down like a good student and read through from cover to cover. At this time I marked words and passages that I did not fully understand.

My general first impressions were that the script was not my favorite but that portions were fun, and that the entire thing was *much ado about nothing*. No strife came to matter in the end. Nobody's woes held any weight at the final curtain. After this first reading I moved on to my usual methods.

My first lesson in failure came about when I attempted to patch together a comprehensive character analysis for Mistress Ford. I scoured every scene for information, for clues. What I came up with was too flimsy. Nothing based solely in the script could tell me much of anything about my past. I knew nothing of my parents. Perhaps they were living, perhaps they were dead. I may or may not have had any siblings. I may or may not have been raised by my biological parents. In fact, there is no mention of my immediate family aside from my husband at all. Mistress Page has two children. I don't appear to have children, but even that fact isn't substantiated in the text. Perhaps I have a baby who is off with her wet nurse. Perhaps I had children who died. I may have a son who is at court. I may have a daughter who is married and has moved away. My education, my religion, my childhood rearing, my schooling or lack thereof...all of these specifics I found to be missing. I quickly came to realize that if I was going to harvest facts about my character, I would have to piece them together myself.

My next mode of attack was to look to the era to find out about my character. I read through many books looking for clues. My first area of research focused on the women of Shakespeare's time. I then looked to the religious, political, and economic climates of the era. Finally, I did specialized research and explored writing which documented the Elizabethan's penchant for superstitions, an area I imagined my husband to be a bit obsessive over. Armed with more



knowledge than could be listed in these pages, I headed back to my script, carrying with me a much deeper understanding of the Elizabethans that I'd previously dreamt of. I then attempted to use this awareness to help me put myself into the shoes of my character. Being raised under the influences of Stanislavsky, I attempted to make use of his "*Magic If*." This idea seemed to come crashing to ruins all around me as soon as I looked to the immediate reversals of attitude which came about throughout the action of the play. *If* I were Mistress Ford, and *if* my husband had subjected me to a lifetime of endless unfounded jealousies, how would I react when he claimed in an instant to have successfully had a complete reversal of attitude? As scripted, Mistress Ford forgives and forgets the moment her husband claims to. This occurrence is mimicked a number of times through various other characters. The seething hatred Ford holds for Falstaff is quelled totally and without question as soon as all information is out in the open. Caius and Hugh, who are both prepared to fight to the death in a duel, reverse their sentiments completely the very instant Host tells them to. All of the intertwined agendas involving Anne's hand in marriage are healed as if by magic by nothing weightier than the urging of Fenton who has stolen Anne away against the wishes of everyone involved. Here the *Magic If* holds no water based on my personal human experience. Again I came up empty handed.

One day, during the second week of the rehearsal process, I came upon a discovery which would cause me to research into an area I'd never planned to look into. The discovery came as I sat on the floor of the blue rehearsal room where we rehearsed prior to being allowed on the set. I remember sitting there with my back against the wall, watching the company prepare for the choreographed entrance that had been built for the top of the show when it hit me that what we were doing was inadvertently quite Brechtian in style. Instead of creating an illusion of reality,

we were beginning our production by showing the audience that we were actors. The forward motion of the play was stopped twice; we even made use of a mock stage manager to set the scene.

I began to research links between Shakespeare and Brecht and I soon discovered that I was not the first to make a connection between the two. Susan Forbes, professor of the Ohio University Theatre Department, stated in her essay presented at the 1998 annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, that a Brechtian approach to Shakespearian acting is much more appropriate than the modern methods most commonly used in University settings. In the following quote, Forbes explains the difficulties she witnessed through the rehearsal and performance processes of her own students:

In my teaching, I have discovered a wide chasm between the techniques of Stanislavsky and the theatricality of Shakespeare. My advanced students rely primarily upon Stanislavsky but when they attempt to apply the psycho-technique to the intricate wordplay of a Shakespearean text, the results are often muddy, boring, and repetitive. They seek to find, and thus sometimes create, subtext, psychological motivation, and detailed communication among people when it does not exist. The students have been trained to live truthfully under imaginary circumstances; to maintain a high degree of public solitude; and to create an imaginary circle that does not extend beyond the apron of the stage.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Forbes, P. 1

The process which Wells explains, having watched her own students trudge through, is the exact process I found myself muddling through. In my attempt to find the details I was used to hunting for in my characters, I was being forced to fabricate facts which held no textual basis. It had been a fruitless and frustrating task.

I went on to find record that Brecht himself re-wrote a number of Shakespearian plays, tailoring them to be more strongly representative of his own personal theories. Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* was re-written by Brecht and entitled *Round Heads and Pointed Heads*; the National Theatre earned fame for its Brechtian style production of *Richard III*; and *Coriolanus* was re-mastered and produced by Brecht under the title of *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*. My research led me to further discover that the Brecht/Shakespeare connection was not one-sided. Not only did Brecht use Shakespeare to test out *his* theatrical philosophies, but I found that many respected Shakespearian directors were using *Brecht's* conventions to enhance their own Shakespearian productions. Peter Brook's 1962 version of *King Lear* was said to have been one of the most talked about and influential productions of the play since the war. Brook's actors were thrust onto an almost bare stage, wearing only plain black leather clothing; they were free of illusionary costumes and scenery. The Brecht/Shakespeare pairing even found its way to the silver screen. Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* is decidedly Brechtian in its use of multi-media effects to highlight the strong social implications inherent in the script.

Bolstered by the newfound evidence that I was not alone in my belief that Brecht's methods held possible keys for the modern actor playing Shakespearian theatre, I went back to take a closer look at the Brechtian aspects specifically connected to our UCF production of *The Merry Wives*

of *Windsor*. The parallels I found fell into three main categories. First of all, Brecht made use of what is called the *Verfremdungs-efekt*, a technique whose name has been translated by American theatre practitioners into what we now refer to as the *Alienation Effect*. Brecht's alienation techniques were put into place to constantly keep audiences off balance, reminding them that they were not witnessing reality, but were in the theatre, watching a play. The second main area addressed by Brecht's philosophy concerns itself with social injustice, and the third defining component of the Brechtian aim was to call the audience to action. All three of these elements upon which Brecht's theories depended I found to be paralleled within the University's production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

The specific Alienation Effect techniques which could be found in the UCF production of *Merry Wives* include the employment of a "stage manager" used to point out a self-conscious production, breaks in the forward movement of the play, utilization of signs, and the use of presentational characters who address the audience directly.

Brecht often made use of a stage manager to introduce or narrate his productions. This convention was intended as a means to remove the audience from becoming too absorbed in the fantasy they were watching upon the stage. As the curtain speech for the University of Central Florida *Merry Wives* audience was being given, a mock stage manager, performed by one of the cast members, wandered up-stage of the greeter and proceeded to act out the duties of a stage manager, inspecting the space's appropriateness for the production to be performed. Doorways were measured, stairways were inspected, the audience was counted, and finally the cast was called in. In a bustle of activity, actors entered from either side of the audience and took to the

stage as they themselves inspected the space and interacted with each other as members of a traveling acting troupe and with the audience for whom they were about to perform. In true Brechtian style, the audience began their theatrical journey with an unequivocal reminder that they were witnessing a staged theatrical event. No myth of reality was to be endorsed. Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" would be neither expected nor tolerated.

Brecht also employed breaks in the forward movement of his productions. This method was used in the continuous interest of keeping the audience aware that they were witnessing a self-conscious production. This technique was also tied in with in UCF's *Merry Wives*. At Kate Ingram's direction, once our "company" entered, actors were called to their places by the mock stage manager and the stage was cleared. Introductory music was played to cue the beginning actors to their places. The action of the play was immediately interrupted by the frantic entrance of an actor who apparently had arrived "late" to the performance. This break in the forward movement was furthered by the actor's delivery of lines from a different Shakespeare play, which the actor mistakenly thought was being performed that evening. The on-stage actors were then choreographed to "break character" and inform the tardy actor that the play to be presented that evening was *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. A program was then politely taken from one of the front row patrons and used to show the actor his role.

This constant awareness of the staging of the play supports Brecht's intention of cultivating in the audience a detachment, known as the *Verfremdung*, or *Alienation* effect<sup>2</sup>. This would allow

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<sup>2</sup> Fuegi, P.523

them to absorb the social/political importance of the work being viewed, rather than simply being seduced by the ebb and flow of a typical production's theatricality.

Yet another tool used to achieve Brecht's *alienation* was his use of signage. Most commonly, Brecht used signs, slides, banners and even newspaper headlines to herald what he called the "gestus" of the scene. Though the word "gestus" has no exact American equivalent, the term is used to describe the main point of each scene. Brecht's plays often revolved around a basic premise, a theme of sorts, and each scene within the play was designed to stand on its own and showcase a main argument supporting the play's overall aim. This main argument, this *gestus*, was often printed on a sign or banner. Though this specific practice was not paralleled in UCF's *Merry Wives*, signs were used in another Brechtian manner supporting the alienation aim. The set for our production consisted of two main houses connected with a second story level bridge. The house down right was the home of the Pages, the house down left was the Ford's homestead. Hung outside the door of both homes were signs which read "Ford's House," or "Page's House." The signs were then turned around by the character of Robin to announce a change in location. For instance, the Ford home was also used as the Caius home. Nothing was done to make the houses seem like new locations, except for a switching of the sign and a wink at the audience from Robin as she changed them. This outlined that the homes were representations of locations, not actual places.

The final alienation element I found mirrored in our UCF version of *Merry Wives* is the use of representational characters. This is where Brecht's instructions to actors came to be of service to me. The previously mentioned alienation methods I have identified in our particular performance

came primarily from elements placed onto the production by our director. My character, of course, was created by Shakespeare long before Brecht's time and therefore could not possibly have been influenced by the Brechtian philosophy. I am not suggesting that there are Brechtian elements inherent in the penning of *Mistress Ford*, but I do believe that Brecht's ideas concerning performance lend themselves to Shakespearean acting.

Brecht's direction to actors hinges not so much on what *to* do, but rather on what the actor should chose *not* to do. Brecht's theatre promoted an unemotional approach to performance and presentation. Brecht warned that the desire for empathy from the audience was the downfall of many actors' performances. In the pursuit of forging a bond of empathy between the audience and the character, the actor often destroyed all possibility of moving the audience to action. Instead, a trance-like state based on emotional reactions rather than rational responses was created thereby rendering the performance mere entertainment as opposed to a proactive motivating force.

This is not to suggest that Brecht desired his actors and his audience to be without emotion altogether. Though Brecht did not want his performers or spectators to become blinded with empathy for the characters as individuals, Esslin states that Brecht did want them to, "Produce socially useful emotions such as indignation at injustice, hatred of oppressors, or an active desire for the overthrow of the existing social order."<sup>3</sup> For example, instead of empathizing with Falstaff's plight, Brecht would rather see the audience outraged at the guilty knight's complaints.

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<sup>3</sup> Esslin, P. 98

Brecht explains this concept by stating that the “alienation effect intervenes, not in the form of absence of emotion, but in the form of emotions which need not correspond to those of the character portrayed. On seeing worry the spectator may feel a sensation of joy; on seeing anger, one of disgust.”<sup>4</sup> Brecht goes on to explain that the actor, instead of becoming possessed by the spirit of his character, should imitate what the character might do, and speak as though quoting what the character says. Brecht suggests that the modern style of acting based on being private in public and by putting up an imaginary fourth wall between the stage and the audience is a hindrance to actors and audience members alike.

Brecht also encouraged his actors not to become wrapped up in the analyzing of the characters they portrayed. According to Esslin in his book entitled *Brecht-The Man And His Work*, Brecht warned his actors against creating detailed character studies. He felt that if an actor constructed a character analysis he would become immersed in the imaginary world of that individual and would in turn lead the audience into doing the same.<sup>5</sup> It was Brecht’s desire to keep both the actors and the audience from being lured into the intricate inner lives of the characters and focus instead on the social implications involved in the action of the play. Here I was given leave to let go of my unsuccessful attempts at forging an intricate analysis of Mistress Ford’s background and focus instead on what her function was in regards to the play itself.

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<sup>4</sup> Brecht, P. 94

<sup>5</sup> Esslin, P. 116



Mistress Ford is shown as a victim of the tyranny of imposed social norms. We know nothing at all about her personal history. No family is mentioned aside from her jealous, raving husband. We know nothing about her parents, her education, or her upbringing. Literally nothing is written in the script concerning her past. If a character analysis were to be written for Mistress Ford; the percentage of it that would have to be created with no literary support from the script would almost entirely eclipse anything actually penned by Shakespeare. By modern Stanislavsky based acting angles, this left me coming up empty at every turn, but from Brecht's perspective I was in good standing. Brecht's epic actor is given leave to let go of the modern acting style and is more at home in the Shakespearian setting than the modern actor who holds fast to realistic acting methods. As Forbes puts it, since the epic actor "...rejects the Stanislavsky notion of the imaginary circle and public solitude, he or she has no difficulty in transcending the chasm between the stage and audience. The epic actor has no tendency to mumble lines, exclaim wildly, or get lost in a generalized emotional wash because of imperatives dictated by the desire to live truthfully under imaginary circumstances."<sup>6</sup> The guilt I had harbored at being a "bad" actor because I was being presentational and was having difficulty patching together an analysis was immediately lifted.

Brecht called for characters that were one dimensional, characters that helped to make the story clear but deterred the audience from becoming emotionally attached to them. Brecht's characters could have personality, but in order to keep audience members from becoming emotionally attached to them, their personalities could not be justified in extensive character exploration. In

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<sup>6</sup>Forbes, P. 6

this regard, the characters of both wives seem to comply with Brecht's ideal, and arguably so do all the others presented in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Even Falstaff is painted as a rogue but gives no explicit reason as to why he is a rogue. Master Ford is drawn as a maniacal, jealous husband with no explanation as to why he became that way. This evident use of the one dimensional character is intended to create skepticism in audience members and is meant to rouse the play's spectators to challenge the social structures that they take for granted in their own day to day lives. This is the very heart of Brecht's movement.

The second main recurrent theme in Brecht's works which is showcased in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is the absurdity of certain forced social structures. Social injustice was of major import to Brecht and likewise, can be seen time and again as a subject in both Shakespeare's tragedies as well as his comedies. Brecht is reported to have hailed Shakespeare as a politically focused writer who staged social discord and contradictions rather than the Utopian humanist delusion.<sup>7</sup> This discord is the very base for the comedic and outrageous elements found in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; it can be witnessed in the foppish prattle between Shallow and Slender at the play's opening; it can be seen in the absurd advantages offered to the rogue knight Falstaff; it is illustrated in the submissive role forced upon the women of substance in the play; and it is demonstrated in the inane lessons that Parson Hugh uses to drill his young pupil. The numerous instances of social discord are what form the backbone of the comedy, and the quasi-farcical nature of the play lends itself perfectly to the staged quality that Brecht sought in his own productions.

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<sup>7</sup> Kay, P.1

Within *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Shakespeare's treatment of character and plot certainly lead one to notice the ludicrousness of unchallenged social standing. The main plot and a number of the sub-plots revolve around a rogue Knight's privileges taking precedence over those of the more pious yet less *noble* commoners who are potential victims of the Knight's cuckolding and thieving nature. Privilege, questionably being awarded solely on the basis of social class, is an issue which is repeatedly addressed in this play, and an issue that extends beyond just Falstaff. For example, the loveless and insipid Sir Slender is given marriage rights to the fair Anne Page solely because he is of better breeding. Anne's vows of true love to Fenton are deemed subordinate to her father's wishes because her father is her elder, a man, and sole proprietor of his daughter Anne. Falstaff's nefarious cohorts are given leave to harass and pickpocket innocent bystanders simply because they are the entourage of a noble man.

Shakespeare presents simple characters of various social statuses and throws them into situations which cannot help but to illustrate to the audience the absurdity of rank based on norms and not on capacity. How can a man be respected merely because he is a knight when, as Sir Hugh Evans says, he is "given to fornications, and to taverns, and sack, and wine, and metheglins, and to drinkings, and swearings, and starings, pribbles, and prabbles"?<sup>8</sup> How can a jealous husband with a faithful and virtuous wife; a man who flies into mad fits of rage, be respected above his spouse simply because she is a woman? How can the arranged marriages that Anne's parents have created be of more worth than the marriage that the maid herself sought out of true love? Shakespeare seems to be asking his audience to shake themselves from the trance-like and

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<sup>8</sup> Shakespeare, P. 68

complacent acceptance of the traditional roles of status which society has arbitrarily imposed. In Brecht's eyes there is no higher aim.

Mistress Ford is directly touched by the stings of social injustice in a number of ways, almost all of which stem from the fact that since she is a woman, she is at the mercy of her husband regardless of his mania. I decided that in place of dredging up a fictional analysis of Mistress Ford as a character, I would follow Brecht's lead and look instead to the social issues which would have been affecting her, as a woman in Shakespeare's era.

I found that woman's status as being inferior to that of men was an accepted norm which is repeatedly challenged in Shakespeare's works, notably so in his *Merry Wives of Windsor*. The role of women in Shakespeare's England was not one of privilege. Women of the age had little to no hope of being highly educated. They had no leave to pursue careers of merit such as that of doctors, lawyers, teachers, or priests.<sup>9</sup> Married women were considered the property of their husbands and their duties varied according to the occupations of their husbands.

The fact that a single woman was ruler of England during much of Shakespeare's lifetime was certainly not indicative of women's general standing during the time. Queen Elizabeth, I was not representative of the women of her era as she was highly educated, having been schooled in French, Italian, Spanish, Flemish, Greek, Latin, astronomy, mathematics and history by the age of twelve. Elizabeth refused to heed the advice of her council to marry and instead used the

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<sup>9</sup> Papp, P. 68

prospect of marriage as a bargaining tool in her negotiations with foreign lands, often breaking off engagements at the latest possible minute for reasons such as religious differences.<sup>10</sup> While Elizabeth ruled quite successfully and became a woman of immense power, even she had to present herself in a way so as not to offend the staunchly held belief of her age that women were the lesser creatures. She constantly referred to herself as the exception to the rule of women's frailty. Though she was mighty, women's rights were in such a dearth that she could not afford to suggest that all women were on the same level as she or her power would surely be depleted.

At the time, the schooling of common women was composed entirely of instruction in the skills piety, chastity and good home making. Women, should they be lucky enough to receive a semi-formal education, were mostly schooled in activities that would make the home a better environment. Skills such as sewing, cleaning and cooking were the core of the Elizabethan woman's education. For wealthy women who had the privilege of owning servants to tend to the household chores, singing, dancing, musical instruments and the art of entertaining were the subjects for their schooling. Women of this higher status spent much of their time in social settings and passed the time with leisure activities such as visiting with friends, gossiping, letter writing, needlework and strolling. Joseph Papp, in his book entitled *Shakespeare Alive!* Describes "the paradise of married women," which was defined as the right to "spend their free time in walking and riding, in playing at cards or otherwise, in visiting their friends and keeping company, conversing with their equals whom they term gossips and making merry with them at

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<sup>10</sup> Quennell, P. 74

childbirths, christenings, churchings, and funerals, and all this with the permission and knowledge of their husbands.”<sup>11</sup>

By this definition, both Mistress Ford and Mistress Page seem to fit seamlessly into the norm for upper middle class women of their time, but one must remember that though upper-class women were given leave to enjoy more leisure time, they were not allowed to defy the wishes of their husbands. The fact that the two think and act secretly behind their husbands’ backs is a direct assault on the social norm of the age where women were expected to behave as subservient chattel.

This challenging of the status quo is very Brechtian indeed because Brecht’s main goal was to create theatre that would cause people to break out of the unquestioned social expectations which government and society had previously placed on people. The mere fact that Mistress Ford and Mistress Page engage in clandestine activities of their own choosing is a slap in the face to the rigid social code forced upon women of their time. Perhaps Shakespeare was emulating some of the wit and cunning of his ruling queen by showing women taking charge of their own doings. The ridiculousness of the situation is brought home even more profoundly by the juxtaposition of the unfounded jealousies and ranting of Master Ford’s against the true faithfulness of his wife who is so fiercely loyal that she is goaded into seeking revenge by the mere proposition of an affair from the Fat Knight. The prospect that women of proper moral standing must revert to

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<sup>11</sup> Papp, P. 74

means of trickery and deception to gain the rights that men are given outright is a theme that Shakespeare presents as laughable and that Brecht would suggest is a call for protest.

It seems that Shakespeare's constant addressing of women's status could quite possibly have been a nod of respect towards his Queen. After all, Elizabeth and her affiliates certainly had the capacity to be a great help or a great hindrance to their nation's theatres. While entertainment these days must primarily please the general public, in Shakespeare's time things were quite different. The ruling class held direct power over theatres and dictated what they could and could not do. It behooved playwrights and theatre managers alike to present plays that would gratify the local nobles. This information helped me to look at Mistress Ford in a new light. Because she helped to highlight the nobility of women in spite of women's lower rank, it is conceivable to conclude that she was created to be a kind of compliment to the Queen herself. Mistress Ford champions women's rights. Though this may seem like an abstract notion, I used this as a kind of motivation in my performance of Mistress Ford. I allowed Mistress Ford to be endowed with an internal higher purpose. I called on remembrance of this to fuel her energy, give power to her speech, and lengthen her spine so that her gait became more regal.

Though Brecht's history had no direct influence over the playing of my character, I was moved to research into his life in the interest of finding out why he was motivated to so radically alter the theatre of his time. My probing led me to the conclusion that social injustice was at the core. Brecht was born in 1898, into an age of intense political and social unrest. European governments were growing increasingly Fascist and totalitarian. The freedoms granted to individuals were becoming more and more confined by policies seeking to restrict the

individual's rights and liberties in favor of strengthening the political ideologies of the time. The post-industrial revolutionaries found themselves unfulfilled and disillusioned. Stalin gripped the Soviet Union in an iron fist, Mussolini reigned over Italy, and Nazi Germany was in the grips of the political sociopath Adolph Hitler. Each government sought to extend total control over its people and the rights of the individual were subjugated to the government in an often violent and inhumane manner. Brecht observed how the population was lulled into a trance-like acceptance of governmental rule with the promise that a new and prosperous age was dawning. That very dream-like complacency is what Brecht sought to do away with in his audiences. In his author's notes for *The Life of Galileo*, Brecht warns that "it is well known how felicitously people can be influenced by the conviction that they are poised on the threshold of a new age."<sup>12</sup> This mass acceptance of governmental promise and the zombie-like state of the general populace is exactly what Brecht designed his theatre to oppose. Brecht eschewed the audience's habitual seeking of diversion in theatre<sup>13</sup>

It was social injustice that made Brecht's theatre a theatre of necessity rather than frivolous entertainment. Brecht wanted to use his theatre as a weapon to battle governmental and societal injury. This is why Brecht's theatre was built around exposing social wrongs. This is also why Brecht wanted to motivate his patrons to shake themselves from complacency and stand up and do something.

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<sup>12</sup> Brecht, P.3

<sup>13</sup> Artaud, P. 84



The third and final Brechtian element I am seeking to parallel in our UCF production of *Merry Wives* is the notion of the audience's response to a call for action. At the heart of Brecht's theoretical works is the doctrine that theatre must be used to stimulate its audience to rise up. Brecht wanted his patrons to be inspired by what they saw upon the stage and in turn become active in bettering their lives and their society. Shakespeare speaks on this very subject through the title character in his tragedy *Hamlet*. In the final scene of Act II, Hamlet plots to drive his guilty Uncle into revealing that he has murdered Hamlet's father and usurped his father's throne unnaturally. Hamlet's plan is to do this by hiring actors to play out a scene identical to that of his father's assassination and by watching the new king closely for signs of guilt. The following dialog demonstrates Hamlet's belief that theatre has the power to provoke man to action:

Hamlet: I have heard  
That guilty creatures, sitting at a play,  
Have by the very cunning of the scene  
Been struck so to the soul that presently  
They have proclaim'd their malefactions:

Act II, scene 2,

This very speech outlines what Brecht called for in his own productions. Brecht wanted action! The audiences of Shakespeare's time were irrefutably active in their relationship with the performers. Theatre patrons of the age looked to the theatre as a place to share news of current events, history, and to share ideas about their government, society, and the economic state of their country. Since books, newspapers and periodicals were not available to them, citizens

looked to the theatre. There was no fourth wall for actors to hide behind. Actors spoke directly to the audience and audience members often talked back to the actors

Although Brecht believed Shakespeare to be an author kindred to him in intention, and though Brechtian conventions were used in the staging of the UCF production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the call to action concern may be where Brecht and Shakespeare come closest to parting ways. Brecht's philosophy hinged on the notion explored by Piscator that theatre must radically attempt to instruct the audience<sup>14</sup>. Brecht wanted his work to challenge his audience to rise to action against the oppression of man by tyrannical social, economic, and governmental structures. No such action was discernibly motivated by the UCF production. This led me to question what it is that makes a particular theatrical theory hold water.

Is a theory only applicable to a production if the prescribed goals set forth in the theory are successfully brought to fruition as a direct result of the production? It has been argued by many scholars that though Brecht's ultimate goal through his theatrical works was to spark political revolution, it was nearly always a goal realized on a spiritual level rather than a physical level. Since dramatic art is not true reality, the revolution or uprising that it brings about is, by nature, usually internal. As Robert Brustein states in his book entitled Theatre of The Revolt, the modern dramatist such as Brecht is "essentially a metaphysical rebel, not a practical revolutionary; whatever his personal political convictions, his art is the expression of a spiritual condition. For he is a militant of the ideal, an anarchic individualist, concerned with the impossible rather than

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<sup>14</sup> Bentley, P. 6

the possible.”<sup>15</sup> By this rationale, it is conceivable that audience members *were* motivated to action, not on a blatant and discernable level, but internally. Without an audience poll or a thorough scientific investigation of an appropriate cross section of UCF patrons who attended the production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, it cannot be assumed that the production inspired action, or on the contrary, that it did not.

A strong argument can be made to support the theory that Shakespeare’s work, coupled with the style in which it was presented on the UCF stage, gives solid characteristics of Brechtian theatre in its use of alienation and in its call for audience members to question the authority of social and political norms. And regardless of whether the production motivated rise in action from our UCF audience members, it did motivate action within me. My performance of the role of Mistress Ford was profoundly touched by my research into the links and bridges between Brecht and Shakespeare. Even if the call to action fell on deaf ears from the UCF house, I myself *did* hear that call and was moved to free myself of the shackles of the ineffective approaches to my role which I’d been subjecting myself to. Incorporating Brechtian acting methods widened my scope so that I was ultimately able to approach the role of Mistress Ford in a way that I could both understand and enjoy.

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<sup>15</sup> Brustein, P. 8

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The process of creating a character is one that must be cultivated by each actor as an individual. There are many theories, schools of thought, methods, clubs, cults, and sects. Each age in this world's history adds to and takes away from the ideas that have come before it. Ultimately, regardless of how diametrically opposed certain methods may appear to be in practice, we generally share the same goal. We want our performances to be good. There is no one size fits all approach to acting. One must create a method that best suits the individual.

I have come to believe that each play presents different challenges, and so a method created for one role may prove tried and true in practice for that particular performance, but may turn useless when applied to a play of a different style. The process of preparation for a role therefore must be ever morphing. That continuous growth is the very thing which makes theatre such a grand art in my opinion. There never can be a time when the craft is conquered. The work goes on, and the opportunity for growth is infinite.

**APPENDIX A:  
PRODUCTION REVIEW FROM THE CENTRAL FLORIDA FUTURE**

## Central Florida Future - Lifestyles

**Issue:** 11/18/02

### **Theatre UCF offers a 'Merry' time, indeed**

*By Samantha Fredericks*

Laughter and applause vibrated throughout the theater at the opening night of UCF's first Shakespeare production in over 10 years, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. First performed in 1597 for Queen Elizabeth, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* still manages to shock and entertain audiences with its flamboyant characters and raw humor. With an ensemble of 22 actors, this episodic comedy pulsates with energy.

The play revolves around the humiliation of Sir John Falstaff, who is attempting to woo the two wives of the wealthy masters of Windsor in hopes of financial gain. The two women, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, find out about his plan after receiving identical love letters from the foolish knight and decide to teach him a lesson.

After having Falstaff thrown in a river and beaten throughout a series of hilarious events, the wives plan a final humiliation where Falstaff is reduced to a crying state curled into a fetal position for the whole town to laugh at.

As all good Shakespearean comedies conclude, all is mended in the group and everyone dances, sings and eats.

The brilliant cast of UCF students and graduate students was led by director Kate Ingram. Before becoming an associate professor at UCF, Ingram taught at the State University of New York for 14 years. She is also a professional actress and director, who has directed about 30 plays in her career, this being her second at UCF and her largest cast in her career.

"I love teaching and directing, but I am an actress at heart," Ingram said. "So when I direct, I really try to direct from the actors' point of view."

Ingram describes the play as a Shakespearean sitcom full of many strange and unusual characters rushing at you at once.

The play is composed of several mini scenes which all come together in the end. With a mixture of modern and Shakespearean English, the production provides the opportunity for any audience, even those unfamiliar with Shakespeare, to appreciate and follow the genius story line and humor it proposes.

Ingram leads a cast of talented actors who have nothing but great things to say about her, praising her talent and incredible directing ability.

"One of the best experiences in doing this show was working with a director that facilitates

freedom and exploration," graduate student Brook Hanemann said.

Playing the part of Mistress Ford, Hanemann says she looked forward to coming to the theater every night to play this character. A lover of Shakespeare, Hanemann is a theater major and has performed in 19 shows at UCF, and is also a cast member of the Soul Fire Theater and Dinner Experience. This is her thesis role, which she is dedicating to her father, whom she says nurtured her passion for Shakespeare.

"My father read Shakespeare to me when I was a baby. I don't think there is a better playwright," Hanemann said. Graduate student Lara Mainard (Mistress Page), has never performed a Shakespearean role before. However, she has been performing since she was about 7 years old. This is her 12th play at UCF. Her other productions include I Love My Wife and The Lady's Not for Burning. She describes her character Mistress Page as a hyper-control freak whom which she feels she has brought a sense of energy and fun to.

"I wanted to do this play because I have never done Shakespeare before and I felt it would be an exciting challenge," Mainard said.

One of the most entertaining characters in the production was that of Sir John Falstaff, played by J.J. Ruscella. Ruscella is an assistant professor at UCF as well as a director. Ruscella gives an incredible performance with his impeccable comedic timing and energy. He makes you hate him, while feeling sorry for him. Most of all, he forces you to laugh at him.

Along with the professionals and veterans of UCF theater, this production also invited some new faces on to the UCF stage. Freshman Cody Stone, a performance major, is excited to have the opportunity to be a part of the show. This is his first production at UCF, though he was part of the Orlando Shakespeare Festivals Young Company, and has been involved in theater for four years.

"The hardest part was finding my place in the company," Stone said. "Everyone has connections and ties with each other, so I had to find my own way of helping the show and my fellow performers."

With its cast of animated characters brought to life by the most talented of UCF's students and alumni, and lead by the professional direction and acting abilities of Ingram, The Merry Wives of Windsor is a UCF production no one should miss. It will leave you gasping at its audaciousness and laughing at its wit.

**APPENDIX B:  
PRODUCTION REVIEW FROM THE ORLANDO SENTINEL**



**Date:** Saturday, November 16, 2002

**Source:** Elizabeth *Maupin*, Sentinel Theater Critic

**Column:** THEATER REVIEW

**Type:** REVIEW

**Section:** LIFE & TIMES

**Page:** E1

### CHARACTERS GET LOST IN `MERRY WIVES' CROWD

Shakespeare nowadays is Shakespeare on the lean -- pared-down, budget-driven, with seven or eight actors playing parts written for three times that many.

But stages still look jam-packed in university-theater Shakespeare, where actors work for free, bodies are never in short supply and directors have the luxury of live human beings on hand to speak every single line.

Theatre UCF's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is that kind of Shakespeare. With 22 actors onstage, all of them in full regalia, this production of Shakespeare's popular comedy is nothing if not complete. But all of the commotion those actors raise doesn't quite bring forth the spirit of this raucous comedy. It takes more than commotion to do the job.

For the novice, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is easy to grasp. The humor is broad and freewheeling, and when you compare it with Shakespeare's other comedies -- Much Ado About

Nothing, say, or *As You Like* -- there's nothing deep about it. The characters are as middle-class and recognizable as any Shakespeare wrote -- the two comfortably married couples, the Fords and the Pages, who get into a raucous wrangle with the lowbrow aristocrat Sir John Falstaff, the hard-drinking, heavy-wenching character made popular in the playwright's earlier *Henry IV Part One*.

But *Merry Wives*, in which Mistress Ford and Mistress Page play a series of tricks on Falstaff to get back at him for trying to woo them for their money, is not as easy as it looks. There's a subplot in which everybody and his brother is trying to wed the Pages' heiress daughter, Ann, and every one of those suitors has to be as distinct as can be.

That challenge of making more than a dozen key characters memorable is what fells Theatre UCF's production, which works very hard at its comedy but often shows the strain. Director Kate Ingram has provided all kinds of comic business for just about everybody onstage. But she and her cast, which includes a couple of her fellow professors, haven't quite gotten at what makes these people funny. The result is that too often they're not.

Ingram has added a frenetic start to the play, which begins at Theatre UCF with the actors pouring in from the back of the house and includes one poor fellow who mistakes this show for *Romeo and Juliet*. That kind of frenetic activity keeps on coming, in ways both useful and less so. A very short servant has a hard time hanging up a sign announcing we're at the Pages' house, and Falstaff (J.J. Ruscella) gets into a pretty vigorous fight. But there are so many people onstage and their personalities are so indistinct that, even if you know the story, it's hard to figure out why he's fighting or who he's fighting with.

It doesn't help matters that the actors use a cacophony of accents: Although most speak in plain American, a couple of them sound British for no good reason and at least one who is supposed to sound Welsh does not. The best of the actors know how to make Elizabethan English understood, but too many of them don't, and that doesn't help an audience that is trying hard to figure it all out.

Fortunately, a few of the cast members make their way through the commotion (and they benefit from Kristina Tollefson's handsome costumes and Richard Harmon's old-fashioned Elizabethan set). The women come off better than the men, and not just because there are far fewer of them: Brook Hanemann and Lara Mainard make an expressive pair of *merry wives*, and Paula Rossman is a simple-minded, hearty Mistress Quickly. Few of the men are quite so vivid, although Nick Sprysenski looks hilarious as the lantern-jawed Frenchman Dr. Caius, and he almost always makes his silly French-accented English understood.

Ruscella, who is an assistant professor in the theater department, can be a very funny Falstaff: He surprises you sometimes with his deadpan, and after he's thrown in the chilly Thames he's a terrific whiner. (Shakespeare helps him with lines such as "You may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity in sinking.") But Ruscella doesn't always come on as strongly as he might, and too few of the other actors make much impression. Ann Page's bevy of suitors and their comrades are especially disappointing: This is supposed to be a group of caricatures, and, beyond Sprysenski's French doctor, only Josh Duke's unenthusiastic Slender comes across. Director Ingram doesn't help the production by playing up the final scene in which Falstaff is scared by a bunch of apparent fairies -- there's nothing funny-scary about it, and it never comes to life -- or

by concentrating on the hubbub, which confuses the audience more than it should. Better to breathe life into Shakespeare's characters, and let the comedy take care of itself.

**APPENDIX C:  
CAST LIST FOR THE 2002 UCF PRODUCTION OF “THE MERRY WIVES OF  
WINDSOR”**

## Cast List

Sir John Falstaff	J.J. Ruscella
Bardolph	Chris Carberg
Pistol	Aaron Kirkpatrick
Nym	Cody Stone
Host	Shawn Rice
Sir Hugh Evans	Scott Leake
Robert Shallow	Mark Brotherton
Abraham Slender	Josh Duke
Doctor Caius	Nick Spryenski
Master Fenton	Ryan Gilreath
Master Frank Ford	Matt Greenbaum
Master George Page	Chris Taylor
John (Ford's 1 <sup>st</sup> Servant)	Tommy Booth
Robert (Ford's 2 <sup>nd</sup> Servant)	Reji Woods-Hill
Mistress Ford	Brook Hanemann
Mistress Page	Lara Mainard
Miss Anne Page	Annie Forgione
Mistress Quickly	Paula Rossman
Will Page	Kyle Ann Lacertosa
Robin	Fredreka Irvine
Peter Simple	Joe Swanson
Jack Rugby	Rob Coll

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