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March 29, 2019

*The First Oxford St. Scholastica's Day Pageant: A Case-Study in Using Ensemble Development*  
to Address Paradigms of Power

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An abstract of

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Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of Theater Studies

2019

## Abstract

### *The First Oxford St. Scholastica's Day Pageant: A Case-Study in Using Ensemble Development to Address Paradigms of Power*

*The First Oxford St. Scholastica's Day Pageant* is an ensemble piece written by Theater Studies student Josh Oberlander, developed by five of his student peers in an ensemble research and development workshop, and performed as a staged reading on February 26th, 2019. This document chronicles the journey from Oberlander's abstract questions of societal tensions between the university, the state, and the public, to his broad theatrical, historical, and theoretical research and from there to the assemblage of the ensemble and the development of their practice up to and including the performance. Two drafts of the text are included: an annotated pre-workshop draft that footnotes major changes, ideas, and contributions from Oberlander or the ensemble members, and a draft of the text as it was performed. The document culminates in a reflection on the process, its development, and further ideas on how it could be improved in subsequent theatrical experiments.

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## Acknowledgments

This sometimes funny, sometimes poignant, sometimes frustrating, always rewarding experiment would never have been possible without the efforts of a village of people who offered support ranging from scholarly to emotional. I extend special thanks to Theater Emory and the faculty of Emory's Department of Theater Studies, especially Brent Glenn, Michael Evenden, Sara Culpepper, Leslie Taylor, and Robert Schultz. For the skills they've taught me that directly made this project possible, I thank Jim Grimsley, Jan Akers, Kathleen T. Leuschen, Lydia Fort, Cassie Gonzales, Jiréh Breon Holder, Lisa Paulsen, Patricia Cahill, Munia Bhaumik, Leslie Taylor. I thank the Mu Beta cast of Alpha Psi Omega for letting me unceremoniously raid their storage, and Dooley's Players for accommodating this project in various ways.

I thank the members of the ensemble who dedicated their valuable time and trust to this process, and extended their incredible talents to my work to create a product that they should be immensely proud of: Adam Friedman, Julia Byrne, Lily Bowman, Peter Buzzerio, and Nathan Ray. Let's do this again sometime.

I thank my brilliantly talented colleague Roz Sullivan-Lovett for reading and critiquing my work at its worst and supporting it at its best. I thank Austin Kunis for his saintly patience. I thank my family for supporting me, beginning with *Princess and the Pea* and ending up here.

I thank my numerous influences, including but not limited to: Bertolt Brecht and Caryl Churchill, wherever they may be.

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## Research Chapter

### The Aim

In his introduction to his *Collaborative Theatre: A Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, theater professor David Williams sets down some of the Théâtre du Soleil collective's guiding questions, including, "How does one collaborate with political and ethical integrity? What processes disperse and multiply creativity and power within a collective? ... How can theatre dismantle and re-vision monolithic representations of History?"<sup>1</sup> In this quotation, Williams eloquently describes many of the admittedly nascent hopes and ideas that guided me to this thesis: how does the theatrical process reckon with its inheritances of power hierarchies while also creating an environment that uses a collective understanding of creativity (a force that can be enhanced by a plurality of voices and contributions) to yield a better product, both for the audience and for the performers? Structurally, this thesis contains two parts: firstly, a largely solo textual generation of a one-act play concerned with using a historical event to dramatize tensions of power between the university, the public, and the state, and secondly, the establishment of an ensemble, with the goal of decentralizing the paradigms of power that plague the rehearsal room, inheritances of the Western obsession with the singular Kantian genius. The contours of my research diverged in very different directions between the parts, but both parts are concerned with the questioning of power, and a resistance of the autocratic impulse in its varied forms: kings, chancellors, playwrights, or directors.

Early on, I settled on a question to explore: personal events during my first years at Emory made me question a palpable tension between those within academia and those without,

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<sup>1</sup> David Williams, *Collaborative Theatre the Théâtre Du Soleil Sourcebook* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), xi.

and how the politics of the state seem to play into that paradigm. I wanted not only to develop a text on my own with this question in mind, but I also wanted to find a way that the theatrical process itself could be redefined to address questions of power in the rehearsal room, and challenge the supremacy of the playwright's and director's interpretation of creative text, and ultimately use the resources of a group most efficiently to inform the production of work. In this sense, I wanted to pursue a question of whether the formal qualities of the theatrical process could address power paradigms in the same way these broad political questions are concerned with power structures. I, in passing, came upon a relatively obscure historical event: the town and gown conflicts that mired medieval English universities of Oxford and Cambridge, specifically the 1209 hanging of two clerks for a murder of which they are presumed innocent. In formulating my research, I pursued two concurrent yet diverging research questions: how do I best explore this topic dramatically and how do I effectively structure the ensemble? For both, I looked at historical precedent to serve me.

### The Text

Throughout my collegiate career, I have been interested in examining what it means to be within the realm of higher education and what it means to be excluded. In the midst of the 2016 presidential campaign, a string of chalkings referencing slogans of the then-candidate Donald Trump, some of which were written directly in the vicinity of Emory's Latinx and black student unions, sparked a national debate, with many students fearing the xenophobic implications of the chalkings jeopardized their safety on the campus, and many censured the student body's backlash

as unacceptably oversensitive.<sup>2</sup> The issue elicited a complicated series of reactions from within the university, and from without, and ultimately became a talking point in the national conversation surrounding, as Snopes.com puts it, “rampant political correctness on college campuses.” Later that year, echoing candidate Trump’s populist anti-immigrant rhetoric, the Georgia state legislature voted to strip state funding from sanctuary campuses, a distinction that Emory’s administration, after some deliberation, ultimately decided to avoid.<sup>3</sup> These controversies led me, pretty early, to question what being within academia means, and why the interests of the state, the university, and the public caught in between (fundamental units of society) often lead to perceptible tension. These events highlight instances where issues of controversy have often been used by a political establishment’s leadership to weaponize a general public against an insular academia that is seen as delusionally disconnected, or radically out of touch.

Going from this initial question, I ended up drawing stretched parallels between these contemporary tensions, and a distant and poorly documented historical event: the 1209 hanging of Oxford clerks, framed for a murder they didn’t commit, that led to the temporary dissolution of Oxford and the founding of Cambridge. This distant and unfamiliar historical event, the earliest of a series of town and gown conflicts that seem to define the love/hate relationship of the city and the university, seemed a fertile jumping off point for a roughly one-act text that uses

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<sup>2</sup> “Emory Students Not Traumatized by Trump Graffiti,” *Snopes.Com*, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/emory-students-trump-graffiti/>.

<sup>3</sup> Will Robinson, “Emory President: All Welcome, but We Won’t Be a ‘Sanctuary’ Campus,” *Ajc*, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.ajc.com/news/local-education/emory-president-all-welcome-but-won-sanctuary-campus/E0D39eAuaCtGcWst7LRfpO/>.

history analogically to question the large-scale power struggles that I was perceiving in my contemporary life.

Some historical context: England, in 1209, was ruled by King John (1166-1216), the head of a large conglomerate of holdings in the British Isles and France, known exonymously as the Angevin Empire. In *A History of the University of Cambridge*, historian Damien Leader explains that King John struggled both with France (ultimately losing his continental holdings) and the Papacy, and, in 1209, after quarreling with the Pope over the election of an archbishop, he found himself excommunicated, sending England's "law courts and governments in chaos," and leaving many ecclesiastical authority positions vacant.<sup>4 5</sup> In the same year, a university clerk murdered an Oxonian townswoman, and, unable to take the absconder into custody, secular authorities arrested and hanged two or three fellow clerks with King John's permission. By violating custom and allowing a case meant for the internal ecclesiastical court to be judged and punished by secular authorities, the rights of the scholars as they were understood then were violated and, after ensuing riots, the University of Oxford was closed for a period and its scholars dispersed, with some settling in Cambridge to found England's other famed medieval *studium*.<sup>6</sup>

The 1209 event can be broken down into the three discrete societal units I describe above: In his afterword to a collection of essays entitled *The University and the City*, professor Thomas Bender argues that the conflict, like the one between Oxford University and the town of Oxford, was inevitable, almost predestined to occur, because, "while they seem to share a

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<sup>4</sup> "United Kingdom - John (1199–1216)." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed December 17, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom>.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Brooke et al., eds., *A History of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Brooke, J. R. L. Highfield, and Wim Swaan, *Oxford and Cambridge* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 50–52.

number of formal sociological similarities,” the city and the university “very different social constructs”: “Because of their difference, relations between the two are necessarily tense...”<sup>7</sup> *Oxford and Cambridge*, a history of the two medieval universities, qualifies Bender’s view of a necessarily tense university-city relationship by portraying the influence of Oxford University over the town of Oxford as one of both economic reliance and control: “The market was to become almost as much interest to the university as it was the town” and “the resentment” on the part of Oxford’s townspeople “was understandable, especially as the rights of the university may well have had a restrictive influence [on the market].”<sup>8</sup> These material tensions are perhaps a contributing factor in turning an event of local importance into a vaster, political one. King John’s decision to ignore precedent and to try the crime in the civil court, controlled by the townspeople who already harbored resentment towards the university, weaponized the tension, and for a period, obliterated Oxford University in its relative infancy. Here, the public and the academic’s general contempt for one another, based around the material reality of shared tangible resources like land and housing, is what turns a relatively individual crime into a larger conflict, and the university’s political disregard for the authority of the sovereign government seems to be what motivated the political administration to step in on behalf of the public’s interest, magnifying the conflict into an ultimately climactic one that, for a period, collapsed the university. I acknowledge the reductive elements of my summary of the historical event; Bender also qualifies his analysis of the city and university, saying that “both [the city and the university] are incompletely bounded fields of contention, comprising various interests and ideals.”<sup>9</sup> Bender

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Bender, ed., *The University and the City: From Medieval Origins to the Present* (New York Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 290–292.

<sup>8</sup> Brooke, et al., *Oxford and Cambridge*, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Bender, ed., *The University and the City*, 291-292.

is talking about his own collection's topical units, the city, and the university, but the same sentiment applies to my own analysis of the situation, and my identified units of the public, the university, and the state are three are separate constructs with their own nuanced web of overlaps and internal contentions. It is too simple to pretend that academia is a purely isolated garden around which a general public exists, and, that there exists, beyond that, an abstract political establishment separable from both,; further, it is simplistic to ascribe to each of them contain easily explicable and independent motivations and wants. The membrane around each unit is permeable, shifting, and, like medieval Oxford, their mutual reliance and contempt ebbs and flows, sometimes bringing mutual concord and sometimes bringing punishment. That's what makes it difficult to apply the same terms to Emory's relationship to the public, non-academic sphere and, beyond that, the vested interest of the American political establishment (a more loosely defined construct than King John's autocratic aristocracy). However, in order to understand these discrete units at all, I must defer to theatrical critic Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance* and its analysis of "temporary communities, sites of public discourse that ... can model new investments in and interactions with variously constituted public spheres."<sup>10</sup> In line with this conception — which Dolan applies to theatrical audiences, but is susceptible to wider application — the idea of the academic unit of society as a loosely defined body of individuals with their own varying interests implies that their separation from the other units, the general public, and the state, is due only to the site of discourse in which they locate themselves and their multiple interests. The location of the discursive site can remain relatively stable, but the people who constitute it will shift and so will the motivations that define it. Along these lines, my

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<sup>10</sup> Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 10.

analysis of the historical event is as follows: in short, King John's intervention into the town and gown conflict of 1209 was because of the political imperative against Oxford University's political allegiance to the Papacy, but was supplemented by the material stressors between the town and gown. Likewise, the values of the contemporary academic sphere I find myself in now find themselves, in a more abstract way, at odds with the values of large swathes of the American general public, and the nation's democratic processes reflect that with a conservative political establishment that seeks to capitalize on this tension, the same way King John capitalized on it in 1209, using public suspicion of the academy to serve his own politically divisive purposes. Critical theorist Henry A. Giroux, in an interview entitled "The Violence of Forgetting," seems to touch on these ideas as well, characterizing the contemporary moment as one in which "politics and violence now inform each other."<sup>11</sup> While Giroux sees "critical education" as a means of combating political violence and creating a more "critically minded, socially responsible" public, education can also be "a site of repression that destroys thinking and leads to violence" in the form of "gated intellectuals" that eschew public interaction by creating a "rarefied, otherworldly space of disinterested intellectualism."<sup>12</sup> In Giroux's formulation, the state and the university are spheres of control over the public sphere, and, in their formulation, determine a society's latitude for violence. When people wonder if college students are too sensitive for the "real world," it is a question that wonders, among other things, whether academia is a part of the "real world" that consists of the domain of the public sphere, the market economy, and established political realities.

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<sup>11</sup> Brad Evans, Natasha Lennard, and Henry A. Giroux, "The Violence of Forgetting," in *Violence: Humans in Dark Times*, Open media series (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2018), 69.

<sup>12</sup> Giroux, "The Violence of Forgetting," 68-73.

In my research, the actual 1209 event is very loosely sketched and poorly documented. It became clear that a measure of creative invention, rather than any strict dramatization of the historical events, would be required in any theatrical exploration, and this led me to instigate a craft-focused inquiry into the ways politically-motivated dramatic writers utilize historical events, documents, text, and scenarios to comment on social themes while still inventing toward a literary, rhetorical, or political end. Ultimately, I looked to Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children* (1939), Caryl Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), and Branden Jacobs-Jenkins *An Octoroon* (2014).

*Mother Courage and Her Children* by Bertolt Brecht, freely based on a 1670 novel by Hans Grimmelshausen, introduces us to Mother Courage, an opportunistic saleswoman, against the basic context of the Thirty Years' War. According to John Willett and Ralph Manheim's introduction to the Penguin Classics edition, *Mother Courage* was written in a white heat on the heels of Hitler's invasion of Poland, a direct response "written under pressure."<sup>13</sup> In questioning the source of this particular context, the editors posit many different possible literary sources, but specify that Brecht had a "particular feeling for the seventeenth century, that period ... with its proclamation of 'faith in a new age'." The Shakespearean history play is singled out as a literary model borrowed for a play about an Early Modern war that "failed in his view to make a modern nation of Germany ... which thus became the natural analogy for his pessimistic warnings." This model, using a variety of distant historical references to make contemporary comment, is one he employed over and over again in Brecht's oeuvre, but *Mother Courage*, his so-called chronicle play, uses the obscurity of the Thirty Years' War to make comment on the effect of war on

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<sup>13</sup> Bertolt Brecht, John Willett, and Ralph Manheim, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Penguin classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), xxvii–xxviii.

individual humanity, focusing his energies into the tale of Mother Courage and the destruction of her family, with the inclusion of nameless characters that Brecht uses as stand-ins for the larger forces at play in the broad purview of the conflict, such as a Clergyman who represents the complicated role of religion in the war.

*Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* by Caryl Churchill is the only piece of these that was developed in an ensemble fashion, with Churchill observing the Joint Stock workshops (which are discussed more in depth later in the chapter), but ultimately interpreting them loosely, including no improvisations verbatim but rather incorporating basic scenarios, dynamics and ideas from the workshop into the final text.<sup>14</sup> The text is a postmodern assemblage of varied inputs, such as verbatim transcripts, biblical passages, short but compelling human scenes, and theo-political debates, with a relatively large *dramatis personae* (twenty four different characters, with the intention that the same parts are played by different actors). The piece is a multi-vocal one, and Churchill's entanglement with the ensemble process has been noted to produce drama that examines thematically vast ideas, usually political ones, with a variety of lenses that ultimately obscure any strict judgment on the content. Churchill's vision of Epic Theater offers "a generalised experience of events" rather than any specific manifesto on the subject, perhaps distinguished by its encounter with the plurality of the ensemble process that Joint Stock, quite revolutionary for the time, offered her.<sup>15</sup> Her work is not centralized around any specific narrative, but seems, at every turn, to open itself up to ambiguity and tries to paint a rather full and complicated portrait of the source events.

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<sup>14</sup> Philip Roberts, *About Churchill: The Playwright and the Work*, About (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), 61–63; Rob Ritchie, ed., *The Joint Stock Book: The Making of a Theatre Collective*, A Methuen paperback (London ; New York, NY: Methuen, 1987), 118–120; *Churchill: Plays One* (Routledge, 1985), accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9780203826935>.

<sup>15</sup> Roberts, *About Churchill*, 62.

*An Octoroon* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins is different in that it more comically examines contemporary coding and ideas within the shell of an antiquated, racist melodrama.<sup>16</sup> Characters talk in a contemporary vernacular while trapped in Dion Boucicault's melodrama, *The Octoroon*. Jacobs-Jenkins uses the dissonance of the dramatic situation (for example, one of the most memorable scenes includes two slave character picking cotton, while discussing the social situation of the estate in very contemporary terms) to comment on the play, and, by extension, comment on American history. Jacobs-Jenkins notably plays with the visual presence of the actor (a feature of his other work as well), specifying race and doubling in the casting notes, a feature that becomes more complicated as the play uses the spectacle of the actor's visual presence in subversive and discomfoting ways. Overall, *An Octoroon* uses, with postmodern skepticism, source material from America's dramatic inheritance to question the contemporary inheritance of systemic racism, a still-violent and dehumanizing force within the current American tradition.

All three texts explored different historical stimuli in three vastly different ways, but the commonalities among them include a compassionate look at the individual's role in the historical context, while also instrumentally discussing social issues relevant to their own contemporary context. Source materials are treated both with sensitivity and skepticism, and their presentation can either be integrated into the text to create a cohesive work or can be presented almost as they originally appear, letting them jut out of the text and using that conspicuousness to help the audience make comment on the strangeness of the historical input. I can locate certain parallels that draw me to use this story to examine the present; both Angevin England and contemporary America are warring states and the feudal antagonism between the town and gown seems to

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<sup>16</sup> Jacobs-Jenkins, Branden. *An Octoroon*. New York, NY: Dramatists Play Service Inc, 2015.

roughly correspond to the feuding ideologies of populist interest and intellectual seclusion, stoked by more tangible material conflicts over shared resources like housing, land or funding. With these parallels in mind, the goal then is to use the base facts from the historical source and write, in a post-modern tradition, a contemporary context trapped in the shell of the feudal English power struggles in order to highlight the anti-intellectual emergence of autocracy, academia's sometime disregard for the conditions of those without, and the weaponization of the public interest within the realm of rising populism.

### The Ensemble

Having seen varying manifestations of the received power structures in theater rehearsals and the ways in which participants can come out either ignored or abused, I wanted to look for a way to modify the theater production process and challenge these preconceived power structures while still developing a singly-authored text and its related ideas in a freeform and open-minded way. Ariane Mnouchkine, founder of the French theater collective Théâtre du Soleil who was initially frustrated by what she saw as the self-defeating process of creating leftist theater under thoroughly capitalist circumstances, talks about the ensemble development process as a resistance to the "system of production," and not a means of radically dismantling it, but finding a way to produce work that is the way the "group wants it to be."<sup>17</sup> In this sense, the goal of the ensemble would be to reexamine the relationships of the various pieces of the theatrical production process to eliminate the imperatives they put on the theatrical product; in short, to prioritize the human element of the production process rather than the material imperatives of

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<sup>17</sup> Williams, *Collaborative Theatre*, 19.

hierarchical efficiency. Primarily, I want to know if, in providing a more direct line between the text and its producer, and the performers who enact it, we can decentralize who in the room has the privilege of interpretation and generation and give that creative power to the members of the ensemble. In doing so, are we able to yield a product that is more multivocal and more nuanced in the way in comments on its subject? Can we produce a work with less bias and more plurality, and, as Rob Ritchie says in the preface to *The Joint Stock Book*, can we understand more about “how the quality of the work is related to how it is created[?]”<sup>18</sup> At the very bottom of it, can we produce a work that is better (for the audience, in quality, and, for the participants, in process)? Perhaps, at the end of the process, the only way to judge the success of it would be to ask the participants their opinion of the endeavor and whether they felt well-invested and well-utilized by it. With this in mind, I began investigating the working processes of ensemble-based companies that use group investigation to explore work received from external authors or sources. Certain historical examples are interestingly applicable if we think of them in contemporary terms: are the sharers (as opposed to the hirelings and apprentices) of the Elizabethan playing company nothing if not a core, permanent ensemble with shared duties and equal artistic stature working from a text produced by a singular playwright but for the expressed needs of a group?<sup>19</sup> However, this reading of historical structures can be forced and I sought contemporary examples of ensemble groups. There is an often generalized difference in cultural attitudes toward public funding for theater between Europe and the U.S., which perhaps explains why there are several notable ensemble companies from Europe with a wide range of documentation on their practice, and comparatively few American groups (with the exception of

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<sup>18</sup> Ritchie, *The Joint Stock Book*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur F. Kinney and Thomas Warren Hopper, eds., *A New Companion to Renaissance Drama*, First edition., Blackwell companions to literature and culture (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 202.

projects like the Tectonic Theater Project, who just recently published a book on their theory and practice in 2018). Though a lot gets blamed on the differences between European and American funding culture, it seems to have an impact on incubating non-traditional theatrical projects like ensemble development, a relatively fringe practice that has become more and more widely practiced. From here, I examined the processes of notable companies like Joint Stock, Théâtre du Soleil, and Complicité.

The socialist-leaning group Joint Stock, subsequently Out of Joint, emerged as the most relevant precedent to research for a few reasons: their relative commercial success and ties to established playwrights like David Hare and Churchill have led to a generally wide range of literature on their process, and they have a tradition of developing work from a singular source, like *Fanshen* and *Shopping and Fucking*, or working closely with specific playwrights by way of their investigative workshops, like Churchill's *Top Girls* or Hare's *The Permanent Way*.<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly enough, a lot of Joint Stock members trace the communal aspects of Joint Stock to their group exploration of the rise of Chinese communism in *Fanshen*, which formulated a group that “applied the process to itself, eventually establishing a collective, abolishing the post of artistic director and subjecting all aspects of the work ... to democratic discussion and control.”<sup>21</sup>

Joint Stock's legacy is a complicated but celebrated one that, as Ritchie says, gives the “democratic company” a “democratic spirit” and a list of productions that exemplify “ensemble work of the highest order.”<sup>22</sup> Their typical process, with variations over the years, has mostly included an initial development workshop wherein the writer observes the ensemble who, through improvisation and research, explore a typically nebulous topic (for instance, sexual

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<sup>20</sup> McKeown, Maeve, and Ian Redford. *Max Stafford-Clark: Education Resource Packet*. Out of Joint, 2008;

<sup>21</sup> Ritchie, *The Joint Stock Book*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Ritchie, *The Joint Stock Book*, 11.

politics) or source (the historical nonfiction book *Fanshen*). The writer then leaves the process to produce a text, the ensemble dissolves, and they reconvene some time later to rehearse the ensuing script. It is a process that sustains more traditional theatrical production roles, like playwright and director, in service of the ensemble work, seeking to bridge the gap between the “fringe and the bigger stages, a company that could retain the flexible methods of the fringe yet have access to better facilities, reach a broader audience and achieve higher standards.”<sup>23</sup>

In contrast, both Théâtre du Soleil (France) and Complicité (England) are ensembles founded by graduates from the L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq and informed by the largely physical processes taught there. The former, founded by practitioner Ariane Mnouchkine in 1964, adopts a process that Mnouchkine describes as resistant to “leftist plays produced in collaboration with the commercial system.”<sup>24</sup> As Mnouchkine sees it, the political play must be foregrounded in a politically conscious and sustainable process, before it can have political merit. Théâtre du Soleil is a theatrical collective with “no specialization,” all members are paid the same flat salary, that seeks to reconfigure the way plays are produced, using a politically conscious collective process that foregrounds their work, with an intense focus on examining and dismantling received representations of history.<sup>25</sup> Complicité, founded in England by Simon McBurney, Annabel Arden, and Marcello Magni in 1983, founded in contrast to a Thatcher-era theater that was, as McBurney describes it, “very class-determined, literary, intellectual...”<sup>26</sup> Complicité’s connection to continental experimentation was directly opposed to the rising West End culture of the musical mega-phenomenon. Both have a physical focus rather

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<sup>23</sup> Ritchie, *The Joint Stock Book*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Collaborative Theatre*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, *Collaborative Theatre*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Tomasz Wiśniewski, *Complicite, Theatre and Aesthetics* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 2, accessed December 17, 2018, <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-33443-1>.

than a textual one, utilizing tools like *commedia dell'arte* and physical improvisation, entailing a process that moves away from the textual wellspring of the playwright and into the realm of pure devising and group inquiry (with exceptions, like Théâtre du Soleil's more recent collaborations with playwright Hélène Cixous).

At first glance, the ensemble development process could seem like the perfect, non-individualistic formulation of collective artmaking, but the processes examined here approach the question of the individual in complicated ways. The reputation and heritage of Joint Stock as the pinnacle of an egalitarian ensemble experience is challenged by its devoted use of single authors and singular directors, and their supremacy over the process. This is not to say the use of singular writers or directors is problematic in and of itself; certainly my own project hinges on the interplay between that which was produced singularly and the collective effort, but what does it say about feasibility of group artmaking if many critics of Joint Stock imply that their *best work* was when they had strong writers and strong directors? In an interview in *The Contemporary Ensemble*, Max Stafford-Clark admits “the group [was] dominated by Bill [another founder of Joint Stock] and by me because of our position as directors...”<sup>27</sup> This isn't unique to Joint Stock. Even Théâtre du Soleil, which is structurally more communal than Joint Stock or Complicité, is described as “inconceivable” without the contributions of Ariane Mnouchkine (and more recently Hélène Cixous), who, despite her best efforts, seems to be a figurehead of the collective's ethos.<sup>28</sup> Lastly, and most unsettlingly, is that, despite Joint Stock's utopian visions of collectivism in theatre making, the intrusion of disgusting bias has been documented by women who were formative in the group's journey. In *The Joint Stock Book*, one

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<sup>27</sup> Duška Radosavljević, ed., *The Contemporary Ensemble: Interviews with Theatre-Makers* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2013), 66.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, *Collaborative Theatre*, xiii-xv.

of Joint Stock's early collaborators, Carole Hayman, describes rampant sexism, and implications that women can't create as effectively as men levied against her and her female peers.<sup>29</sup> More recently, Max Stafford-Clark was ousted from Out of Joint (Joint Stock's successor company) for sexual harassment against the company's education director.<sup>30</sup> If the goal is to conceive of a process that eliminates bias and celebrates the creative power of members, often ignored voices, what good is an ensemble that perpetuates our darkest and most violent biases, like sexism, racism, classism, or homophobia?

Ultimately, the ensemble experiments I've researched have their great successes, and establish a structural precedent for this project, but not without raising some serious questions about the limitations of a collective ensemble investigation workshop. The ensemble investigation structure's limitations do not defeat its utopian aims: it is a model that, at its heart, decentralizes the artistic impulse of creation and allows the ensemble members access into the roles of interpretation, visualization, and text generation that are traditionally reserved for roles like the director or the playwright. It is a process that can celebrate plurality and engender an initial question or series of questions with a variety of voices, perspectives, and ideas. In evading a standard system of production, the ensemble process is a romantic pursuit of the ideal of collective power instead of the need to bend to market pressures and visions of individual artistic productivity. Its contradictions and implausibilities provide a tension that excites the process rather than defeats it, forcing us to grasp at larger conceptions of creative contribution to the

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<sup>29</sup> Ritchie, *The Joint Stock Book*, 110.

<sup>30</sup> Alexandra Topping, "Theatre Director Max Stafford-Clark Was Ousted over Inappropriate Behaviour," *The Guardian*, October 20, 2017, sec. Stage, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/oct/20/theatre-director-max-stafford-clark-was-ousted-over-inappropriate-behaviour>.

artistic process than the standard rehearsal method we are currently used to, and it is this vibrancy that holds exciting promise in the face of the question: how can we make better theater?

**Annotated Pre-Workshop Draft of**  
*THE FIRST OXFORD ST. SCHOLASTICA'S DAY PAGEANT*<sup>31</sup>

By Josh Oberlander

Developed by Julia Byrne, Peter Buzzerio, Adam Friedman, Lily Bowman, and Nathan Ray

CHARACTERS<sup>32</sup>

- ADAM: A young clerk, played by a woman.<sup>33</sup>
- HENRY: A young clerk, played by a woman.
- JAMES: A promising scholar, played by a man.
- JOAN: A woman in the town, played by a man.
- KING JOHN OF ANGEVIN EMPIRE
- QUEEN CONSORT ISABELLA, COUNTESS OF ANGOULEME
- ESSEX: The king's thing.
- HEADMASTERS of OXFORD UNIVERSITY
- JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER for THE TOWN OF OXFORD
- THE TOWN OF OXFORD

SETTING

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<sup>31</sup> The title references a few things: (1) the medieval pageant drama structure and the title of medieval plays like *The Wakefield Second Shepherds Pageant*, (2) the aesthetic of the piece: (a thrown-together, irreverent, and non-naturalistic performance piece), and (3) St. Scholastica's Day (a following town and gown conflict in Oxford that ended with the town of Oxford being forced to pay reparations to the university on St. Scholastica's day up until recent history).

<sup>32</sup> The cast was chosen after a discussion about each member's strengths, interests, and desires re: roles they could play or roles they wished to challenge themselves with (see: rehearsal notes for final cast list). It was relatively easy and non-overlapping, except for Peter Buzzerio and Adam Friedman who worked the casting decision between themselves. Also, two roles were added within the process: Gregor and Gwen, played by Julia Byrne and Peter Buzzerio respectively.

<sup>33</sup> There was a lot of discussion initially about why I included genderbending as an element of the main characters, and what the ensemble thought of it. Personally, non-comedic drag as a queer performance tool is something with a long lineage in the theater, and I enjoy going back to it in my writing. It complicates the role of gender in the events of the play, and, in the case of Adam and Henry, who are marginalized within academia for many reasons, the visible presence of the female performers who are locked out of a "boy's club" is meant to reflect a lot of the contemporary non-male, non-heteronormative scholars' struggles to achieve respect in an environment that privileges sexually, racially, gender-normative thought. More practically, as Julia Byrne mentioned, the gender bending allows a play that would be all males and one woman who is brutally murdered in a sexually charged way to instead be more inclusive to female performers. Nathan Ray mentioned that genderbending Joan gave him pause because he feared of a male actor laying claim to the experience/depiction of sexual violence that is inflicted on women, but also said that putting a male actor in that position has the fascinating effect of making an audience potentially uncomfortable with sexual violence on stage, something female performers are often forced to undergo, is often romanticized and often goes unquestioned by the audience, a distancing technique observed in the work of, for instance, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins (whose *An Octoroon* served as research material for this piece) or Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*.

Oxford University, England, 1209. For the most part.

At night, if you go a little out of town, you can see every star in the night sky. But there's something fearful in the dark and in the air.

## NOTES

No accents.

## DOCUMENTS QUOTED

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Boethius, *De Institutione Arithmetica*
- William Shakespeare, *King John*
- John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*
- Sir Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentence of Peter Lombard*
- Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*
- *The King James Bible*<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> A prologue was added here, based on improvisations during the workshop, depicting the characters drinking in the bar during the “festival” that occurs just before the beginning of the play. The prologue was performed to contemporary music pulled from a playlist that was collaboratively compiled.

## 1.

*Just outside ADAM, HENRY, and JAMES' shitty house.  
ADAM and HENRY stumble up drunk.*

ADAM  
Locked?

HENRY  
Of course.  
Do you have the key?

ADAM  
No Henry you have the— Oh god, I'm gonna throw up.

HENRY  
Again? Jesus. Do it out here.  
Do you have the key.

*After some rummaging, ADAM hands HENRY the key. Before ADAM can hand it over, he retches. HENRY pushes him and he falls into the grass to retch.*

HENRY  
OH ADAM, oh shit, I'm so sorry...

ADAM  
Did you push me?  
(Out) Did he push me?

HENRY  
I'm sorry... Ugh, it's just you were about to— I mean, it's a new tunic— I'll go get you some water.

ADAM  
You didn't have to push me, though...

HENRY  
I'm sorry, I'll be right back.

*He goes to unlock the door, but can't do it. He's so wasted.  
ADAM stops wrenching for a moment, turns over and sits against the front of the house.*

ADAM

Rich boys, and their clothes. I mean, I don't blame him— If I could spend as much as he does on clothes, I would, but I can't so I guess... I mean, I wish he didn't push me down.

*(Retches, but nothing comes up)*

Huh. Anyway, he's too smart to spend that much on a tunic, even if he can, but he buys a lot of books so I guess the tunics and the books balance out, and he even reads them *all* too, the books, not the tunics, obviously.

*(Leans in)* He's working on a translation, a big one. I know. I mean, he reads and writes Latin, duh, but the things he does with Greek, with French, with Anglo-Saxon, with Arabic, it's beautiful to watch. Sometimes I just watch him write for hours. He says it's something about this philosopher Secundus<sup>35</sup> or whatever, and I don't know what it means, it's all Greek to me so I just watch. Watch him work, when I'm not doing my own work. *(whispers)* I'm working on something very special. Secret and special.

*(He looks at him, the door finally opens.)*

When we first started renting this house together, I mean, we'd like just gotten here, and I'm from Bletchingly-on-Medway so you know how I am and he's from Southwark so you know how all that is, I mean, his dad's a pretty good wainwright for Christ's sake (sorry), I mean you know how they are and stuff so we didn't really talk and we'd just come home and go in our separate rooms and work and work, and one time, I mean, it must've been a year ago, he came over and knocked on my door, and he said, hey there's this bard in town, with his lute or whatever, and I was gonna go and I don't wanna walk alone. And I said: yeah? I mean, what else do you say to that? And he's like: You wanna come? And I don't know what to say, so I'm like: I mean, I haven't really seen that many bards or whatever I don't know and so he nodded and went to leave and I dunno why but I stopped him and said yeah I'd love to come. And we did, and we talked the whole way there. And we talked the whole way back. And I guess we've never stopped talking since. There was a few days a few months later where there was this like crazy fucking storm, insane, the hale and the rain came down like a thick thick curtain and everything was running and flooding and so classes were cancelled, and so we just kinda sat by the window, waited it out together, always talking. And ever since, I dunno— *(laughs quietly)*

The townies, they can drink. I mean, he can drink too. I guess I can drink, I guess my problem is holding it down, and I seem to be the only one who can't hold it.

HENRY

Here you go. *(Hands him water.)*

ADAM

Where's James?

*(out)* He's our shitty roommate. *(whispers)* *He's from London.*

HENRY

---

<sup>35</sup> I chose Secundus as the name for Henry's academic interest thinking there was no such person: partially to imply that Henry's execution could lead to this person's descent into historical anonymity, and also that it is literally Latin for second, as in second-rate or second-best (an anxiety of Henry's). However, Julia Byrne's research showed Secundus the Silent to be an actual figure from history, who seduced his own mother to prove a misogynistic point about women's frailty and then took a vow of silence.

I don't know. Lost him hours back.

ADAM

Oh yeah, that girl...

HENRY

I mean, of course. There's always a girl.  
Let's get you inside.

ADAM

Wait. Listen.

*Silence. After a moment, some music and singing rings over the distance.*

HENRY

The music?

ADAM

Yeah. They're still going.

HENRY

They'll be going all night, and then all day tomorrow, with their... maypole, or whatever.

ADAM

Did you have fun though?

HENRY

Yeah. Did you?  
Drink your water.

ADAM

Yeah. Of course. Thank you for coming out, I know it's not your thing.

HENRY

No, of course. I had fun. A lot of fun.

ADAM

You even danced.

HENRY

I'll deny it if you tell.

ADAM

*(laughs, then a small moment)* Will you spend the night in my room? I know the bed's small, but—

Of course.

HENRY

Okay, I'm ready now.

ADAM

Do you have to throw up again?

HENRY

I don't think so.  
*(Forced retch into the grass. Nothing. Placid smile back at Henry.)*  
All good.

ADAM

Up ya go, then.  
I'm sorry I pushed you.

HENRY

No harm, no harm.  
What's tomorrow?

ADAM

Monday. Aristotle at 9.

HENRY

Fuuuuuuuck.

ADAM

## 2.

*Tavern. Very much looks like a bar in a college town at closing time.*

*JOAN, the barback, is wiping down tables, JAMES watches her, and maybe a couple nuzzling in the back of the bar, maybe an older drunkard.*

*Everything is messy.*

JAMES

Am I in your way?

JOAN

I mean...

JAMES

Yeah?

JOAN

Yes, sir.

JAMES

Good.

I'd very much like to be in your way.

*JOAN just laughs, shakes her head.*

JAMES

What? Corny?

JOAN

Beyond corny.

JAMES

It made you laugh though, and you have an incredible laugh.

JOAN

College boy?

JAMES

Does it show?

JOAN

(laughing) Sorely.

JAMES

There it is again.

DRUNKARD<sup>36</sup>

Joan!

JOAN

Yeah?

DRUNKARD

Oh am I interrupting you and—

JOAN

What do you want, Fred?

DRUNKARD

Another drink—

JOAN

Bar's closing soon, don't you think—

DRUNK

Oh just one more Joanie, just one more fuckin' cup.

JAMES

Two for me.

JOAN

Okay, okay, last round, last call.

DRUNK

Where's your brother, Joanie?

JOAN

Not here.

DRUNK

Where is he? He should be helping. You're all alone—

JOAN

He's not here, stop asking.

DRUNK

*(matter-of-factly to JAMES)* Huh, must be dead.

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<sup>36</sup> The drunk is played in this production by Lily Bowman, and the lovers are Julia Byrne and Nathan Ray.

*She goes to get the drinks. The couple puts their money down and starts to stumble out.*

LOVER

Did you leave your bag?

LOVER

Oh, oh, I think I did. I think I left it at the table.

*One goes to get the bag, and the other just stares at JAMES.*

JAMES

What do you want.

LOVER

Oxford student?

JAMES

Yeah?

*LOVER spits on him.*

JAMES

*(calmly)* Thank you.

LOVER

My uncle had to move out of his house because you bastards drove the rent up.  
You're welcome.<sup>37</sup>

LOVER

*(rushing up)* What the fuck did you do that for? Sorry, sir, sorry, she's very drunk.  
Let's go.

*They go as JOAN reenters with drinks and JAMES wipes his face.*

JOAN

One for you. *(hands one to the drunk)*  
And two for you. *(hands two to JAMES)*

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<sup>37</sup> This is the first glimpse we have at discontent, mostly economic, from the townspeople toward the university's impact, mirroring similar anxieties that people have toward the gentrifying effects of expanding contemporary universities. The ensemble expressed that the script doesn't show enough on the public, and we are particularly strapped for performers to make this happen, so the town of Oxford's issues (and the public, in the frame narrative [frame narrative being the catch-all term for the triangular relationship of co-dependencies and tensions between the university, the state, and the public betwixt]) are represented by mostly singular characters.

JAMES

And one for you. (*slides it over to her*)

*JOAN looks at it for a moment, before laughing.*

JOAN

Alright, I'll bite. Joan.<sup>38</sup>

JAMES

James.

JOAN

What do you study, James?

JAMES

Theology.

JOAN

Amen.

JAMES

My thoughts point heavenward.

JOAN

Are your friends the same thing?

JAMES

Friends?

JOAN

The guys you were—

JAMES

Ohh, ohh yes. My roommates. They're clerks, not scholars. It's different. (*whispers*) *Worse*. And I guess they're my friends. We're housemates, so we stick together a lot. They're kind of killjoys. They spend a lot of time together, but they never interrupt me.

JOAN

That's nice of them. What's a clerk do?

JAMES

They can work on their own projects but mostly they're support staff, for the scholars.

---

<sup>38</sup> Julia pointed out that this scene was interesting to her because this scene is rather ambiguous as to whether Joan is actually attracted to James or not, and that was a decision left almost completely to the performer.

JOAN

Lemme guess, like you?

JAMES

I'm a man on top over at Oxford. Sometimes, I have two clerks helping.

JOAN

Ah, yes, man on top. You scholars are quite the polite and modest bunch.

JAMES

I'm sensing some sarcasm.

JOAN

A little bit. I haven't had the best experiences.

JAMES

I'm sorry to hear that. Some of us might be very charming if you got to know us—

JOAN

Get to know you? Please. Most of you don't even speak English. You just babble to each other in some language, your precious Latin, and point to the table, thrust your empty cups out at me, have rounds and rounds and by the time you stumble out of here you're too broke to tip. You trash the tables, break the glasses.

JAMES

Oh wow.

JOAN

Sorry, I wouldn't normally say that to a customer, I just— It's late.

JAMES

I get it. Well, I hope I've been a little more pleasant than most.

JOAN

You've been nice, yeah.

JOAN

*(suddenly)* Why did you wait around for me?

JAMES

What do you mean?

JOAN

Why didn't you go home with anyone else. Like, I don't know, someone who doesn't work here.

JAMES

Because I wasn't interested in anyone but you.

JOAN

That's very flattering. God, it's late. I need to start closing up—

JAMES

Wait. *(fishes out some money, puts it on the table)* A tip.

JOAN

Oh, yes. Thank you. *(counting the money)* Oh damn.

JAMES

There's a bit there.

JOAN

Thank you very much.

JAMES

When's your shift end tomorrow?

JOAN

Late.

JAMES

Same time, same place. *(he gets up to go)* And there's more where that came from.

## 3.

*Dinnertime in Oxford's candlelit dining hall. Very Hogwarts. They're sweating profusely under the heat of the candles.*<sup>39</sup>

*The Headmaster's speech:*

HEADMASTER 1<sup>40</sup>

Good evening all.

HEADMASTER 2

Good evening.

HEADMASTER

I welcome you all, fellows, to a warm meal underscored with the warmest thoughts of your loving and esteemed headmasters.

HEADMASTER

A harsh winter has thawed to a fabulously verdant spring, but we would all do well to concern ourselves with the quote of the esteemed Aristotle: *'Tis not a singular swallow or a fine day that makes a spring, so it is not one day or a short time that makes a man blessed and happy*

HEADMASTER

So quite wise, sir.

HEADMASTER

The contents of our soul, its virtuous fabric, does assert the goodness of the quality of our times, thereby assuring the goodness of our lives,

HEADMASTER

And then it follows, thereby, that the goodness of the quality of our enduring growth of knowledge does well to assure the goodness of our virtuous thoughts:

HEADMASTER

THEREBY, good sir—

---

<sup>39</sup> In the later version of the script, the following is specified: "Through the course of the speech, they strike poses from *The School of Athens* painting by Raphael, statues of the institution." This is the first of what we called **visual structures**, blocking and images that the actors occupied to create scenic arrangements that were drawn from outside material. This instance shows poses the actors drew from the famous painting of *The Academy*, and was created organically from there.

<sup>40</sup> Very early on, the cast referred to these characters as *dottore* archetypes, and, in the visual structure, came to see them as statues of the institution of the university that, as the play progresses, become more and more human. I wrote their dialogue to be as difficult and artificial as possible, inspired by other plays that play with borderline incomprehensible syntax, vocabulary, or usage to convey a linguistic barrier on the stage (see: *You for Me for You* by Mia Chung).

HEADMASTER

Good sir—

HEADMASTER

Thereby proposing the fundamentals of our place here in Oxford: our enclave of good knowledge thusly breeds sterling thoughts thusly breeding good gilded virtuous lives, thereby gilding over our entire lives on this mortal coil—

HEADMASTER

Thereby begging thusly the following question: to suffer ignorance bestially thusly ensures bad thoughts, bad actions, bad lives perforated with many vices.

HEADMASTER

Do you excuse those who know not any better?

HEADMASTER

Just as ignorance of law does not excuse crime, ignorance of higher laws, higher thoughts, higher virtues, does not excuse vice.

HEADMASTER

Thereby, good sir,

HEADMASTER

Thereby—

HEADMASTER

Thereby, goodest of sirs, in the midst of festivals such as this weekend's most raucous affair, we must extend pity on those who do not partake in the exchange of discourse, by extension knowledge, by extension virtue, by extension goodness, but also be steady in censure, let them know better, by your modest example when that is enough, by direct words and actions when those are requisite.

HEADMASTER

Those who don't feel comfort in doing this, leading as an exemplar in the world, should rather sequester their minds to the confines of our university's walls, our university's minds, We shall now be led in song:

[To the tune of the Alma Mater]<sup>41</sup>

*With its comely green traverses*

*With its hallowed halls*

*When the bell doth toll at noontime*

*Oxford's wisdom calls.*

---

<sup>41</sup> This was sung, in our version, by the entire cast.

JAMES

*(whispering)* So when I went to Paris for that semester, I shit you not, there was not a day I wasn't knee deep in—

HENRY

*(absently whispering)* uh huh.

JAMES

Anyway, dude, the food is shit. They say our food is shit, but damn. And I was supposed to be gathering research material but they're fucking insane if they think—

HENRY

uh huh.

ADAM

*(whispering)* Guys.

JAMES

Adam what do you want.

ADAM

Be quiet they're singing the—

JAMES

I'm telling Henry about the time I fucked a nun in Paris.

*HENRY shoots ADAM a 'help me' look.*

ADAM

Charming. But the song, James—

HEADMASTER

*(hissing)* Could the good sir, Clerk Adam, please remain silent.

*ADAM deflates. JAMES and HENRY stifle laughter.*

[continuing]

*Wisdom comes to the enlightened*

*Let our wisdom spread*

*By the words of sterling sages*

*Let our lives be led.*

*Oxford calls me, Oxford tells me*

*Secrets of this frame*

*Wisest hearts seeks the knowledge*

*To defer the flame.*

HEADMASTER

What beautiful song. Music is of course one of the fundamental building blocks on the liberal art's trivium. Consider this passage from renowned Boethius: *Nunc illud est intuendum quod omnis ars, omnisque etiam disciplina honorabiliorem naturaliter habeat rationem, quam artificium, quod manu atque opere artificis exercetur. Multo enim est majus atque altius scire quod quisque faciat . . . (continues underneath)*<sup>42</sup>

HENRY

Do you still have a headache?

ADAM

Yeah, it's fine though.  
(to James) Where did you end up last night?

JAMES

I was with someone until last call.

ADAM

What did they do to deserve that?

JAMES

Fuck you.

HENRY

Some country girl no doubt.

JAMES

You're such an elitist, Henry.

HENRY

Sure but I don't get off on outsmarting townies before fucking and dumping them.

JAMES

That's harsh.

HENRY

It's fucked, what you do to them.

---

<sup>42</sup> Very interestingly, Nathan Ray played this part, and went immediately into the Latin (having studied Latin at Emory). This was an interesting moment of the ensemble bringing their skills from other classes into the production without much introduction or ado, and Nathan became somewhat of the Latin expert for the process, later coaching Lily on her Latin lines that appear later in the play.

JAMES

At least I deign to stoop so low as to speak to them, unlike you, your highness.

ADAM

Guys, please—

JAMES

And I'd rather fuck some milkmaid in a field than sit in a room and jerk off over your precious essays all night. You wouldn't know what to do with a woman unless they published the instructions in Greek first and asked you to translate them

*HENRY doesn't reply to that.*

HEADMASTER

Does good sir Clerk Henry have a moment to spare for level discussion on the subject of his work?

HENRY

Of course, sir.

*THEY walk away, take a lap.<sup>43</sup>*

JAMES

I've lost my appetite.

ADAM

You can be a real dick, James.

JAMES

He's a hypocrite. He really is an elitist.

HEADMASTER

I understand your progress on your translation of Secundus' *De Poetica Bonitatis*<sup>44</sup> is quite ... significant.

ADAM

Elitist? Look at what you're wearing. Look at where we're eating.

HENRY

Yes sir, I am approaching the end of *liber primus*, and might I say I am quite excited to—

HEADMASTER

---

<sup>43</sup> This too was developed from their improvisation within the visual structure, which had a very Jane Austen-esque "turn around the room."

<sup>44</sup> This roughly translates to The Poetics of Goodness and is not a real text, at least to my knowledge.

I understand your manuscript is mounting, and I have heard from your advisor that it is a formidable feat in Greek translation, from a promising new clerk.

HENRY

I thank you for the complimentary words, I'm—

HEADMASTER

I understand you are making headway far in advance of your timeline.

HENRY

Right, yes, I uh—

HEADMASTER

In that case, our department has conferred and we think perhaps the most ardently useful direction of your work is to assist good sir Scholar James on his climactic thesis: his commentary of the nature of the soul, after Aquinas' commentary on the Arabic commentary on Boethius' commentary of Aristotle's commentary on Plato.<sup>45</sup>

HENRY

Yes I will try to carve some time for him in the midst of—

HEADMASTER

Try to carve, *hmm*, well perhaps, defer rather than carve.

HENRY

I'm sorry?

HEADMASTER

Yes, it's work/study you see.<sup>46</sup> You do your work, then you help him do his studies. He's of remarkable provenance, a wealthy and genteel scholar all the way from London, and we are very pleased with his work. He deserves someone of well-examined renown to help him complete his very worthy manuscript before he graduates. I believe good sir if that requires perhaps, shifting focus away from your work for the moment, for the requisite amount of moments, that he requires then perhaps that would be most suitable for all.

*HENRY looks back at JAMES.*

---

<sup>45</sup> This was an attempt to convey to the audience, in a humorous way, the journey of widely-considered canonical texts back into Europe during the Middle Ages. The rediscovery of Aristotle (somewhat around the play's diegetic period actually), for instance, struck Julia Byrne as something that should be seen in the play as a genuinely exciting development, but that did not make it into the draft as much as I'd have liked

<sup>46</sup> This is a contemporary critique of my own of how low-income students often have to sacrifice their disposable time, used for study or even relaxation, in order to help the university or other students. This is not to say the work/study program is bad, and it does provide much-needed work to low income students like myself, but does come at a cost that more privileged students don't have to incur.

JAMES  
Her name is Joan.

ADAM  
Was she nice?

HENRY  
Of course, good sir.

HEADMASTER  
I so look forward to your fabulous work good sir, indeed.

JAMES  
Yes, but not fawning. Blunt, like an old axe.

ADAM  
Oh of course.

JAMES  
I'm seeing her again tonight.

HENRY  
What's that?

ADAM  
Nothing. How was your meeting?

JAMES  
Well, I've got a seminar, I've got to head off.

ADAM  
Which seminar?

JAMES  
Aristotle.

BOTH  
Ah.

JAMES  
Yeah. See ya.

*A moment, watching him leave.*

HENRY

I'm gonna fucking kill him.

ADAM

What?

HENRY

I— *(about to yell, he bites his sleeve and starts to stifle crying, a lot like a child.)*

ADAM

What's wrong?

HENRY

I'm sorry, I've got to go.

ADAM

Henry.

*HENRY storms swiftly off, ADAM following.*

## 4.

*A field by the river. Stars as far as the eye can see.*

*JOAN and JAMES swig a 40 oz of mead from a brown paper bag, stumble a little. They've been drinking.*

Hand it here. JOAN

Here. JAMES

Oh, I'm done walking. JOAN

*She lowers herself onto the grass.  
JAMES follows.*

Oh god, it's so wet. JAMES

It rained while we were talking. In the tavern. JOAN

I didn't notice. JAMES

*(laughs)* How? JOAN

I was distracted, by you. JAMES

Very charming. JOAN

*She unties her smock, puts it on the ground for him.*

*(sitting)* Such unexpected chivalry. JAMES

You said you were going to tell me about the stars. JOAN

JAMES  
Oh, oh yes... Where to start...

JOAN  
What's that one?

JAMES  
*(squints, then laughs)* I don't know.  
That one's Pisces.

JOAN  
What?

JAMES  
The fish one.

JOAN  
Ohhhh yeah. I forgot. My mom told me about them a long time ago.  
The fish one.  
*(points)* The hunter.

JAMES  
Orion.  
*(points)* Virgo.

JOAN  
What's that?

JAMES  
The maiden.

JOAN  
Someone told me in great big castles, when a baby's born, they draw up the whole sky and you can tell a whole life from all that.

JAMES  
Sometimes. Not always, though.  
For very important people.

JOAN  
Though, the joke with that is like, what fuckin' monk or whatever is gonna draw up the sky, and see some bad omen of some horrible painful death, and then go to the king and queen and be like, oh yeah your babies gonna die at 13 of a horrible, painful death.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> This was, at least to me, a little off-handed reference to the drama around the star chart that appears in *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster (Act III, scene 2).

JAMES  
Yeah, that'd be hard.

JOAN  
Shoot the messenger, you know.

JAMES  
Gimme.

JOAN  
Oh, oh. (*hands him the bottle*)

JAMES  
You said you've been working at the bar for a year.

JOAN  
Yeah.

JAMES  
How do you like it?

JOAN  
It's fine. It's rough. But it was easier with two people.

JAMES  
Who helped?

JOAN  
My brother.

JAMES  
Where's your brother?

JOAN  
Oh. Oh.  
France.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> In the workshop, there was a day where Julia asked which war to which they were referring, and, with some research, we concluded it was just another conflict in a series of long-running wars that were so ubiquitous, they had no formal name. I found a sad similarity between the wars tearing apart the Angevin Empire and the web of armed conflicts that occupy contemporary America. The analogy is stretched, but both are nationalistic in nature, and serve the interests of a ruling class almost exclusively. They are also part of a nebulous string of conflicts, not one monumental war with easily definable boundaries. This became apparent when an ensemble member asked which

Fighting? JAMES

Yeah. JOAN

Sorry. JAMES

Don't— Don't. JOAN

Oh, okay. JAMES

JOAN  
 He did it for the money. Can you believe that? If he dies over there, I don't know, it's like, he's young and full of life—  
*(shakes her head)* It's all about money.  
 What year are you? At Oxford.

A senior. JAMES

You tired of it yet? JOAN

School? JAMES

Yeah. JOAN

Yeah. JAMES  
 You ever get tired of living here?

Duh. JOAN

You ever try to leave? JAMES

---

war they were fighting in the text, and we couldn't find a specific answer. They are both societies that are ever-constantly war-driven, with all the consequences of that.

JOAN

No.

JAMES

Why don't you?

JOAN

Same reasons as everyone else. Family's here, they've been here, never been anywhere else. Some Vikings or whatever fucked on this hill, made a brood. They fucked some others here, probably in this field or that one, had their own litter. Some ancestors decided to stick around, and I'm just a punctuation mark to all that, I guess, end of a very long sentence. Everyone I've ever known sticks around here, has stuck around, old as the hills themselves, miserable as mud. What's your excuse?

JAMES

Leaving?

I probably will leave. When I graduate.

Go back to *London*.

Do you hear that?

*They stop talking for a second. An owl calls.*<sup>49</sup>

JOAN

An owl. Ominous.

Do you like being a student?

JAMES

Sure. I like it well enough. I'm very good at it.

Do you want to know what else I'm good at?

JOAN

What?

*He leans into her. A horribly sloppy kiss. Awkward to watch.*<sup>50</sup>

JOAN

---

<sup>49</sup> The owl is a contemporary symbol of wisdom, but in the Middle Ages, it was seen as a bad omen. I liked this double-nature.

<sup>50</sup> Early on, the ensemble agreed that certain things that would be hard to convey in the reading/workshop format would be read from the script by someone not in the scene, and we had a discussion about whether this would be read or performed in the reading: partially because Peter felt ill during the process and didn't want to get Adam sick, but also because it would be tonally inkeeping. Adam Friedman argued that the irreverent tone allowed us to read it in a humorous way, but I said the intimacy shared by two performers who are heterosexual in the text but literally the same gender is a strange and transgressive gesture that alienates the audience and their reaction to the intimacy being portrayed. The ultimately decided to perform it.

*(wiping her mouth)* Wow.  
Do you want me?

JAMES

Yeah.

*THEY kiss again, just as poorly.*

JOAN

I want you too. But first, you said, after you gave me the big tip at the bar...

JAMES

Oh. Oh.

JOAN

You said—

JAMES

You're a whore.

JOAN

No, what? No, I'm not, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about an arrangement, an ongoing arrangement.

JAMES

What are you talking about?

JOAN

The best of both worlds.  
You give me something I need, when I need it. Regularly.  
I'll give what you need, when you need. Regularly.

*They freeze.  
HENRY and ADAM are trawling up to their house.*

ADAM

I heard an owl a while back.

HENRY

Yes. I also heard it.

ADAM

Ok.

HENRY

...

ADAM

Dinner was shit tonight, yeah?

HENRY

Not really.

ADAM

I was being polemical. For effect.

HENRY

All polemics are for effect. That's what makes them polemical.

ADAM

Okay, what the fuck did I do? Why are you talking to me like I'm the bad guy? You have been since dinner. /I'm not a bad guy.

HENRY

/I know that.

ADAM

No but like, I understand you're pissed off, I understand your meeting was bad, you don't have to take everything out on me all the time.

HENRY

I don't always take things out on you, stop being ridiculous.

ADAM

I understand they're telling you your thesis isn't as important as James'. I understand how bad that makes you feel, I understand you're really fucked up about your translations of whoever—

HENRY

Secundus.

ADAM

Yeah, "Secundus."

HENRY

Why do you say it like that?<sup>51</sup>

ADAM

---

<sup>51</sup> A short exchange was added here based on the fact Secundus actually is a documented historical figure, a direct response to Julia's interesting research.

All day, you just seethe, I just get these monosyllabic “yes, grr, no, grr” and I’m just supposed to be like, sure! When you fuck up a page and have to start over, the whole night becomes a vigil on your ruined page. When I was drunk after the festival, you pushed me because—

HENRY

Are you still mad about that?

ADAM

No, I’m not mad, it’s just like—

HENRY

It was an accident, Adam.

ADAM

I get that—

HENRY

I was told to put aside my work because James, with all his money and all his accolades and all the academic head patting, the fucking sycophant nymphomaniac, he needs help.<sup>52</sup> He’s got everything because they’ve let him in the boy’s club. I’ve gotten no help to do what I do. I’m not a part of that club, and I’m starting to fear I never will be—

ADAM

Are you jealous of him?

HENRY

What? *What?*

ADAM

No, just the way you talk—

HENRY

*I’m not fucking jealous of him.*

ADAM

I didn’t mean it like that—

HENRY

I’m sorry you can’t understand what it means to work on something you’re truly proud of, what that feels like.

---

<sup>52</sup> Added in the later script: “I can actually help people, my work can teach people about what it was like to live then, *that’s priceless*. To teach people, to help people, *that’s priceless*.--” to which Adam replies, “I know it is.” This is because the ensemble felt the script critiqued the university a lot, but at the expense of discussing the tangible and intangible pleasures of university learning, and the empowering effects of it. It is a long-winded discourse, but I tried to include some of that sentiment (the genuine reward of scholarly pursuits) here for the actor to attach to.

(*taken aback*) Oh. ADAM

I... I didn't... HENRY

Sounded like you meant it to me. ADAM

I'm sorry. HENRY

I hate you. ADAM

That's not true. HENRY

... ADAM

*They're near enough home to see a warm glow from inside their home, the door left cracked open.*

Fuck. HENRY

Damnit James. ADAM

I'm gonna fucking kill him, this is the second time he's left the door— HENRY

*HENRY rushes in.*

ADAM  
(*to the audience*) He always does this, and we told him if he did it again we'd have to penalize him, surcharge him or something, I don't know how. Maybe—

(*reappearing*) He's not here. HENRY

He's probably out still. ADAM

His shit is gone. HENRY

What? ADAM

His books, his clothes; there's nothing. HENRY

The fuck? ADAM

*ADAM goes in to check. He comes out.*

Why would he? ADAM

I don't know, I'm so— HENRY

*Yelling heard off.*

What are— ADAM

Get inside. HENRY

The fuck is on their hands? Is that blood? ADAM

Get inside. HENRY

*A moment of indecisions, ADAM goes inside. HENRY remains, frozen. JAMES just begins to burst out laughing.*

You think I'm going to— JAMES

At the bar, last night, you said— JOAN

JAMES

You are an idiot for thinking I meant I'd rent you like a prostitute, for a fuck I could get for free. You're just a greedy townie. You're nothing. In fact, you'd be lucky to have me, a man of my stature and class—

JOAN

Lucky to have you? Oh fucking spare me.

JAMES

What?

JOAN

You really think I'm lucky to have you? You really think I'm lucky to be in your presence?

JAMES

Yes.

JOAN

You're worthless. What are you good at? Pointing at shapes in the sky and giving their Greek names? Extraordinary. You're good at drinking, and dancing, and fucking<sup>53</sup>. Showing up somewhere, talk about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, write about it in a dead language, publish it in a book. Rinse and repeat. You're *brilliant*, all of you brilliant, useless men. Lucky to have you.

JAMES

What did we ever do to you?

JOAN

I work at a fucking bar. I serve you all liquor, I get to overhear, whenever you deign to speak English at all, how simple we are, how foolish, how bestial! You think we're animals, we're just trying to work the best we can here. We're trying our best here. *We're trying our best.*

JAMES

Okay, listen—

JOAN

No, you listen. I've never gotten the chance to tell one of you to your face how much I hate the way you condescend, look down on us, spit in our faces while you rent out our houses and eat our food and drink our beer. You take us for granted, our obedience, you take it as a given, our ignorance. I can't do what you do but I can be honest, share, be fair and kind. I would I could learn each of you some of that, but I can't. And now you think, in your heart of hearts, that you're God's given gift to me because you can speak Greek. You really thought you were so special that you'd get under my skirt with just some Greek and a brisk walk. (*she laughs*) You said you speak four languages?

---

<sup>53</sup> In the production, Adam reliably changed this to: "You're good at drinking, and dancing, and *maybe* fucking."

JAMES

Yes.

JOAN

You know what I thought of? One day, nobody's gonna speak the languages you speak, you know that? Everyone will read everything and learn everything, and then you'll all be sorry. I think one day all the laws will be written in English.

JAMES

The Bible isn't even written in English.

JOAN

That can't go on forever. It can't. Maybe for a while, but not forever. But maybe it will. Everything's built for you guys on top, and they always make sure it'll stay that way, don't they? But, I mean, it doesn't matter. You wanna know why? You can write all the papers in the world, speak every language, recite every chapter of every book in Latin, and I still wouldn't be impressed. How's that make you feel? I think that must makes you realize: if there's one woman out there who can't be impressed by my knowledge, there must be many. Many men, many women, maybe: all my work pleases so few people that all my work will rot away on a shelf and I'll never have anything left of me in the world one day.<sup>54</sup>  
I'm sorry, I really thought— I lost my head, coming out here.

JAMES

I could have you whipped for the way you're speaking to me.  
I could strike you and nobody would ever blame me.  
You wretch.<sup>55</sup>

JOAN

I enjoyed talking with you. Foolish me, I thought you were nice. Go fuck yourself.  
I'm going home.

JAMES

*(seething)* Wait.  
Come here.

JOAN

---

<sup>54</sup> This tirade changed a bit between productions, but ultimately was important in that it was Joan's chance to sum up a lot of Oxford's (the town's) grievances against the university, so it remained relatively fleshed out. Furthermore, it has a sense of prophecy to it that I felt would foreground Joan's later posthumous monologue that has an equally prophetic tone.

<sup>55</sup> In later texts, this was changed to "You certainly wouldn't be the first, you wretch." This line was added because Lily Bowman believed that James' character hurt women in the past. Julia Byrne also said that the escalation of this scene from a pretty non-violent sexual encounter to a murder highlighted the journey of a boorish man to perpetrator of violence that actually occurs in universities.

What? No.

JAMES

Are you afraid of me?

JOAN

No, I'm not.

JAMES

Wrong.

JOAN

What the fuck did you just say?

JAMES

Come here.

JOAN

No.

JAMES

Come here.

JOAN

Get away or I'll scream.

JAMES

I'm going to make you eat your words—

JOAN

Fuck you.

*JOAN throws the bottle at him, and runs, and he darts after her.*

JOAN (*off*)

LET FUCKING GO—

*JAMES yelps and comes back on, hand over his bloodied eye.*

JAMES

SHE SCRATCHED MY FUCKING EYE.

*He sees the broken head of the bottle, grabs it, wields it, and runs back after her.<sup>56</sup>*

---

<sup>56</sup> There was some discussion over whether James grabbing the bottle is an act of complete, in-the-moment passion, or a calculated choice that we see him make, and, while Peter left it somewhat ambiguous in the performance, the

*Blackout.*

5.

*The dark. Night noises: toads, an owl, wind.*

*Voices in the distance. They get closer.*

VOICE 1

There she is.

VOICE

Holy shit, is that?

VOICE

Oh shit, it's Todd's girl.

VOICE 1

I heard a scream, so did my wife, so I let my dog out, and he ran off to this field and I followed and I smelled it before I saw it, and I slipped in the blood, and now it's all over me—

VOICE

Cover her up.

*A door opens, a stark beam of light. There's a body, covered in a bloody wool blanket.<sup>57</sup>*

*A small group of people are clustered over her.*

VOICE

Who do you think it was?

VOICE

She was dragged.

VOICE

She was stabbed.

VOICE

Was she... you know...

VOICE

---

ensemble discussed that the calculation was important to the situation because it showed James' intention very clearly. I thought it was important for the same reason.

<sup>57</sup> This visual was cut from the production. Overall, this scene in the dark was developed by the ensemble based on the ambiguous cues from the text. I had to help in the development of it, as the only person who was able to spectate it.

Don't tell Todd.

VOICE

Someone at the bar said she was going to meet a student.

VOICE

Christ...

Who said that?

VOICE

That drunk Fred.

VOICE

Find the drunk, bang on his door, ask him who.

*Lights out.*

VOICE

HEY.

VOICE

YOU, STAY RIGHT THERE.

*Flashlights illuminate a crowd facing down HENRY.*

HENRY

Can I help you?

VOICE

Where's your friend?

HENRY

Why is he covered in blood?

VOICE

Get your friend, step aside. We're searching your home.

*Two go in, one brings ADAM out.*

ADAM

What's happening?

HENRY

I think they're looking for James.

What did he do? ADAM

A woman's dead. VOICE

Oh my god. ADAM

*Someone exits with rags, black with blood.*<sup>58</sup>

Oh my god... ADAM

Come with us. VOICE

*Blackout.*

---

<sup>58</sup> In this production, the ensemble changed it to Joan's smock as the damning evidence, which feels (at least, to me) to have more literary significance as a working-class symbol and one that has some importance in the flirtation scene between Joan and James earlier.

## 6.

*The court of King John. A regal affair.  
A fanfare of sorts.<sup>59</sup>*

ESSEX

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN of the court, the King of England.

*THE KING and QUEEN enter, and they don't touch the ground.*

KING

Good e'en, lords and ladies.

QUEEN

*Bonjour, monsieur ou madame, merci beaucoup.*

KING

Your requested audience has been well met, lords and ladies. As you know:

*(from Shakespeare) Arthur Plantagenet, lays most lawful claim*

*To this fair island and the territories,*

*To Ireland, Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine,*

*Desiring me to lay aside the sword*

*Which sways usurpingly these several titles.*

*We disallowed, and what followed?*

*The proud control of fierce and bloody war,*

*To enforce these rights we forcibly held.*

*Here have we war for war and blood for blood,*

*Controlment for controlment: so answer France.*

As you also know: quite a bit has been lost, our favorite vineyards in Poitu, our favorite mines in Normandy, our chalets in Maine and Anjou.

*50's sitcom sound effect: awww<sup>60</sup>.*

QUEEN

*Oui.*

KING

It's an English carnage, but the borders of this isle have never been stronger. Foolishly, our church disputes have also led to quite the spats with the foolish Pope and his perpetual stronghold here, his mouthpiece known as Oxford University. I have been recently excommunicated.

---

<sup>59</sup> In the production, it was a strange rock cover of Aaron Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man" that we accidentally found on Spotify.

<sup>60</sup> Adam Friedman suggested these be replaced by cue cards, and the sound effects be produced by the audience, which is how this was accomplished during the production.

*50's sitcom laugh track.*

So you have heard.

The world is against us, ladies and gentlemen, the wind is shifting against England, *this royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle, this earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, this other Eden, demi-paradise, this fortress built by Nature for herself against infection and the hand of war; this happy breed of men, this little world, this precious stone set in a silver sea (which serves it in the office of a wall or as a moat defensive to a house, against the envy of less happier lands), this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, this nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings, feared by their breed and famous by their birth, c'est moi.* We are hated for this. This beauty makes us hateable, and to hate another for their beauty, thereby good sirs, is *jealousy*. The world is *jealous of what we have, the beauty we hold in our hand*, and they can hate us all they want to, the continental kings and all the Popes of Rome along with their sluttish sycophants who denigrate us, homegrown from Oxford.<sup>61</sup>

ESSEX

Hear, hear.

HEADMASTER

We have God on our side, his blessings on our plates and under our feet and in our bank accounts, whether they like it or not.

ESSEX

Hear, hear.

*50's laugh track: sad aww.*

ESSEX

Shit. (*He slaps a wall.*)

*50's laugh track: clapping.*

You have me, his greatest blessing, and I will resceper this isle once more. Nothing will keep me from it...

*50's track: romantic awww.*

KING

Now, a song:

---

<sup>61</sup> The ending of this speech was changed in the final text to incorporate some text from Donald Trump's inauguration speech, an oration of resounding terror and nationalistic pathos that was used in an exercise in the development rehearsals. We found that, with some changes, fit the tone of this scene inconspicuously. This speech also was cut and changed around for clarity as the workshops progressed.

[SONG]<sup>62</sup>

*Enter ESSEX with HEADMASTERS.*

ESSEX

*My liege, here is the strangest controversy  
Come from country to be judged by you,  
That e'er I heard: shall I produce the men?*

KING

*Let them approach.  
Our abbeyes and our priories shall pay  
This expedition's charge.  
What men are you?*

HEADMASTER

Good sir, our liege, our rightful protector of the realm, our master: we come most hastily from Oxford University.

QUEEN

*Merdre!*<sup>63</sup>

KING

My love, leave it be. Oxford, despite our amicable relations in the past, has, of late, been a, as you may term it, an insulting thorn in the Crown's side, has it not?

HEADMASTER

We assure you, it is not our intention to—

KING

Our kingdom employs a great many clergyman, lawyers, physicians educated at your school, does it not?<sup>64</sup>

HEADMASTER

---

<sup>62</sup> Peter Buzzerio was tasked with inventing this moment, and he did a three-minute sequence where he opened his mouth to “lip sync” to “Rule Britannia.” The moment is long and cumbersome, partially for comedic effect, but also because it reflects the discomfort of having to sit through such a long-winded nationalistic exercise.

<sup>63</sup> An inconsequential reference to the absurd drama *Ubu Roi*. The court during this time probably would have spoken exclusively French, and considered themselves as French as they were English, and the Queen switching between the two languages was meant to reflect that.

<sup>64</sup> How do we consider the duality of the university's function? In the one sense, it is an institution tasked with providing advanced training for citizens to fill jobs. In another sense, it is an enclosed space with an intellectual culture that often becomes anti-authoritarian. In the rise of fascist regimes, intellectuals and university students are often one of the first groups persecuted, targeted, and silenced. Sometimes, considering the role of pedagogy and academia from a societal standpoint, while using thoroughly intellectual terms, seems to be a self-aggrandizing exercise.

It absolutely does.

KING

Is it not, then, a bit insulting, how you opposed my agenda and aligned yourself with the continental Pope, and seem, in every instance, to subtly undermine my rule. What's your matter?

HEADMASTER

Good sir, our liege, our rightful protector of the realm of England, our master, we have come unfortunately upon at a dispute that has disrupted life in Oxford wherein two scholars have come under the charge of the local sheriff—

KING

What caused the dispute? Speaketh plaineth.

HEADMASTER

A woman was killed.

HEADMASTER

Yes, a woman from the town was sadly killed, disposed of in a field, good sir our liege our rightful protector of the realm of England our master, but the townspeople have over hastily imprisoned two of our scholars...

HEADMASTERS

Clerks, they're only clerks.  
Not scholars, but clerks. They're different.

KING

And?

HEADMASTER

Pardon?

QUEEN

*Et?*

KING

They killed someone, they ought to be imprisoned.

ESSEX

Hear, hear.

HEADMASTER

Well we're not so sure it was them, we can't be sure because, *as we all know*, these matters are settled in ecclesiastical court<sup>65</sup> and not by the town court, we handle these things at the judicious judgement of —

HEADMASTER

It is how these things are done.

HEADMASTER

How they've always been done.

HEADMASTER

How they should be done—

HEADMASTER

Thereby, would be done—

HEADMASTER

Would be done would we could do them that way, good sir, good sir our liege our rightful protector of the realm of England our master.

KING

Interesting.

QUEEN

*Interessant.*

KING

You know, m'lady, something I just can't get out of my head—

QUEEN

*Ah, oui, monsieur?*

KING

Every nation state deserves its universities. Paris has hers, Bologna has hers. Even backwater Iberia has one.

QUEEN

*Oui, monsieur.*

KING

---

<sup>65</sup> This is a true fact — members of the university were considered members of the clergy and were tried in ecclesiastical proceedings. The excommunication left these positions vacant in 1209 and the courts in chaos. I've reduced it a bit to reference the notorious backroom, internal investigations and tribunals that universities use to investigate some crimes today, a way of evading negative press but also a way to absolve students of due consequences.

Every nation states deserves its universities, and deserves quality ones at that, to discuss the ideas of the realm, to parse and understand that which, you know, must be parsed and understood, and that, in turn, is why we pour money into our universities. Pounds of gold, we heap and heap for those books and those halls.<sup>66 67</sup>

HEADMASTER

Ah, yes sir, well—

QUEEN

He's not done.

KING

All those books, all those shelves, all those libraries, all those buildings, all that land, all those roads and bridges, all that material wealth to produce all that immaterial wealth: knowledge. Knowledge to help the nation, to help her subjects, to make us all better. *All of us*, not just you, but all of us.

HEADMASTER

And that's what we try to do: to better all of England.

HEADMASTER

Yes, good sir our liege—

KING

You have not tried hard enough. I think the only people you try to better are yourselves. In the light of the excommunication, it becomes obvious what passes for knowledge in your halls. Please translate the following passage for us.

QUEEN

*(Reading from Aquinas) Respondeo dicendum, quod potestas superior et inferior dupliciter possunt se habere. Aut ita quod inferior potestas ex toto oriatur a superiori; et tunc tota virtus inferioris fundatur supra virtutem superioris; et tunc simpliciter et in omnibus est magis obediendum potestati superiori quam inferiori.*

HEADMASTER

*(Over her)* Ah yes, Sir Aquinas. Well, in that passage—

---

<sup>66</sup> Public funding is not just a state university concern. It affects private universities too, like Emory. When anti-immigrant rhetoric led the Georgia legislature to pass a bill removing funding for sanctuary campuses, Emory decided not to be called a sanctuary campus for fear of losing the funding. This issue is complex, but it shows how the use of government funding is a tool for guiding the public ideologies of even super-progressive or private institutions.

<sup>67</sup> It is also worth mentioning that the extent to which Oxford University was developed at the time is exaggerated in this draft, as the college in 1209 would probably have been run out of rented rooms and with minimal resources. The extent of development is stretched, in this draft, to further the analogy to modern day university-state relations.

HEADMASTER

On the question of a divided authority, wherein two higher powers clash—

HEADMASTER

We must choose which to obey.

HEADMASTER

We obey the superior power, that which has dominion over the issue at hand.

HEADMASTER

The secular authority for secular matters, the religious for religious matters.

KING

Interesting. How about this one?

QUEEN

*(Flips page, reads from Locke) Should any one make so perverse an use of God's blessings poured on him with a liberal hand; should any one be cruel and uncharitable to that extremity; yet all this would not prove that propriety in land, even in this case, gave any authority over the persons of men, but only that compact might; since the authority of the rich proprietor, and the subjection of the needy beggar, began not from the possession of the lord, but the consent of the poor man, who preferred being his subject to starving. And the man he thus submits to, can pretend to no more power over him, than he has consented to, upon compact.<sup>68</sup>*

HEADMASTER

I don't— I'm not—

HEADMASTER

We are not familiar.<sup>69</sup>

KING

Or this?

QUEEN

*(reading from Rousseau) The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right, and obedience into duty. Hence the right of the strongest, which, though to all seeming meant ironically, is really laid down as a fundamental principle. But are we never to have an explanation of this phrase? Force is a physical power, and I fail to see what moral effect it can have. To yield to force is an act of necessity, not of will ... In what sense can it*

---

<sup>68</sup> In the later text, Essex was given a line where he condescendingly tells the audience the author of these texts.

<sup>69</sup> In the later text, one of the headmasters asks, "Why isn't it in Latin?" This is because Julia Byrne felt there should be clearer indication of the anachronisms going on here. This technique is, again, one I observed from Churchill's *Light Shining*, where she incorporates text from sources ranging from English Civil War-era debates to Walt Whitman poetry.

*be a duty? ... Let us then admit that a force does not create right, and that we are obliged to obey only legitimate powers.*

HEADMASTER

I'm sorry, I'm not, uhh—

KING

The mind is so powerful, a powerful tool, and any tool can be used improperly. If I could fear something lower than me, I'd fear this drivel. But I have been made the head of this place, the shepherd of these people, the protector of this realm, and no Latin can change that. Sir Thomas Aquinas is wise indeed. "We obey the superior power, that which has dominion over the issue at hand." So it seems a civil murder of a milkmaid deserves a civil case and a civil hanging.

HEADMASTER

Oh dear God.

*The Queen laughs and laughs, tossing the treatises into a trashcan or a fire or simply away. The HEADMASTERS are pushed out.*

KING

Ah, what a beautiful day to be vindicated. Teaching a lesson. If anyone would like to see what happens to people who think they can outthink me, humiliated me with their words and thoughts, let them know there will be a hanging at Oxford any day now. I will save them a seat.

## 7.

*ADAM and HENRY in a jail cell, dark and damp.*

HENRY

They think we strangled some woman.  
 I've never hurt anything in my life.  
 Once when I was a child my dad came home from a hunt with our dog.  
 She'd hurt her leg, chasing something down. Hurt it really bad.  
 She wouldn't stop crying, whimpering in the next room.  
 I hear my dad tell my mom: *The bitch has hurt her leg,*  
*I think she's got to go. She's old anyway, maybe shouldn't have brought her,*  
*but what am I supposed to do? Go to hunt without a dog?*  
 Mom agreed: *She should go. Take the hatchet, and Henry.*  
 And so my dad brought me outside and laid the dog down in the grass,  
 I think he thought it'd be good for me.  
 It was very hot, a very hot summer. We were wet with sweat.  
 And he asked me if I would raise the hatchet but I just started crying.  
 I couldn't stop crying. Wailing.  
 The dog was whimpering soft on the grass.  
 My eyes were closed when he did it. When the dog stopped.  
 I've never hurt a thing in my life. I would never kill someone.

ADAM

*(painfully aware they are going to die)* They're not listening to us.

HENRY

I'm scared they won't listen.  
 I'm scared they won't let us tell them we didn't do it.

ADAM

Me too.

HENRY

I'm scared... I uh...

ADAM

What are you scared of?

HENRY

I'm scared they've hurt my papers.

ADAM

Your translation?

HENRY

Yes.

I know, I'll work on it while we're in here. I'll work from memory.  
Waiting for James to turn up.

ADAM

You think James will turn up?

HENRY

They'll find him, they'll figure out the mess he's fucking made, they'll figure out we're innocent,  
they'll set us free.  
It's all a very big misunderstanding.

ADAM

Yes.

A very big misunderstanding.

HENRY

I hope they didn't fuck up any of my pages, I'll kill 'em.

ADAM

I'm sure they're fine.

The pages.

HENRY

I'll send them a bill.

If they've fucked up my pages, even the order, I'll send them a bill for the vellum and the ink,  
and then they'll be sorry.

ADAM

But what if James doesn't show up?

And they don't start listening?

And they don't let us make our case?

And we—

HENRY

*(stern) He'll show up.*

You should work on what you were working on, it'll pass the time.

ADAM

I don't have my books.

HENRY

Work from memory.

ADAM  
I can't. I'm not like you.

HENRY  
... What were— are you working on?

ADAM  
I told you a long time ago.

HENRY  
I'm sorry I—

ADAM  
You forgot.

HENRY  
I forgot.  
I'm sorry.

ADAM  
I know. You and everyone else at Oxford. All you focused on was you and yours, so you'd have your backpatting and symposiums and meetings. And that made you feel good, didn't it? To feel like a real man for once, a part of the boy's club.

HENRY  
Please stop.

ADAM  
I don't think any of it was worth it.  
I just wanted to learn, help others learn, make things better. Maybe that's for other people. Our papers are going to be burnt, we're going to die, James will do well as he's always done, and nothing we've written will ever be read.  
Everyone will think we're murderers and no one wants to remember murderers.

HENRY  
Stop, you're killing me.

ADAM  
Not me.  
I've realized we're a part of something big and very wrong, something's gone wrong.  
No one's gonna know our names.

*A long silence.*

HENRY

Will you tell me what you were working on?

ADAM

Some commentary of some Aristotle or other. Who cares.

HENRY

What were you really working on?

ADAM

Honestly?

HENRY

Yes.

ADAM

... Love ballads.

HENRY

No way.  
Translations?

ADAM

No, my own.

HENRY

Oh. I didn't know you wrote ballads.

ADAM

They make— made me very happy.

HENRY

Can I hear one?

ADAM

No.

HENRY

Please?

ADAM

No.

HENRY

It might be the first and last time anyone hears any of them.

It might be the last time it is just you and me in a room.  
If you're right.

*A moment, then ADAM nods.*

**[A LOVELESS LOVE BALLAD SONG]<sup>70</sup>**

*PLACEHOLDER TEXT*

*When the trees bare themselves*

*And the leaves are falling*

*When the showers wet the grass*

*When the birds come calling*

*When the showers freeze to snow*

*When the crawl of times goes slow*

*I will still be calling*

---

<sup>70</sup> After long discussion, Julia Byrne was given this moment to create a small piece of music. We all brought in medieval lyrics/text/poetry and a bluegrass song, and she was tasked with combining some of our selections to create something suitable to her. Originally, it was going to be bluegrass themed, and feature a few more instruments, but time pressures ultimately reduced it to the stripped but honestly beautiful acapella performance: a setting of lyrics from Algernon Swinburne to the tune of "Through the Valley" by Shawn James.

## 8.

*The executioner puts a rope 'round their necks, they don't fight it.  
The executioner puts a hood over their head, they don't fight it.  
They have lost their place and are part of something big and violent and abstract.  
ESSEX is viewing the proceedings from afar.*

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

On the charges of the violent and brutal killing of a woman of this town, how do you both plead?

CLERKS

*(deadpan unison)* Not guilty.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

How do you explain this then?

*He holds up the bloodied rag.*

CLERKS

Not ours.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

Likely story. I know it must be uncomfortable, having to answer to crimes in a normal civil court, not in your ivory tower closed room affairs, having to deal with hard evidence in the face of a crime you've committed, nothing more and nothing less.

*The CLERKS don't speak.*

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

A woman is dead, the bloody proof found in your lodgings.

CLERKS

Not ours.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

Save your rhetoric, good sirs, your wicked double speaking, your wicked turns of phrase designed to clothe vice in the robes of deprav'd sin.

ESSEX

*(entering with a flourish, maybe a fanfare)* An interjection if I may...

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

You may, esteemed sir.

ESSEX

Esteemed? Me? Not at all. *(practically blushing, pulls out notecards)*

I come from London, the court of the King the good sir our liege the protector of our realm etcetera etcetera, knowing that which has occurred here: the shameful death of a woman, what's her name? Joan. JOAN. Horrible and sad, how she was (*looks at cards*) strangled to death. What a blessing, a blessing to have found her murderers so expediently. These two clerks are meek enough taken now, at the brink of their punishment, how pale with fear they are, their quivering is not for fear of death but for fear that the Good Lord after will know, in his heart of hearts, what they've done, and cast them down to the depths of Hell for what they did to Joan.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

Hear, hear.

ESSEX

(*a little off script*) Look at them. Why do you look so scared? All that smugness and condescension is vanished with no strength underneath.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

You take our wealth, our land, and our authority from us.

ESSEX

And what do they do with what they take?

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

What?

ESSEX

The foreigners.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

Everything we know is under attack. From outside, and, with you, from within. You harbor strange foreigners, Jews and Spaniards and French, who hate us, don't speak our language, call them students, you harbor their perversities and hatred, and there's no recourse.<sup>71</sup>

ESSEX

You write strange books, that call our government illegitimate, call our sovereign conditional.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

You call us simple beasts, you use us as an example of life in ignorance, you speak down to us, you tell us we think wrong, and that's a sin.

ESSEX

*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

---

<sup>71</sup> National and ethnic identity played a large role in medieval universities. Jewish moneylenders were an invaluable resource to the early universities, perhaps a crucial factor in their foundation. English universities flourished because of a ban at the University of Paris against English students. Similarly now, xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric often targets universities for their diversity. See an earlier note re: the sanctuary campus debate.

*For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:*

*Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

ESSEX

*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*

*And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

*Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:*

*And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*

*And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:*

*And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.<sup>72</sup>*

*Beat.*

*Finally:*

ESSEX

*And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:*

*For he taught them as one having **authority**, and not as the scribes.*

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

We sentence you to death. For the murder, for everything else.

Let them now say their last words.

*A dramatic flourish, the lights dim and a harsh spotlight centers on them.*

*Swelling, emotional orchestral strings begin to play.*

*The CLERKS are frozen and cannot speak.*

*An awkward silence as the music plays.*

---

<sup>72</sup> This speech was divided in the later text to give a large chunk to Peter, to redistribute this hefty quotation from the King James Bible, but also to show a moment of genuine emotion from the two dimensional figurehead for the town in all of this. Essex stifles laughter at the genuine display, and this was another moment to show the public's position in this more clearly, and how their governmental support is provisional.

*Momentarily:*<sup>73</sup>

I'm scared. ADAM

Shh. HENRY

I'm sorry. ADAM  
Do they know what they're doing?

It doesn't matter. HENRY

I'm sorry. ADAM

*They stop talking. ADAM begins to quietly cry under the hood.  
HENRY cannot.  
The music swells to its final climax.  
They are hanged.*

---

<sup>73</sup> This dramatic, ironic moment didn't happen in our production, but was rather muted and heartbreakingly sincere between the two. Lily changed one of the lines, Henry thanking Adam for sharing the poem.

## 9.

*A meadow overlooking Oxford campus.  
People yell and scream distantly.  
JOAN enters, leading a sheep.*<sup>74</sup>

## JOAN

I have a feeling they don't care that I died. Not really. The show they put on about it is flattering, but I have a feeling they would have murdered me themselves if they could've gotten same outcome.

*The sheep bleats.*

*(to sheep)* Shh, shh.

*(out)* I wish you could see what I see now. It is a beautiful sight. All of England, all the world, is one flat field, endlessly burning to each corner. Everything's in disarray, on fire, and I think it will never go out. It is a candle burning on both ends, whatever that means.

I know the problem: One single life is too small. Everything else beyond a life is just too vast. The forces that govern are too big, the world is too wide, history is too deep; that's the problem. A single life is stone in a wall, a book in a library, a sheep in a flock; these are tired metaphors, I'm sorry.

*(to the sheep)* I'm sorry. Had to.

*(to the audience)* But you know what I mean. When I lived, I truly believed in the logic of these mounds: they have stood here forever and always will. I thought things would never modify. This felt true, in the span of my tiny life and maybe it was true for that span of time, but everything is vaster than I thought. I know that now, and now I am watching distantly as Oxford burns. The students are packing their bags, and that's smart, because the common sense would say: *Those two got hanged because they killed a woman, and I'm not a killer so I'm fine.* But they have shreds of wisdom, wisdom in them that tells them there is something bigger at play than just the death of one woman, the hanging of some clerks, and the demise of one school, and that they are not safe here. But if they could see what I see, they'd know a burning castle and a dying university look awfully similar, the more you see it. It would all be so sad if I didn't know how it would end up. But for now, Oxford University is burning. And I can't help but laugh.

*She laughs. The sheep bleats.*

*One HEADMASTER drags a heavy sack of books down the road, the other trailing behind.*

## HEADMASTER

Good sir, wait, good sir, in this dark time, Aristotle would say—

## HEADMASTER

*(the one with the books)* Wait for what? For us to get hanged too? Fuck you, good sir.

---

<sup>74</sup> In the production, Joan entered to the instrumental of "Through the Valley" and announces her own entrance. The sheep was a large ball of cotton. The later text says she smells of lavender, which Lily's research showed to be a significant scent in the Middle Ages. It's a small change, but one that was moving toward a world-building, sensory experience based on the research.

HEADMASTER

Now is not the time to flounder, now is when they need us most.

HEADMASTER

No, now is when they need to kill. That is what they need, because that is what those people always need. Them and their king.

HEADMASTER

They needed revenge, they had their revenge, and now we can all go back, business as usual, short two clerks is all!

We'll give the students Monday off, then on Tuesday—

HEADMASTER

Oxford is over. It is done. They will not have us anymore, and that is that.

HEADMASTER

Where are you going to go?

HEADMASTER

To Cambridge. Me and some others will give Latin lessons there, and then they'll run us out from there too and then we'll probably go to France, or Wittenburg. I will go anywhere they'll have us, until they decide they won't have us anymore, or someone decides for them...

HEADMASTER

How can we call ourselves just in our quest to spread knowledge, to better our pupils, to improve upon this firmament our holdings of the world, our advancement of technologies and furtherance of the good wisdom that flows just underneath the surface of life. At stake now is the great ever-burning torch of knowledge that says to each and every scholar—

HEADMASTER

If the torch of knowledge came to me, and with thunderous voice said: *Goodest of all sirs, I hath chosen thee, thou needs must die that I may burn, that the light of knowledge shall live in all men. What say you?*

I would extinguish it.

HEADMASTER

Good sir, the wise heart seeks knowledge.

HEADMASTER

The wise heart keeps itself beating.

*He goes to go.*

HEADMASTER

Wait!

HEADMASTER

What?

HEADMASTER

Let me help you.

*They drag the sack out together, JOAN follows out.*<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> After this, another scene was added in later texts between two townspeople, Gregor and Gwen, who come dragging loot in. They admire their findings before one of them realizes that they've actually destroyed some of Oxford in their rioting. This causes Gwen, played by Peter Buzzerio, to go on a violent but idealistic rant about rebelling against power, in all of its forms. There is a double edge to idealism: how can revolution be all-encompassing and be more constructive than destructive? It's an idea that mires Marxist theory a lot: the notion of spontaneous uprising, how it happens, how it works, what it looks like, when it will come, who will lead it, and how much violence it necessitates. The addendum was also an effort to balance the scene more to depict the town's location in all of this (a note from the ensemble), and set the stage for the next and final scene.

## 10.

*The palace throne room, dark except for a beam of moonlight.  
The KING and QUEEN look out the window at the stars. There's a faint rumbling underneath.*

KING

On the night I was born, my father had a star chart drawn for me. He told me the seer had all the torches extinguished and he went to the roof to look at the naked sky and he set down all the constellations, and my father watched him all the while, and when the seer read over all the things the stars told him, he paused a moment and then tore the paper into pieces. My father asked him what it had said, why he tore it up, what poor omens it portended; all the old man said was, how would they know? The stars, how would they know? They are faint fixtures of light God put there for our amusement, they can never know what a king knows in his anointed bones.  
I think he was scared to say what he knew.

QUEEN

*Ominique.*

KING

*Oui, madame.*

*Enter ESSEX, spattered in blood.*

ESSEX

Good sir, our liege, our rightful protector of the realm of England, our master, it is done.

KING

What is?

ESSEX

At your wisdom, the clerks were tried, found guilty, and hanged.

KING

Good.

QUEEN

*Bien.*

KING

Perhaps, going forward, Oxford will know who they serve and—

ESSEX

Oxford is, my liege, no more.

KING

What?

ESSEX

As soon as the hanging was over, the scholars packed their things and, in fear, fled. Their halls empty, their lodgings abandoned, the townspeople went through the campus and rifled through what was left, dragging the tables out for bonfires, yelling, *the King has given the power back, the King has given Oxford back*. In your name, priceless chronicles and almanacs were fed to the fire, and they danced around them, chanting about freedom. It was a... it was a sight.

KING

Freedom.  
I see.  
I, uhh..

QUEEN

Essex, send in some guards tomorrow, tell them to establish some order, or something. Put them in their place.<sup>76</sup>

KING

Isabella.

QUEEN

John.

KING

Do you think we've done something wrong?

QUEEN

No.

KING

Are you sure?

QUEEN

How would I know?

ESSEX

These things will be settled, over time.

---

<sup>76</sup> The double edge of populism: a political interest can weaponize a population, but, when they become threateningly powerful, they have to be re-subjugated. This happens in totalitarian regimes supported by popular uprisings that then have to be destroyed post-revolution. It's a sad and violent cycle where people try to liberate themselves through political interests and then become victimized by them.

I'm sure.  
Good night, your highnesses.

*ESSEX rushes out.*

*The KING goes to follow, but looks back at the QUEEN, who is staring out at the stars.*

*Slowly, he goes to her to see what she sees, and as they stare, the sounds of carnage can be heard from afar, but approaching. It gets closer, and closer, and closer until<sup>77</sup>*

*Blackout.*

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<sup>77</sup> This note was read by Julia Byrne, while “Now That I’m Older” by Sufjan Stevens begins to swell.

## Rehearsal Journal

The role of the rehearsal journal is to record the proceedings in an effective and clear way, to record the group's decisions, and to record poignant moments that stuck out to me from the exercises.

The raw notes for the rehearsal journal are made available for viewing and editing by other members of the ensemble, in case I left something out or missed something, though they aren't required to.

There will be an audio recording of the events that won't be public but will be available to the members of the ensemble.

### Sunday, 2.10.19

This is the first rehearsal. Prior to this, I drafted a short information sheet containing some of the background information that I thought useful for the performers to have, including the medieval history, the current events that prompted the questions, and the aim of the ensemble. Adam and I also discussed certain activities and practices we'd gleaned from research or other ensembles we've been in, in order to get these started, including: some Viewpoints exercises, improvisational/interview-based exercises taken from Joint Stock and Tectonic, some physical exercises from Frantic Assembly, some moment work from Tim McDonough's *Developing a Role* course taught at Emory, some exercises taught in Jireh Breon Holder's Devising course, and some external research practices. We also began the rehearsal by setting the rehearsal times for the coming week.

To begin the rehearsal, we dove into a read-through of the text. I arbitrarily assigned the roles at each scene, trying to be as random as possible and give everyone the chance to read the roles they could be playing. I found that not numbering roles with the same title (The Headmasters, for example) was difficult in terms of delegating roles.

The read-through lasted under an hour, and we followed it with an open discussion. I began by asking them if any images stuck out to them. Adam began by talking about how the sack of books, hood over the head, and the body bag for Joan all equated in a very strange way.

Nathan said the language was smooth and easy to read. Julia remarked on the conversational and anachronistic nature of the text that she liked. Lily was struck by the description of Henry going to bite his sleeve. This went into a discussion of why the title includes the word *pageant*: I answered that it spoke to the intended aesthetic of the final product, one that is at times psychologically dramatic and at times completely heightened and showy but is always consciously connected to the role and existence of the actors beneath. It reminded Adam of the medieval mystery pageants, and the rotating wagons of scenes. We then verged into the topic of how the university is both an actively bad and actively good institution: with some contemporary examples such as GSU purchasing large swathes of downtown Atlanta, Emory purchasing and closing a homeless shelter Julia's dad volunteered at, the political maneuvering on Emory's part that led to its integration into Atlanta's municipality, and more. How do we question that the university is beneficial and enriching while also being a place that privileges, excludes, and can marginalize people for the benefit of a certain hegemonic group.

This discussion of the images that were effective segued into me asking where the script was lacking, uncomfortable or fell short. Nathan asked for some clarification of my goals to better answer that question. I gave a short exposition of my research, the Joint Stock model, *Shopping and Fucking*. This went to a discussion of how this script is a rough, mutable thing grappling with large, abstract, ideas of contemporary relevance, and the role of the ensemble member is to bring their personal, subjective ideas to the group and see how the group can integrate their own personal ideas into the conversation, and use the theatrical piece as a medium for dialogue and (ultimately, when it's presented) instruction about the contemporary ideas of relevance for us, as college students in a system that is both antagonistic and beneficial to us and those around us. I also conceded that the historical analogy is problematic and instrumental, but it applies in some ways and falls short in others, and the role of the ensemble was to tease that out and explore its limitations and applications.

This led Adam to suggest that the university, in the script, seems to only present the university as a negative institution, and rewrites should explore the positive qualities of the institution. Julia mentioned that the projects they work on in the script are immensely dry, and seem to portray their work as overwhelmingly useless, suggesting perhaps to capitalize on the

idea that translating Aristotle, for instance, is a worthwhile pursuit of knowledge and understanding for them, rather than just a bemoaned, useless endeavor. It was also brought up that the tragedy of the university is that the sites of brilliance and general social welfare (advanced in medicine, for instance) can be attributed to scholars that are morally or socially corrupt. How do we reconcile the idea that every university, as Julia said, has a brilliant professor who fucked a student? Lily mentions that, based on conversations she had with coworkers, male students can get away with remarkable amounts of grievous wrongdoing, without a slap on the wrist, because the university is afraid of being associated publically with such crimes. Julia says that James reads like a pretty average figuration of a standard “fratty prick,” until he kills a woman, and that raises questions of how easy it is for people she knows to do the same thing, or something similar.

Joan’s intended arrangement with James, in the script, is then questioned, with the group reaching a consensus, and then leading into a discussion about the gender bending. Ultimately, I explained that the clerks were gender-bent partially to include more women in the story, but also to use the presence of the female actress (albeit playing a male role) to question the discomfort that the institution puts on female scholars operating within the social and institutional framework of the academy. Joan being played by a woman, on the other hand, was more complicated. I explained that non-comedic drag is a writerly fixation of mine, but also I wanted to use the presence of the performer as male (albeit in a female role) to reach at questions of how James’ act can be read as sexual violence against women, but also the fact that, in instances where a queer person and a person who identified as heterosexual/cisgender meet for an encounter, it has the capacity for homophobic violence, conceding that I’m not sure if wrestling with both prevents any actual interrogation into either of the ideas. Julia, who earlier expressed that she was glad that the script wasn’t just a narrative about men with one woman who dies midway through (though Nathan did point out that the two clerks are hanged before the end), found it interesting to put a male performer in the position that female performers are often put in: to be brutalized, often in a sexual way, in the show, with the idea that the audience that accepts sexual violence against women will be uncomfortable with the same sexual violence against a man. Nathan found this interesting, but also expressed reservations at a male performer

claiming the ability to be able to empathize with misogynistic sexual violence. Julia clarified that she was more comfortable with the deaths of the clerks because the death isn't sexualized or feminized, while Joan's is. However, Adam countered that the idea of writing love poetry and being absolved of guilt does seem to verge on conventional ideas of feminine dramaturgy. Ultimately, one of the reservations of Joan's death being played by a male performer is that the line between gender parody (traditional drag) and a more serious theatrical embodiment of the opposite gender is a fine one, and it is imperative that we don't muddle it.

This discussion proved lush, and, for the sake of time, I said that we should put a pin in it, and continue the discussion more at a later time. Instead, I explained the nuts and bolts of the presentation: memorization would not be required except for scenes where it is necessary, the show would occur with minimal tech elements, etc. Casting was discussed, and Adam and I explained that the casting would be more conversational and based around discussions of strengths, weaknesses, and interests than a traditional casting process. I explained that the process is one so that the ideas of the script now belong to the group rather than just me, and Adam assigned them to bring in two moments of the script that are interesting, or questionable, or need clarification for the next rehearsal. On top of that, I encouraged them to bring some visual and textual stimuli that connected with them in some way regarding the ideas or images of the script, such as fiction, art, photographs, or articles. For this purpose, they can either print them or put them into the group Drive folder, or (for music) the group's Spotify playlist, entitled Songs to Translate Greek To.

The ensemble took a break. When we returned, I explained the role of the director and the playwright: the director as a temporary leader who is meant to acclimate people with the ensemble work in the hopes that the members of the ensemble will eventually be comfortable enough to also lead exercises, or to do exercises without a lead, and the playwright as an administrative filter and recorder of the artistic decisions of the group, but ultimately one beholden to the intellectual work of the group. I then turned the floor to Adam, who led them in a viewpoints exercise mostly focused around spacial awareness of the ensemble and interaction between themselves, each other, and the space. This exercise included some movement, some

solo work with architecture, some contact improvisation, some exploration of one's natural movements. Finally, they settled and ended the exercise.

Lastly, we all circled up, and I opened the floor for some last questions, after thanking them for their work. Adam discussed setting a ritual to begin rehearsal, and instructed them to think of it. In the meantime, I offered that we do an exercise I learned at LAMDA, where the group sees a circle that contains the work for the day, and throws it up into the ceiling at the end of the session, allowing the work of the day to be sealed until next meeting. We did so, having to start and stop a few times before we were in sync, but ultimately doing so. We then cleaned up the room and were dismissed for the day. I had a short discussion with Adam re: if the length of the exercise was good (it was), and I encouraged him to integrate text into later exercises, and to shorten them into warm-ups when rehearsals begin to dig more into the actual text.

## **Tuesday, 2.12.19**

At the beginning of the session, Adam and I set the order of the events of the evening, and then the actors stretched. The first major order of discussion were group rules of engagement for the ensemble process. After some pretty non-contentious discussion, we agreed on the following rules:

1. All rules are unanimous.
2. Say what you want, within reason.
3. Include the ensemble.
4. Be respectful of space, checking in with people.
5. Let someone know if you're uncomfortable with something.
6. Don't take it too far / don't take the piss.
7. 5 minute break every hour.
8. Don't interrupt folks / go ahead and say "Let me finish."
9. Be open to criticism (critique and commend).
10. The script is a tool.

## 11. Don't be cynical.

Adam imported an idea from another devising class, and discussed the importance of an opening ritual that puts everyone in the same mindset and ready to work, and that we should all agree on the ritual. Nathan suggested some kind of physical warm up, and Julia suggested a vocal one. We had a group brainstorming session about different type of warm-ups we remember, and eventually decided on the following order: The rope thing (described at the end of last entry), a movement improvisation to a song or two, followed by an activity called Weep or Cheer (where each member of the group takes turns proclaiming either something amazing that's super mundane, or something very bad about their day, and the ensemble reacts with passionate cheers or maudlin weeping), then a breathing/facial massage exercise. The ensemble did this opening ritual.

From there, we went into a group exploration of the moments that the ensemble members prepared. There was a bit of discomfort around the moment, the group analysis of the moment, Adam's role in directing it, my role in what I want from it, etc, so I had to step in a bit and lead some group analysis (What did we see? Can you do it differently?) For instance, to tie the interpersonal moment to the contemporary moment a little more, I asked Julia to consider what she thinks of when she thinks of a student who takes on being a student as an operative part of their personality, and apply that to the characterization. Julia had to leave to moderate another event, so Lily went and presented her moment (James' chasing Joan pre-murder), and this moment allowed me to establish operative language that we can use going forward: *What story does this moment/the actor's choice during this moment tell? Does it match the story the ensemble want to tell? How do we craft the text, or performance to match the story we want to tell?* We talked about some of Lily's thoughts on the James character that were pretty surprising: the notion that a sort of snootiness in real life can have an analogue in actual violence, and the notion that the character is someone who has hurt women in the past.

Nathan began, choosing a moment that was a little longer, from the king's speech section (the part quoting Shakespeare). He performed it in a pretty standard and declamatory way, and then showed a research image of Claire Sterk's inauguration at Emory, where, in a large robe and

white gloves, she holds the university's scepter, and it surprised us at how feudal it looked in the context of the text. Then we discussed the Trump allusion (the text says 'English carnage' which is a reference to Trump's "American carnage" inauguration speech), and we had a discussion on how much the play should address the current American political environment, and how much it shouldn't. We discussed the Trump allusion, and the pitfall of contemporary theater using Trump as a reference only to pigeonhole the content to only fit in a contemporary American context. We talked about the effect of anti-immigrant rhetoric (Trump as symptomatic of that) on the university system, the sanctuary campus idea, and the complicated compromise that the university made in its decision to not be a sanctuary campus. Then we discussed how this is all relevant to the abstract discussion, but we have to be careful not to try to claim the experience of an undocumented student in the contemporary university system, or claim that the play's analogy extends to that. As an exercise: I asked Nathan to read Trump's inauguration speech as a Shakespeare speech, changing America to England, and it felt like it could be put in the play without much of a problem (both alarming and interesting).

Peter chose a Headmaster moment, and, as an exercise, we made him do some Emory professor impressions, and then he did Joan's speech at the end. They asked me, why I gave her a sheep: My answer was because of the irreverence, the iconography of it in Christian mythology (shepherd), and the Joan of Arc allusion. Peter said it's a visceral image because it conjured past associations for him with how dirty and rough sheep are. The discussion moved to: What's this speech for? The reasons: You don't see her unless she's getting chased or destroyed, she's the victim/martyr, she seems wryly satisfied by the destruction, she's more nuanced than just an angry towns member, who don't get much exposure in the piece. People talked about a specific end line: "It would all be so sad, if I didn't know how it all ends up." People disagreed about what it means. Lily thought it meant that she wants them both to go down, and was reminded of how her parents had to take down a stone garden wall over the summer. Lily figured the character delights in the ruin of both Oxford and the state. Adam said it was interesting because, for example, when the War of the Roses happened, it didn't really affect the average person all that much, unless they were directly involved in the war or something like that. Also, I brought

to the fore the notion of how Joan's character kind of speaks to how political agendas tend to isolate and politicize tragedies to further their own discourse.

Peter then presented his research images: a strange and pixelated image of a May Day celebration, because of the implicit reference in the play, and a painting of a burning cottage, which came to mind from an image in the script of the cottage door open and light pouring out.

Adam's moment was more of an exercise, where he asked everyone to do the headmaster scene, but improv as the scene gets more and more intensely concerned with one upping one each other, which was funny to watch. His research was an article about something we had discussed at table a few nights ago, where Emory had bought a homeless shelter, and he had discovered that Emory closed it without really having a plan or reason, only citing that it was a part of the Emory Master and Strategic Plan. Peter added how Emory has fucked over a lot of people, but he overheard once someone detailing all the particular ways they violated native students, in particular. Above everything, they often pay lip service to offended students without any action. This raises the question of lip service as a tool, a way for an institution to implicate bureaucracy for issues while doing nothing to mitigate power struggles within. We introduced, at some point, some vocab: we use the words **frame narrative** to describe the abstract ideas that script is wrestling with (the interplay between the uni, the state, and the public and those triangular tensions).

Adam said that a comment toward the script was that the script lacks an exploration of the people who are in Oxford, the townspeople who are outside of the university. I said this was partially because of brevity and just a lack of resources. All of the major characters are affiliated with school, or Joan who becomes a character built around a scholar. So, I led an improv exercise where I was a member of the university and they were all people from the town of Oxford, who had a chance to air their grievances, and that circled a lot around a pressing issue in the text: how do you reconcile the positive economic impact of university students, even if they're disrespectful, destructive or violent?

Then, to maybe compose something for the top of the show, we did an improv where we staged the tavern scene in the play, but set it before the action of the play begins (during the celebrations that end as the text begins). The ensemble did three different variations on the same

improv theme, to the same song, and, from my outside perspective, I enjoyed it. I'm wondering if there's a way to get a cast to explore their own work, which is impossible if you're in a moment or improv. If only an actor could step out of their own improv and watch others work, and then step in when needed.

### **Friday, 2.15.19**

Julia was out today. A class was in the room we were planning on using for 30 minutes longer than anticipated, so we began by sharing our research images. Adam said the prison scene in the play reminded him of the prison scene in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, so he shared an illustration of that scene that was colored in with bright pastels, and that connected the strangeness of tone to him. Nathan shared a painting called "Drinking With Saints" that showed a painting of monks drinking, having a good time. The image seemed to imply that one of them was having their first sip of beer, which was charming to us. Lily wanted to contextualize more of the period, so she found an article that explained the smells of the medieval period. It said that lavender was a popular and actually sensual scent, and, so were things like ambergris but for rich people. Peter did not find an applicable image. The research yielded an interesting sensory tapestry of ideas and sensations that I felt were really compelling, and really different from what I had imagined.

There was some speaker drama, but Peter and Lily added two songs, and bopped around in a really funny way, but then it turned into a more plaintive free movement. I liked Peter's change from a silly sort of bopping to a more fluid and dream-like, balletic movement. Lily and Nathan have a more frank way of moving, walking imbued with something. Then Cheer/weep: Some were genuinely sad, and tired, but Nathan ended on a shrug I'm alive note that I found funny and interesting. They also ended up forming a caterpillar type line organically, matching their footsteps. Then breathing stuff, then rope stuff (very slow today), and then we set the order for the day.

I then drew out the little scenic arrangement that we're tied to because of the other thesis project, and no one had any major objections.

For moments, we began with everyone's moment, and we circled back around for Adam to ask Nathan why he did that moment. He wanted to contextualize and humanize the headmasters, because that's what he feels like that moment does in the piece. We started a discussion about the good parts of being a scholar, and how we love shooting the shit at parties with friends about shared, super academic knowledge. Lily agreed, expressing how people outside of academia also talk about super serious social issues without the latitude to do anything. There are obvious pleasures in going to university (not having a 9-5, learning a bunch, parties, etc.) but there's more interesting facets to that pleasure. A lot of people treat college as a given, and academic engagement as a means to an end, and they miss out of whatever merit there is in the "love of learning." This connected in my mind to Henry Giroux's analysis of a liberal and conservative formulation of pedagogy (pedagogy for creation of Western Canonical identity, or capitalist job-training respectively), and this is lofty but translates a lot to actual attitudes people have about learning at Emory, like how a lot of theater classes stress connecting theater to corporate skills, or, as Peter brought up, the panels on how to monetize your liberal arts degree that kind of defeat the purpose of the liberal arts. Adam said, something is not seen as valuable unless it benefits capitalist exchange, and the script kind of helps this by trivializing all the academic work going on in the script. I asked how this manifests in relationships, how something isn't seen as valuable unless it serves something else, an exchange. Lily said degrees are certainly viewed that way, and Adam said the text reinforces that attitude. Lily and Nathan both said they have a niggling voice that pooh poohs the efficacy of studying a theater degree, and the only position they can't debunk is that theater is fun, and they enjoy it. Adam said, in general, "there has been a shift of focus towards the process, and not just the product. Brent is a big advocate of focusing on the process and couldn't give less of a shit on the product. It is interesting seeing that. As a public health person, I try to judge the effect of what I'm doing (efficacy) so it is tough to reconcile theater, and, even if you're doing an important show, it's not gonna reach a whole lot of people." Nathan said the fun position is the one he keeps resorting to, and he wonders if pre-professionals who hate on the humanities are motivated by an anti-fun sentiment. Peter said that this is something he enjoys, and we're all doing it together and it's fun, but that can contribute to the ivory tower feeling, that closed room feeling, that isolate castle

feeling for other people. I weighed in with some Plato, who reinforces something we kind of all agree with: bad art can have an ideological effect. Therefore, doesn't it follow that it has the potential to do the opposite? Furthermore, theater has inherited a lot of work-productivity ideas, and has been hated because it violates that contract, and even ensemble stuff has inherited that. Method was built on this notion, and Nathan found this to be interesting.

Then we shifted to Lily's moment, where she acted out a townie spitting in James' face, and she explained the top of her moment was to show the anxiety of talking about a part of an institution that is abusive. Lily talked about how drunk men will get mad that she wants to leave Michigan. She says it's hard not to feel guilty or navigate those conversations because she knows there's opportunities, and things that have worked out for her that have allowed her to be there. Nathan said he grew up within 7 miles of Emory, and thought of the population as average people, and it is weird to hear them talking about locals at Maggie's, and the implicit condescension there. It is weird to even talk about a college and a town as separate. Peter said he lived with his grandmother in Twin Cities, and there are many colleges near her. She's one of the last actual homes on her street, and all the other homes are bought up by people who make them into apartments for students. Is that a bad thing? When she sells her house, she'll sell it for more than she ever could, but also the night is super drunk and loud and now she has to prove her intelligence to everyone she sees. Nathan said at the intersection by Walmart, there used to be a baptist church where there are now apartments. There's a gentrification there, and the church couldn't compete, he assumes. It caught fire and they probably couldn't afford to repair it, so they sold it. GSU is buying up downtown, but Peter said GSU is also completely restructuring their university to ensure retention rates to graduation. It's an interesting thing.

Adam said, let's take a five. During the break, we had a little discussion about Theatre du Soleil, etc, and then Peter and Nathan talked about how that would never work bc there's no place in America where they can just do theater. Peter and Nathan talked about how it is impossible to start the arts unless you have financial support (ex. girl whose parents agreed to pay for her career for five years, and internship support).

When back, Adam had them walking around the room calmy, then upped the speed, then painting the floor, then walking with a partner in sync. Then contact improv and weight sharing.

Then we did an exercise called “Snake that Bites its Own Tail,” which was a pretty joyous ensemble exercise.

After this, we all had to bring in music to fill the gaps in the show where two songs go. We each shared some music, but mostly discussed the tone of what’s going in the show. We thought it’d be interesting to have a lip sync situation for the page boy song in the court scene.

### **Saturday, 2.16.19**

Today we went into the sital, and then set the order. I tried to get them to set the order, instead of me and Adam doing it, and it was a lot of back and forth, throwing stuff around. We eventually settled on something, and then I explained a little bit of how the script will change before Tuesday, and, if they had any suggestions or concerns, to direct those toward me either at the end of the session or by Facebook.

We went into moments. Julia did a Joan moment where she checks out James’ ass at the end of the tavern scene. She said there’s not a lot of clarity in the text about whether or not Joan is actually attracted to James and she’s okay with that. She said, even if she has no interest and he’s a means to an end, the means can be enjoyable, and she’s interested in that latitude of actor choice. Lily agrees with the ambiguity. Adam asked if gender bending complicates this, and Julia said there’s a difference between the character and the portrayal, and it’s hard to separate, but it is up to the actor to make that distinction. I said it was interesting how we can use this moment work to show another actor a range of possibility and what it would look like, and she said she didn’t want to instruct anyone else, but I said there’s nothing wrong with being instructive to an extent, even though it is something we get really touchy about in the rehearsal room. Her research image was the Great Hall of Oxford, how stuffy and hot and gorgeous it looks. The texture, sweating, candles, how hard it would be to heat in winter, and how narrow it is. Then she presented a song called “Morelock Shore”, an old Irish folk song, and then she played “The Wall” by Pink Floyd for what she said were obvious reasons.

It was at this point that we went back to the song conversation, and the tone. I think someone asked why I had songs in the script, and I said because they’re a classic distancing

effect, and they're just fun ways to augment the text and let people breathe. They provide texture to the world of the play. We eventually decided on: the court song should be contemporary, weird, and piped in through the speakers. It would be more appropriate to put in a more genuine song in the prison scene, something not immediately recognizable and anachronistic. We decided on medieval text from a play or ballad set to a bluegrass tune, and we'd try to orchestrate it based on instrument ability (Lily's guitar, Julia's ukulele, and Adam's harmonica).

That settled, they moved on to physical work in a tableaux exercise based on a research image. They gravitated to the Academy painting, and they grabbed boxes and looked at the image. Nathan pointed out some art history details to everyone that he remembered about it, and Julia said it'd be interesting if they stared scenes in tableaux and navigated the scene by remaining in those positions/poses. Adam suggested they start that way, but also do the scene/see how the text interacts. They did the whole of the scene navigating the tableaux. Then they stayed in the same positions, but played different characters, a challenge. After, they debriefed and said they enjoyed it because it made these people into an institution, statues of it, rather than humans in it. It had a strange effect. Julia said it felt real to college life, dealing with adolescent shit while also navigating the physical strictures of a role. I named the technique a **visual structure**, something that doesn't require direction to compose but comes from outside and has a dynamic quality that is usable in performance.

I suggested they try it again, a more serious application. Then: a more serious application of it. We threw stuff around, and I told Julia to lead what she was thinking: We'll close our eyes, and then strike a tableaux, and then person reading Joan reads the monologue interacting with that. Adam read Joan, and they struck such fascinating poses that I can't describe it. They made gorgeous images, and it had the effect of giving us the appropriate distance of the monologue, with emotion and attachment, but not much ability to interact with everything. Adam said it hard at first to do stuff but built towards an end where she wanted to do something but couldn't. It added the idea that she wants to intervene for everyone but can't. Julia said she could only think of one pose, and thought everyone would do similar poses, but they all had different instincts.

We broke a little early to discuss casting. I said it was probably the strangest part of our ensemble process, because casting is usually a very strange and secluded process that ignores the

performers, but I wanted this to be something franker, more honest, more of a discussion of strengths and wants and abilities than anything else. We did a lightning round of going down the *dramatis personae* and naming their attributes, biographical info, and the requirements of the character (How many monologues? Do they sing?). They all agreed they're ready to have the conversation, and we went around and just said what their thoughts were: who they liked, who they didn't, and what they could do. The only two people who had the same appraisal were Adam and Peter who felt Joan would be an interesting challenge, but James was easily playable to them. I was also fascinated by the one-liner characters people really liked. We worked out the following cast list in no particular order:

- Adam: Julia
- Henry: Lily
- King: Nathan
- James: Peter
- Joan: Adam
- Lover (spitting): Julia
- Lover: Nathan
- Fred (drunkard): Lily
- Queen: Lily
- Essex: Adam
- Headmasters: ???
- Judge/jury/executioner: Peter

## **Tuesday, 2.19.19**

Everyone was very giggly today, and the rehearsal began with some outside drama, having to relocate rooms, etc. When we found our room, the ensemble moved into their ritual without any prompting, and that was exciting to see. I also finally furnished the speaker we'd been wanting. During the ritual, there were gorgeous pictures, impromptu moments, such as one

moment where three people slowly walked forward, like they were walking through a pool, while someone walked the same way toward the back, and Lily in the background knelt, watching a ladybug trail up her arm. There was something tranquil and gorgeous about that. During weep/cheer, there was a moment where everyone was marching at the exact same time.

Then, we set the order, with everyone saying what they had wanted to get done today. We decided on a read through with assigned parts, a debrief, a discussion on the songs, a discussion on the gender representation, then setting the following rehearsals and the call time for the performance. Adam and Lily both expressed desire for a read-through with assigned parts, so we went into that with a short clarification on who was who, and I assigned roles for some smaller parts just out of necessity and practicality. I assigned Peter to play Gwen and Julia to play Gregor, two new roles, the latter out of practicality and the former out of a desire to satisfy at least a little of Peter's desire for a challenging, cross-gendered role.

The read through was jokey, but really effective to me. When we went around at the end, I asked for a lightning round of thoughts, and everyone commented on the additions, remarking they were mostly positive with the end of the Gwen/Gregor scene being a little rushed. We also discussed how we'd show gender-bending in the performance, and I suggested makeup which was rejected by the ensemble for a plainer and more simplistic approach that honestly works a lot more smoothly.

### **Friday, 2.22.19**

There were some changes, and we began rehearsal by sorting those into the script, etc. Then they did the ritual, which I participated in. I tried to keep the order of the day open to them, and there was a lull so I threw some stuff out but they eventually decided on: songs, visual structures, splitting up to work and then some scene work. We lost a little time between the ritual and actually getting to work.

Peter and Julia were tasked with producing their respective song moments. Peter went first, and showed us his lip-sync to "Rule Britannia" where he just holds his mouth open for five minutes. We died laughing and all approved. Then Julia showed us her work, where she took the

Swinburne lyrics and an instrumental she found, and, when she sang it through, it was honestly really gorgeous. I almost cried.

We talked a little bit about cutting, and I said that Scene 6 could use trimming and they agreed. We also discussed playing music, and people had different recollections of the discussion but they ultimately decided that we'll pipe in the music for Peter's piece and Julia will accompany herself on ukulele, which she said would be easy enough.

Then we lost some more time with the ensemble chatting, and afterwards they went into their visual structures discussion. They discussed whether they should have image-based transitions, but Adam said it would be better if they read the opening stage direction rather than anything elaborate. They went in to discuss the court scene, and I asked if they'd explore the ambiguous stage direction that says the King and Queen don't touch the ground. Peter, Adam, and Nathan tried a lot of different stuff, while Julia set out some scraps of fabric for Lily to step on. Eventually, Adam and Peter decided to make a sort of chair for Nathan to ride in on. They then tried the scene once, and then another time (this time, with a more direct address style on all parts, with Adam kind of floating around). Peter and Julia as the headmasters did some interesting balletic poses, which Adam pointed out was a bridge between the previous visual structure (the headmasters' address scene) and the final scene where they're completely humanized. I suggested that they should watch one another when they're not in the scene, so that I wasn't the only one capable of giving notes, and I said that they should feel comfortable giving each other notes (which is kind of a faux pas in more traditional rehearsal practices), and they agreed.

For the execution, they just used the same block setup from the previous scene for the cell scene between Julia and Lily. Then they used these blocks for the gallows. This was, to me, a really interestingly organic way of establishing a spatial structure with a clear throughline. Honestly, it was pretty organic scenic design on their part that was really satisfying to watch, and I wonder if there's a way to do this on a more aesthetic dimension (i.e. not just with acting blocks, but with other scenic ideas). They discussed how to do the hanging for a bit, maybe abstracting it, but ultimately decide on using the stage directions. They do the scene really organically, and it is really nice, but, as the outsider, I suggest the only thing missing in the loss

of identity aspect, so Julia and Lily just decide to do the scene turned around. Peter said it worked, and Adam said one of them changed a cue line, and Julia apologized for that. Peter said it was fine in this case, and I said they should feel unrestrained about it. Someone asked Nathan what he thought and he approved, and they discussed whether the hanging was a public or private one. They decided it would have to be public, which is interesting as a parallel to the court scene, which also addresses the audience as a sort of public, diegetic audience.

Then they did the scene that's dark with their phone flashlights. they simulated candles by covering the light with their finger, causing it to glow red. Then they did a silhouette moment, which they accidentally discovered. They tried it all and it was good but messy so I stepped in to help with some moments that they couldn't see because they're in it.

For the last part, they broke off into scenes to work independently: Julia and Lily working on their scene, and Peter, Adam, and Nathan working on one. The latter tried to decide on a scene, but ultimately ended up talking about another rehearsal they're all in, and began helping each other on text from that. Julia and Lily worked pretty hard on an argument scene between them in the hall. Then we reconvened to end the rehearsal.

### **Saturday, 2.23.19**

We all came in, and Julia practiced her song while we waited for Peter. When he arrived, we started the ritual.

Afterwards, they all agreed to do a stumble through, rather than a run-through. Before that, though, Julia and Lily wanted to show their work from their independent scene-work at the end of last rehearsal, but Julia said there wasn't much to show that they couldn't just do during the stumble-through. I asked them if they were all comfortable with organic blocking the scenes they didn't put in a visual structure, and they said definitely.

They did the stumble-through, and it went well. I took some notes, as the observer and kind of out of habit. I asked them certain questions at times, for instance, if something should be cut, and they didn't take me up on any of the cuttings, preferring to work with material rather than remove it. There were some logistical discussions about entrances and exits. Adam asked if they could take notes when they're not in a scene, which Nathan said made him feel

uncomfortable. Adam said they could put a pin in the discussion to complete the stumble-through.

We debriefed at the end, and there wasn't too much that they needed to discuss before tech. Everyone was fine with their progress, and we set the order for tech in the Burlington Road Building. After that, we all went to storage to grab some stuff. Peter wasn't available for that, and Julia pulled for another show she's involved in, so I grabbed a ton of stuff that could potentially be useful, and the stuff that was expressly written in the script (candlestick, cups, etc.), trying to be as broad as possible and pull a variety of neutral things that could be used either for a specific character, but also random things that could be used at the ensemble's discretion. Certain things for I essentially pulled a huge pile and put in into the BRB for tech. We also discussed what would be a good neutral base for everyone to wear, and I suggested a white button-up and black pants, which they liked.

### **Sunday, 2.24.19**

Earlier in the day, I made a little banner for them with materials from the set strike that occurred earlier in the day. It said: ENGLAND 1209 ANNO DOMINI. They could either use it or not.

We came in and did the ritual quickly, and I showed them the massive pile of things we pulled. I said they should take a minute to set up the space together, so they put books in piles everywhere, and put their costumes where they needed them, setting up seating areas for the off-stage characters to watch (we didn't have a super accessible backstage area but also this created an organically Brechtian alienation feeling). I tried to set up a work light as backlight, and I showed them the lighting cues they had available, and they shot down the backlight for just the front lights of the rep plot. They also pointed where I should hang the banner. We also decided to use Peter's wireless speaker for audio, that I could just control with my phone via bluetooth. The space had a cluttered and full quality, with all the props and costumes just set wherever was most convenient for the ensemble, and the hand-painted banner and a scenic mural in the back that was made for my colleague, Roz Sullivan-Lovett's, thesis performance right after

ours. The eccentricity of the space actually created a strange and interesting scenic environment for this staged reading that had an explosive and full quality to it, and it was completely, organically composed from the needs of the ensemble in reaction to the given circumstances of the space and the structures they'd organically decided on in rehearsal.

In essence, tech was very much just putting in their work into the space, and arranging the technical elements out of sheer necessity, but the product made me excited for the performance. The work they've put in is interesting and exciting, and I'm proud of them.

**PERFORMANCE: Tuesday, 2.26.19**

### Parting Thoughts

While I armed myself with an array of potential structures and precedents, the actual structure of this ensemble workshop was left intentionally undefined at the end of research phase. I collaborated with Adam Friedman before the workshop and we agreed to have an arsenal of activities available to start things off with (taken from a variety of sources: other ensembles, other rehearsals we've been in, courses we've taken, etc.) with the intention that the structure would change as people became more comfortable with its demands and we began to understand more clearly the ensemble members' strengths and weaknesses. I figured that I would need to do some guidance as to the aims of the workshop at first, and Adam and I both acknowledged that there was a chance that no one would have any ensemble experience, or perhaps be resistant to it. As a contingency, Adam was the de facto leader of a lot of the early exercises, in the hopes that his leadership role would eventually dissolve. By taking into consideration the ensemble members' individual proclivities, interests, skills, ensemble/devising experiences, the expectation was that the structure of the process would grow to reflect these factors. Julia Byrne said, to this end, that she felt the members "took the reins in parts where they had experience and confidence." The ensemble had five constituent members, plus myself. My role as an observer, partial contributor, sometime administrator, and chronicler situated me firmly within the ensemble, but somewhere on the fringe, and I consider whether or not I shouldn't have divested myself a little more but I don't regret the dialogues that I was a part of and personally feel glad I was able to be a contributing member of the ensemble, even if my role was different. All the members of the ensemble could be considered friends and peers, and have worked with one another in the past. This was designed to accommodate an already truncated process by

allowing us to move past the process of ingratiating the members and building trust through exercises, which are generally essential first steps to any ensemble work.

Towards the beginning of the process, it was initially led by me (in order to discuss the theoretical ideas at play and answer textual questions about the script), and then Adam, who has significant experience in leading ensemble-based workshops and devising. Early on, the ensemble members were very comfortable contributing to various dialogues over the material (perhaps a consequence of their experiences in dialogically-driven seminars in a liberal arts institution) and also being led in physical exercises based on systems like Viewpoints. However, when Adam and I initially tried to turn it over to the ensemble members and introduce a more free-form rehearsal space, there was initial discomfort, and the undefined nature of the workshop's structure seemed off-putting. With time, the idea of assigning someone to take the lead, rather than just giving up the reins entirely, was a more comfortable and understandable way of decentralizing power in the room. Lily enjoyed helping with comedic timing, Peter displayed an interest in sound and supplemented the ironic tone of the piece, Julia felt very comfortable exploring the visual structure work, Nathan helped others with their Latin; this is a small sample of the ways they explored their interests, but it just goes to show the rewarding variety of their contributions. By delegating tasks, we were able to engage with strengths and interests more than just throwing ideas in the air and hoping they'd land, and this process was less forced than it might be in other circumstances. In this sense, I was reminded of Théâtre du Soleil's process: electing positions from the group and playing to strengths, rather than a free-for-all.

Researching Joint Stock, I was interested in how the script was produced from workshop's compelling stimuli, rather than a verbatim devised piece, but was dissatisfied at how cemented the final textual product was for those who had worked on it. I wanted to modify this so that there was a writer in the room to digest the work of the ensemble, but connect that role more closely to the workshop itself, by generating the text prior to the workshop and changing it freely based directly on events or discoveries by the ensemble as they happened. In many ways, we tried to violate the sacredness of the text. After all, the text was written to be a starting off point for the ensemble's development, rather than the main focus of the work. To this end, we agreed on a few rules and measures that were present throughout the process. First, we established the refrain that "the script is a tool," an instrument to tell a story that we are personally invested in, and, in many moments of analysis, we had a set of questions that guided our exploration: *What story is the script telling? What story do we want to tell? How do we make that happen?* The actors were also encouraged to change text, skip lines, and generally improvise without affecting cue lines. This practice was borrowed from Theater Oobleck, and the actors were initially hesitant, but, as it progressed, the actors became more comfortable with the practice, resulting in some incredible modifications that completely bypassed the writer. For instance, where the original draft had the two clerks, Henry and Adam, whimpering before their hanging, Lily (playing Henry) changed the moment so that Henry thanks Adam one last time for sharing the ballad with him (a ballad Julia devised). Small, profound changes on their part, made with incredible sensitivity and with a truly admirable ear to the drama astounded me, and made me question why I included myself in the process as an arbiter between the ensemble and the script, though I think certain contributions on my part that were inspired by the events and

dialogues in the rehearsal room were valuable too, because they delighted the ensemble members and were tied directly to what they had said or thought of but in a way that was novel to them. In this sense, I feel the balance of both worked well for this process, but would be interested in further examining ways the ensemble could change the text without writerly intervention.

In fact, I initially expected the script to morph textually much more than it did, and, at many times, asked the ensemble whether they wanted text changed or cut. More often than not, they preferred not to cut the text. They also picked up on many moments that lended themselves to flexible interpretation, and their interpretations were startling and compelling. We had many lengthy dialogues, about what it means to be a student in a privileged American institution, about the contemporary political moment, about our significantly varied backgrounds, and, ultimately, about how the script reflects these ideas. I believe that, even if these dialogues made it directly into the script, they certainly established a thematic foundation from which all the ensemble members, myself included, were able to explore in their performances and in their devising, even without textual changes. I believe, also, that the textual changes that were made were thoughtfully produced from their efforts, and, the members expressed that they did not feel exploited by it. As is the case with any text being brought to actors, I was pleasantly surprised at all the ambiguities and connections they made, and all the varied interpretations they produced. Rather than just being actors, I watched them play the part of theoreticians, and interpreters, and, ultimately, generative artists as they brought major contributions to the script. I personally feel the text is stronger, having gone through this process. Beyond any textual changes, though, I find myself reflecting on the connective experience of our dialogues, and, in that sense, our theatrically-driven seminar on the nebulous, socio-political ideas was valuable in the way any

discourse is valuable: it was thoughtful, researched, artistically compelling, challenging dialogue that, beyond any theatrical exercise, was rewarding in its own right.

Many of their contributions, rather than modifying the text, dealt with the ways they incorporated their research into the piece. About halfway through, they developed the idea of the visual structure, where they used a piece of art or some other image to essentially place themselves in tableaux, and then they played the scene, and they improvised the way they physically struggled against or interacted with the source image. For example, the headmaster's speech was set in a stiff tableaux based on poses and composition drawn from the famous painting of the academy, *The School of Athens* by Raphael. They would melt in and out of their statuesque poses to deliver their academic speeches, or talk amongst themselves, establishing, as Julia Byrne pointed out, a compelling visual metaphor for the feeling of operating within a large, monolithic institution like a university. All of this was developed from their independent research, and their experimentation with setting the text in this way, and it yielded compelling results without the intervention of a choreographer or director. It was in these moments that the efficacy of group artmaking felt most palpable to me, and the ability for an ensemble to equally assume the interpretive, theoretical, and imagistic demands of theatrical staging in a way that is smart, engaged, and in tune with their contributions is perhaps one of the things that energized me most within the process. This workstyle, explored early on, quickly defined the structural quality and arrangement of the space. In this sense, it also defined the organic blocking that the smaller scenes explored and settled on. The lighting cues were just a series of pre-set repertory cues that were chosen to fit the arrangement and scale of a scene more than anything else (reducing the lighting design to a utilitarian matter) and the soundscape of the piece was

collected by the ensemble and integrated by their decisions. Even things like the tone of the piece and the composition of musical moments in the script were devised by ensemble members after dialogues, and I believe, with more time, this more abstract, more sensory-driven development of the visual and sonic qualities of the piece could've gone further.

In traditional processes, directors tasked with blocking and arranging the actors are seen almost as artisans: there is a sense that it takes a trained, outside observer to achieve staging of premium quality. In the same sense, we put the same expectations on dramaturgs, and composers, and designers, and writers. We see them as craftspeople that each deliver their service, skill or product at a palatable quality only by virtue of their training, and the power structures that have come to define the traditional Western rehearsal room are a product of the capitalist imperatives of productivity, specialization, and hierarchical understanding of the production process. This process has produced amazing work, but it can also be bad or trite or even abusive, especially to the non-male, non-cisgendered, non-heteronormative participant. I've seen it happen to my friends, and in the media, and the ensemble process was, for me, a way of finding some sort of theater-making that was celebratory of its participants, open to discovering talents and proclivities rather than assigning tasks, and evasive of the capitalist inheritances that value the product more than the process. A few ensemble members expressed being skeptical, at first, of the efficacy of a student-driven ensemble workshop, but were surprised at how well it worked. They didn't feel exploited or disrespected, and the final product was rewarding for them. By placing a group of peers at an equal level to one another, and encouraging open discourse and theatrical experimentation, the ensemble members seemed more open to exploring theatrical ideas or roles outside of their comfort zone in a surprising way.

The process was ultimately constructive for me and, based on the surveys I collected afterwards, constructive for the ensemble as well, though certain changes could be made to this model for subsequent experiments along the same vein. The timeline of this process was truncated for a variety of administrative reasons, and we got a great deal of work done in the short time we had, but Peter Buzzerio and I both agreed that, with some more time, further exploration could've been undertaken, such as the sonic elements of the piece. However, Julia Byrne felt the short process was just enough to explore the script but still have a feeling of "raw edges" that enlivened the performance. While I recognize the raw energy the shorter process imbued in the proceedings, I envy the luxuriously-lengthy processes enjoyed by Joint Stock or Théâtre du Soleil. I would be interested to see how it would be different with a longer process that has a different end-goal: either a memorized workshop production, or a full-production with fully-realized technical elements. In the case of a full-production, I wonder if the ensemble-driven design could be extended toward larger, more elaborate design concepts or if that would require the intervention of a specified designer. I want to somehow propose an improvement to the transition period that would somehow shorten the time it takes to integrate the ensemble members more fully into the process, but I'm inclined to think that this is just an important first part of an ensemble process, and the timeline should be lengthened to reflect this rather than try to avoid it. Lastly, I noticed that certain moments were lacking in focus, or people talked about and worked on other things, and a part of me thought on how much focusing happens in the traditionally-led rehearsal room, either by the director or the stage managers. I found myself somewhat frustrated or anxious in these moments of low productivity, and, at times, other members of the ensemble focused the room, but I realized that it is perhaps healthier

to allow the members of the ensemble to dawdle when they need, goof off to a certain extent, or chat about their lives in the midst of their work, provided the work gets done. If the ensemble decides what they do in process, why shouldn't they decide when to disengage or when to let themselves go for a second? I am potentially just making excuses for the symptom of a leaderless process, but I would be interested in further exploring this more flexible understanding of rehearsal room efficiency.

I began this process with just an inkling, a broad societal idea taken from events around me. From there, I found an event, and made a text, and, finally, invited five brilliant peers into the work to explore it with me. What was mine became ours, and I realized my personal, insular thoughts became so much more complicated in our dialogues, realizing themselves in such interesting ways throughout the workshop, consciously or not. The many layers and ambiguities surrounding the university, the state, and the public compounded, and we all reflected the individual ways we (as students and citizens) verge into all three. I find it difficult not to romanticize it a bit, but, all in all, I learned about my fellows, I learned about theater, and we created something more excited and complicated than we found it. Perhaps I was just gifted with the perfect set of five people, or perhaps the utopian ideals that led me to this project have gone to my head, but, in this process, questioning the structure of theater-making and learning to rely on my fellow practitioner in new ways constructively teased the boundaries of the practice in surprising and exciting way. I genuinely believe theater can be bettered in many ways by having a more sensitive understanding of our fellow practitioners, establishing an ethos of trust in the process, and finding ways to make an already collaborative medium even more openly

collaborative by paying more attention to the process of making theater (and its many constituent elements) with the goal of a more thoughtful, more dialogic, more openly developed product.

**Appendix A: The Final Script**  
**THE FIRST OXFORD ST. SCHOLASTICA'S DAY PAGEANT**

By Josh Oberlander

Developed by Julia Byrne, Peter Buzzerio, Adam Friedman, Lily Bowman, and Nathan Ray

CHARACTERS and CAST

- ADAM (Julia Byrne): A young clerk, played by a woman.
- HENRY (Lily Bowman): A young clerk, played by a woman.
- JAMES (Peter Buzzerio): A promising scholar, played by a man.
- JOAN (Adam Friedman): A woman in the town, played by a man.
- KING JOHN OF ANGEVIN EMPIRE (Nathan Ray)
- QUEEN CONSORT ISABELLA, COUNTESS OF ANGOULEME (Lily Bowman)
- ESSEX (Adam Friedman): The king's thing.
- HEADMASTERS of OXFORD UNIVERSITY (All)
- GREGOR (Julia Byrne): A young man of the town of Oxford, played by a woman.
- GWEN (Peter Buzzerio): A woman of the town, played by a man.
- JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER for THE TOWN OF OXFORD (Peter Buzzerio)
- THE TOWN OF OXFORD

SETTING

Oxford University, England, 1209. For the most part.

At night, if you go a little out of town, you can see every star in the night sky. But there's something fearful in the dark and in the air.

NOTES

No accents.

DOCUMENTS QUOTED

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*
- Boethius, *De Institutione Arithmetica*
- William Shakespeare, *King John*
- John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*
- Sir Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentence of Peter Lombard*
- Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*

**PROLOGUE**

*There is an incredible celebration, in a small, little bar, and the time and place is hard to parse but we can see they're having fun, and we can see they're laughing, and we can see that they enjoy the moment, but we can feel something wrong about it, we can feel some dark under it, and in every smile we see teeth that bite and tear and rip things apart.*

*ADAM and HENRY lean in, laughing drunkenly under the music.*

*DRUNKARD climbs onto the bar clumsily, and, as JOAN tries to pull him down, she gets goaded up to him and she smiles at everyone.*

*JAMES stands off, alone, watching.*

*A uncomfortable peace on the brink of something awful.*

## 1.

*Just outside ADAM, HENRY, and JAMES' shitty house.  
ADAM and HENRY stumble up drunk.*

ADAM  
Locked?

HENRY  
Of course.  
Do you have the key?

ADAM  
No Henry you have the— Oh god, I'm gonna throw up.

HENRY  
Again? Jesus. Do it out here.  
Do you have the key.

*After some rummaging, ADAM hands HENRY the key. Before ADAM can hand it over, he retches. HENRY pushes him and he falls into the grass to retch.*

HENRY (cont.)  
OH ADAM, oh shit, I'm so sorry...

ADAM  
Did you push me?  
(Out) Did he push me?

HENRY  
I'm sorry... Ugh, it's just you were about to— I mean, it's a new tunic— I'll go get you some water.

ADAM  
You didn't have to push me, though...

HENRY  
I'm sorry, I'll be right back.

*He goes to unlock the door, but can't do it. He's so wasted.  
ADAM stops wretching for a moment, turns over and sits against the front of the house.*

ADAM  
Rich boys, and their clothes. I mean, I don't blame him— If I could spend as much as he does on clothes, I would, but I can't so I guess... I mean, I wish he didn't push me down.  
(Retches, but nothing comes up)  
Huh. Anyway, he's too smart to spend that much on a tunic, even if he can, but he buys a lot of books so I guess the tunics and the books balance out, and he even reads them *all* too, the books, not the tunics, obviously.

*(Leans in)* He's working on a translation, a big one. I know. I mean, he reads and writes Latin, duh, but the things he does with Greek, with French, with Anglo-Saxon, with Arabic, it's beautiful to watch. Sometimes I just watch him write for hours. He says it's something about this philosopher Secundus or whatever, and I don't know what it means, it's all Greek to me *(laughs, knowing how corny this is)* so I just watch. Watch him work, when I'm not doing my own work. *(whispers)* I'm working on something very special. Special and secret.

*(He looks at him, the door finally opens and HENRY goes inside.)*

When we first started renting this house together, I mean, we'd like just gotten here, and *(casually)* I'm from *Bletchingly-on-Medway* so you know how I am *(they don't)* and he's from *Southwark* so you know how all that is *(they don't)*, I mean, his dad's a pretty good wainwright for Christ's sake (sorry), I mean you know how they are and stuff so we didn't really talk and we'd just come home and go in our separate rooms and work and work, and one time, I mean, it must've been a year ago, he came over and knocked on my door, and he said, hey there's this bard in town, with his lute or whatever, and I was gonna go and I don't wanna walk alone. And I said: yeah? I mean, what else do you say to that? And he's like: You wanna come? And I don't know what to say, so I'm like: I mean, I haven't really seen that many bards or whatever I don't know and so he nodded and went to leave and I dunno why but I stopped him and said yeah I'd love to come. And we did, and we talked the whole way there. And we talked the whole way back. And I guess we've never stopped talking since. There was a few days a few months later where there was this like crazy fucking storm, insane, the hail and the rain came down like a thick thick curtain and everything was running and flooding and so classes were cancelled, and so we just kinda sat by the window, waited it out together, always talking. And ever since, I dunno— *(laughs quietly)*  
The townies, they can drink. I mean, he can drink too. I guess I can drink, I guess my problem is holding it down, and I seem to be the only one who can't hold it.

HENRY

Here you go. *(Hands him water.)*

ADAM

Where's James?  
*(out)* He's our shitty roommate. *(whispers)* *He's from London.*

HENRY

I don't know. Lost him hours back.

ADAM

Oh yeah, that girl...

HENRY

I mean, of course. There's always a girl.  
Let's get you inside.

ADAM

Wait. Listen.

*Silence. After a moment, some music and singing rings over the distance.*

HENRY

The music?

ADAM

Yeah. They're still going.

HENRY

They'll be going all night, and then all day tomorrow, with their... maypole, or whatever.

ADAM

Did you have fun though?

HENRY

Yeah. Did you?  
Drink your water.

ADAM

Yeah. Of course. Thank you for coming out, I know it's not your thing.

HENRY

No, of course. I had fun. A lot of fun.

ADAM

You even danced.

HENRY

I'll deny it if you tell.

ADAM

*(laughs, then a small moment)* Will you spend the night in my room? I know the bed's small, but—

HENRY

Of course.

ADAM

Okay, I'm ready now.

HENRY

Do you have to throw up again?

ADAM

I don't think so.

*(Forced retch into the grass. Nothing. Placid smile back at Henry.)*

All good.

HENRY

Up ya go, then.  
I'm sorry I pushed you.

ADAM

No harm, no harm.  
What's tomorrow?

HENRY

Monday. Aristotle at 9.

ADAM

Fuuuuuuuck.

## 2.

*Tavern. Very much looks like a bar in a college town at closing time.*

*JOAN, the barback, is wiping down tables, JAMES watches her. There are two lovers nuzzling, and a drunk.*

*Everything is messy.*

Am I in your way? JAMES

I mean... JOAN

Yeah? JAMES

Yes, sir. JOAN

Good. JAMES  
I'd very much like to be in your way.

*JOAN just laughs, shakes her head.*

What? Corny? JAMES

Beyond corny. JOAN

It made you laugh though, and you have an incredible laugh. JAMES

College boy? JOAN

Does it show? JAMES

*(laughing)* Sorely. JOAN

There it is again. JAMES

Joan! DRUNKARD

Yeah?  
 JOAN

Oh am I interrupting you and—  
 DRUNKARD

What do you want, Fred?  
 JOAN

Another drink—  
 DRUNKARD

Bar's closing soon, don't you think—  
 JOAN

Oh just one more Joanie, just one more fuckin' cup.  
 DRUNK

Two for me.  
 JAMES

Okay, okay, last round, last call.  
 JOAN

Where's your brother, Joanie?  
 DRUNK

Not here.  
 JOAN

Where is he? He should be helping. You're all alone—  
 DRUNK

He's not here, stop asking.  
 JOAN

*(matter-of-factly to JAMES)* Huh, must be dead.  
 DRUNK

*She goes to get the drinks. The couple puts their money down and starts to stumble out.*

Did you leave your bag?  
 LOVER 1

Oh, oh, I think I did. I think I left it at the table.  
 LOVER 2

*One goes to get the bag, and the other just stares at JAMES.*

JAMES

What do you want.

LOVER 2

Oxford student?

JAMES

Yeah?

*LOVER 2 spits on him.*

JAMES

*(calmly)* Thank you.

LOVER 2

My uncle had to move out of his house because you bastards drove the rent up.  
You're welcome.

LOVER 1

*(rushing up)* What the fuck did you do that for? Sorry, sir, sorry, she's very drunk.  
Let's go.

*They go as JOAN reenters with drinks and JAMES wipes his face.*

JOAN

One for you. *(hands one to the drunk)*  
And two for you. *(hands two to JAMES)*

JAMES

And one for you. *(slides it over to her)*

*A beat. JOAN looks at it for a moment, before laughing.*

JOAN

Alright, I'll bite. Joan.

JAMES

James.

JOAN

What do you study, James?

JAMES

Theology.

JOAN

Amen.

JAMES

My thoughts point heavenward.

JOAN

Are your friends the same thing?

JAMES

Friends?

JOAN

The guys you were—

JAMES

Ohh, ohh yes. My roommates. They're clerks, not scholars. It's different. (*whispers*) *Worse*. And I guess they're my friends. We're housemates, so we stick together a lot. They're kind of killjoys. They spend a lot of time together, but they never interrupt me.

JOAN

That's nice of them. What's a clerk do?

JAMES

They can work on their own projects but mostly they're support staff, for the scholars.

JOAN

Lemme guess, like you?

JAMES

I'm a man on top over at Oxford. Sometimes, I have two clerks helping.

JOAN

Ah, yes, man on top. You scholars are quite the polite and modest bunch.

JAMES

I'm sensing some sarcasm.

JOAN

A little bit. I haven't had the best experiences.

JAMES

I'm sorry to hear that. Some of us might be very charming if you got to know us—

JOAN

Get to know you? Please. Most of you don't even speak English. You just babble to each other in some language, your precious Latin, and point to the table, thrust your empty cups out at me, have rounds and rounds and by the time you stumble out of here you're too broke to tip. You trash the tables, break the glasses.

JAMES

Oh wow.

JOAN

Sorry, I wouldn't normally say that to a customer, I just— It's late.

JAMES

I get it. Well, I hope I've been a little more pleasant than most.

JOAN

You've been nice, yeah.

*(suddenly)* Why did you wait around for me?

JAMES

What do you mean?

JOAN

Why didn't you go home with anyone else. Like, I don't know, someone who doesn't work here.

JAMES

Because I wasn't interested in anyone but you.

JOAN

That's very flattering. God, it's late. I need to start closing up—

JAMES

Wait. *(fishes out some money, puts it on the table)* A tip.

JOAN

Oh, yes. Thank you. *(counting the money)* Oh damn.

JAMES

There's a bit there.

JOAN

Thank you very much.

JAMES

When's your shift end tomorrow?

JOAN

Late.

JAMES

Same time, same place. *(he gets up to go)* And there's more where that came from.

## 3.

*Dinnertime in Oxford's candlelit dining hall. Very Hogwarts. They're sweating profusely under the heat of the candles.*

*Through the course of the speech, they strike poses from The Academy painting, statues of the institution. The Headmaster's speech:*

HEADMASTER 1

Good evening all.

HEADMASTER 2

Good evening.

HEADMASTER 1

I welcome you all, fellows, to a warm meal underscored with the warmest thoughts of your loving and esteemed headmasters.

HEADMASTER 2

A harsh winter has thawed to a fabulously verdant spring, but we would all do well to concern ourselves with the quote of the esteemed Aristotle: *'Tis not a singular swallow or a fine day that makes a spring, so it is not one day or a short time that makes a man blessed and happy*

HEADMASTER 1

So quite wise, sir.

HEADMASTER 2

The contents of our soul, its virtuous fabric, does assert the goodness of the quality of our times, thereby assuring the goodness of our lives,

HEADMASTER 1

And then it follows, thereby, that the goodness of the quality of our enduring growth of knowledge does well to assure the goodness of our virtuous thoughts:

HEADMASTER 2

THEREBY, good sir—

HEADMASTER 1

Good sir—

HEADMASTER 2

Thereby proposing the fundamentals of our place here in Oxford: our enclave of good knowledge thusly breeds sterling thoughts thusly breeding good gilded virtuous lives, thereby gilding over our entire lives on this mortal coil—

HEADMASTER 1

Thereby begging thusly the following question: to suffer ignorance bestially thusly ensures bad thoughts, bad actions, bad lives perforated with many vices.

HEADMASTER 2

Do you excuse those who know not any better?

HEADMASTER 1

Just as ignorance of law does not excuse crime, ignorance of higher laws, higher thoughts, higher virtues, does not excuse vice.

HEADMASTER 2

Thereby, good sir,

HEADMASTER 1

Thereby—

HEADMASTER 2

Thereby, goodest of sirs, in the midst of festivals such as this weekend's most raucous affair, we must extend pity on those who do not partake in the exchange of discourse, by extension knowledge, by extension virtue, by extension goodness, but also be steady in censure, let them know better, by your modest example when that is enough, by direct words and actions when those are requisite.

HEADMASTER 1

Those who don't feel comfort in doing this, leading as an exemplar in the world, should rather sequester their minds to the confines of our university's walls, our university's minds, We shall now be led in song:

[All, to the tune of the Alma Mater]  
*With its comely green traverses*  
*With its hallowed halls*  
*When the bell doth toll at noontime*  
*Oxford's wisdom calls.*

JAMES

*(whispering)* So when I went to Paris for that semester, I shit you not, there was not a day I wasn't knee deep in—

HENRY

*(absently whispering)* uh huh.

JAMES

Anyway, dude, the food is shit. They say our food is shit, but damn. And I was supposed to be gathering research material but they're fucking insane if they think—

HENRY

uh huh.

ADAM

*(whispering)* Guys.

JAMES

Adam what do you want.

ADAM

Be quiet they're singing the—

JAMES

I'm telling Henry about the time I fucked a nun in Paris.

*HENRY shoots ADAM a 'help me' look.*

ADAM

Charming. But the song, James—

HEADMASTER 1

*(hissing)* Could the good sir, Clerk Adam, please remain silent.

*ADAM deflates. JAMES and HENRY stifle laughter.*

[continuing]

*Wisdom comes to the enlightened*

*Let our wisdom spread*

*By the words of sterling sages*

*Let our lives be led.*

*Oxford calls me, Oxford tells me*

*Secrets of this frame*

*Wisest hearts seeks the knowledge*

*To defer the flame.*

HEADMASTER 1

What beautiful song. Music is of course one of the fundamental building blocks on the liberal art's trivium. Consider this passage from renowned Boethius: *Nunc illud est intuendum quod omnis ars, omnisque etiam disciplina honorabiliorem naturaliter habeat rationem, quam artificium, quod manu atque opere artificis exercetur. Multo enim est majus atque altius scire quod quisque faciat . . . (continues underneath)*

HENRY

Do you still have a headache?

ADAM

Yeah, it's fine though.

*(to James)* Where did you end up last night?

JAMES

I was with someone until last call.

ADAM  
What did they do to deserve that?

JAMES  
Fuck you.

HENRY  
Some country girl no doubt.

JAMES  
You're such an elitist, Henry.

HENRY  
Sure but I don't get off on outsmarting townies before fucking and dumping them.

JAMES  
That's harsh.

HENRY  
It's fucked, what you do to them.

JAMES  
At least I deign to stoop so low as to speak to them, unlike you, your highness.

ADAM  
Guys, please—

JAMES  
And I'd rather fuck some milkmaid in a field than sit in a room and jerk off over your precious essays all night. You wouldn't know what to do with a woman unless they published the instructions in Greek first and asked you to translate them

*HENRY doesn't reply to that.*

HEADMASTER 2  
Does good sir Clerk Henry have a moment to spare for level discussion on the subject of his work?

HENRY  
Of course, sir.

*THEY walk away, take a lap around the room in a very Jane Austen-y way.*

JAMES  
I've lost my appetite.

ADAM  
You can be a real dick, James.

JAMES

He's a hypocrite. He really is an elitist.

HEADMASTER

I understand your progress on your translation of Secundus' *De Poetica Bonitatis* is quite ... significant.

ADAM

Elitist? Look at what you're wearing. Look at where we're eating.

HENRY

Yes sir, I am approaching the end of *liber primus*, and might I say I am quite excited to—

HEADMASTER

I understand your manuscript is mounting, and I have heard from your advisor that it is a formidable feat in Greek translation, from a promising new clerk.

HENRY

I thank you for the complimentary words, I'm—

HEADMASTER

I understand you are making headway far in advance of your timeline.

HENRY

Right, yes, I uh—

HEADMASTER

In that case, our department has conferred and we think perhaps the most ardently useful direction of your work is to assist good sir Scholar James on his climactic thesis: his commentary of the nature of the soul, after Aquinas' commentary on the Arabic commentary on Boethius' commentary of Aristotle's commentary on Plato.

HENRY

Yes I will try to carve some time for him in the midst of—

HEADMASTER

Try to carve, *hmm*, well perhaps, defer rather than carve.

HENRY

I'm sorry?

HEADMASTER

Yes, it's work/study you see. You do your work, then you help him do his studies. He's of remarkable provenance, a wealthy and genteel scholar all the way from London, and we are very pleased with his work. He deserves someone of well-examined renown to help him complete his very worthy manuscript before he graduates. I believe good sir if that requires perhaps, shifting focus away from your work for the moment, for the requisite amount of moments that he requires then perhaps that would be most suitable for all.

*HENRY looks back at JAMES.*

Her name is Joan. JAMES

Was she nice? ADAM

Of course, good sir. HENRY

HEADMASTER  
I so look forward to your fabulous work good sir, indeed.

Yes, but not fawning. Blunt, like an old axe. JAMES

Oh of course. ADAM

I'm seeing her again tonight. JAMES

What's that? HENRY

Nothing. How was your meeting? ADAM

Well, I've got a seminar, I've got to head off. JAMES

Which seminar? ADAM

Aristotle. JAMES

Ah. BOTH

Yeah. See ya. JAMES

*A moment, watching him leave.*

I'm gonna fucking kill him. HENRY

ADAM  
What?

HENRY  
I— (*about to yell, he bites his sleeve and starts to stifle crying, a lot like a child.*)

ADAM  
What's wrong?

HENRY  
I'm sorry, I've got to go.

ADAM  
Henry.

*HENRY storms swiftly off, ADAM following.*

## 4.

*A field by the river. Stars as far as the eye can see.*

*JOAN and JAMES swig a 40 oz of mead from a brown paper bag, stumble a little. They've been drinking.*

JOAN

Hand it here.

JAMES

Here.

JOAN

Oh, I'm done walking.

*She lowers herself onto the grass.*

*JAMES follows.*

JAMES

Oh god, it's so wet.

JOAN

It rained while we were talking. In the tavern.

JAMES

I didn't notice.

JOAN

*(laughs)* How?

JAMES

I was distracted, by you.

JOAN

Very charming.

*She unties her smock, puts it on the ground for him.*

JAMES

*(sitting)* Such unexpected chivalry.

JOAN

You said you were going to tell me about the stars.

JAMES

Oh, oh yes... Where to start...

JOAN

What's that one?

JAMES

*(squints, then laughs)* I don't know.  
That one's Pisces.

JOAN

What?

JAMES

The fish one.

JOAN

Ohhhh yeah. I forgot. My mom told me about them a long time ago.  
The fish one.  
*(points)* The hunter.

JAMES

Orion.  
*(points)* Virgo.

JOAN

What's that?

JAMES

The maiden.

JOAN

Someone told me in great big castles, when a baby's born, they draw up the whole sky and you can tell a whole life from all that.

JAMES

Sometimes. Not always, though.  
For very important people.

JOAN

Though, the joke with that is like, what fuckin' monk or whatever is gonna draw up the sky, and see some bad omen of some horrible painful death, and then go to the king and queen and be like, oh yeah your babies gonna die at 13 of a horrible, painful death.

JAMES

Yeah, that'd be hard.

JOAN

Shoot the messenger, you know.

JAMES

Gimme.

Oh, oh. (*hands him the bottle*)

JOAN

You said you've been working at the bar for a year.

JAMES

Yeah.

JOAN

How do you like it?

JAMES

It's fine. It's rough. But it was— it is easier with two people.

JOAN

Who helped?

JAMES

My brother.

JOAN

Where's your brother?

JAMES

Oh.  
France.

JOAN

Fighting?

JAMES

Yeah.

JOAN

Sorry.

JAMES

Don't— Don't.

JOAN

Oh, okay.

JAMES

He did it for the money. Can you believe that? If he dies over there, I don't know, it's like, he's young and full of life—  
(*shakes her head*) It's all about money.

JOAN

What year are you? At Oxford.

JAMES

A senior.

JOAN

You tired of it yet?

JAMES

School?

JOAN

Yeah.

JAMES

Yeah.

You ever get tired of living here?

JOAN

Duh.

JAMES

You ever try to leave?

JOAN

No.

JAMES

Why don't you?

JOAN

Same reasons as everyone else. Family's here, they've been here, never been anywhere else. Some Vikings or whatever fucked on this hill, made a brood. They fucked some others here, probably in this field or that one, had their own litter. Some ancestors decided to stick around, and I'm just punctuation to that very long sentence. Everyone I've ever known sticks around here, has stuck around, old as the hills themselves, miserable as mud.

What's your excuse?

JAMES

Leaving?

I probably will leave. When I graduate.

Go back to *London*.

Do you hear that?

*They stop talking for a second. An owl calls.*

JOAN

An owl. Ominous.

Do you like being a student?

JAMES

Sure. I like it well enough. I'm very good at it.  
Do you want to know what else I'm good at?

JOAN

What?

*He leans into her. A horribly sloppy kiss. Awkward to watch.*

JOAN

*(wiping her mouth)* Wow.  
Do you want me?

JAMES

Yeah.

JOAN

How badly?

JAMES

Very badly.

JOAN

Very bad?

JAMES

Very very bad.

*They kiss again, just as poorly.*

JOAN

I want you too. But first, you said, after you gave me the big tip at the bar...

JAMES

Oh. *Oh.*

JOAN

You said—

JAMES

So you're a whore?

JOAN

No, what? No, I'm not, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about an arrangement, an ongoing arrangement.

JAMES

What are you talking about?

JOAN

The best of both worlds.  
You give me something I need, when I need it. Regularly.  
I'll give what you need, when you need. Regularly.

*They freeze.*  
*HENRY and ADAM are trawling up to their house.*

ADAM

I heard an owl a while back.

HENRY

Yes. I also heard it.

ADAM

Ok.

HENRY

...

ADAM

Dinner was shit tonight, yeah?

HENRY

Not really.

ADAM

I was being polemical. For effect.

HENRY

All polemics are for effect. That's what makes them polemical.

ADAM

Okay, what the fuck did I do? Why are you talking to me like I'm the bad guy? You have been since dinner. I'm not a bad guy.

HENRY

I know that.

ADAM

No but like, I understand you're pissed off, I understand your meeting was bad, you don't have to take everything out on me all the time.

HENRY

I don't always take things out on you, stop being ridiculous.

ADAM

I understand they're telling you your thesis isn't as important as James'. I understand how bad that makes you feel, I understand you're really fucked up about your translations of whoever—

HENRY

Secundus.

ADAM

Yeah, "Secundus."

HENRY

Why do you say it like that?

ADAM

WE DON'T EVEN KNOW IF HE WAS A REAL PERSON.

HENRY

HE WAS A REAL PERSON. FROM GREECE. SECUNDUS THE SILENT—

ADAM

MY GOD WHO CARES? All day, you just seethe, I just get these monosyllabic "yes, grr, no, grr" and I'm just supposed to be like, sure! When you fuck up a page and have to start over, the whole night becomes a vigil on your ruined page. When I was drunk after the festival, you pushed me because—

HENRY

Are you still mad about that?

ADAM

No, I'm not mad, it's just like—

HENRY

It was an accident, Adam.

ADAM

I get that—

HENRY

I was told to put aside my work because James, with all his money and all his accolades and all the academic head patting, the fucking sycophant nymphomaniac, he needs help. I can actually help people, my work can teach people about what it was like to live then, *that's priceless*. To teach people, to help people, *that's priceless*.-- <sup>78</sup>

ADAM

---

<sup>78</sup> The ensemble felt the script critiqued the university a lot, but at the expense of discussing the tangible and intangible pleasures of university learning, and the empowering effects of it. It is a long-winded discourse, but I tried to include some of that sentiment (the genuine reward of scholarly pursuits) here.

I know it is.

HENRY

But James needs help. He's got everything because they've let him in the boy's club. I've gotten no help to do what I do. I'm not a part of that club, and I'm starting to fear I never will be—

ADAM

Are you jealous of him?

HENRY

What? *What?*

ADAM

No, just the way you talk—

HENRY

*I'm not fucking jealous of him.*

ADAM

I didn't mean it like that—

HENRY

I'm sorry you can't understand what it means to work on something you're truly proud of, what that feels like.

ADAM

*(taken aback)* Oh.

HENRY

I didn't mean—

ADAM

Sounded like you meant it to me.

HENRY

I'm sorry.

ADAM

I hate you.

HENRY

That's not true.

ADAM

...

*They're near enough home to see a warm glow from inside their home, the door left cracked open.*

Fuck. HENRY

Damnit James. ADAM

I'm gonna fucking kill him, this is the second time he's left the door— HENRY

*HENRY rushes in.*

(to the audience) He always does this, and we told him if he did it again we'd have to penalize him, surcharge him or something, I don't know how. Maybe— ADAM

(reappearing) He's not here. HENRY

He's probably out still. ADAM

His shit is gone. HENRY

What? ADAM

His books, his clothes; there's nothing. HENRY

The fuck? ADAM

*ADAM goes in to check. He comes out.*

Why would he? ADAM

I don't know, I'm so— HENRY

*Yelling heard off.*

What are— ADAM

HENRY

Get inside.

ADAM

The fuck is on their hands? Is that blood?

HENRY

Get inside.

*A moment of indecision, but ADAM goes inside. HENRY remains, frozen.  
JAMES just begins to burst out laughing.*

JAMES

You think I'm going to—

JOAN

At the bar, last night, you said—

JAMES

You are an idiot for thinking I meant I'd rent you like a prostitute, for a fuck I could get for free. You're just a greedy townie.

JOAN

What is wrong with you?

JAMES

You're nothing. In fact, you'd be lucky to have me, a man of my stature and class—

JOAN

Lucky to have you? Oh fucking spare me.

JAMES

What?

JOAN

You really think I'm lucky to have you? You really think I'm lucky to be in your presence?

JAMES

Yes.

JOAN

You're worthless. What are you good at? Pointing at shapes in the sky and giving their Greek names? Extraordinary. You're good at drinking, and dancing, and fucking. You're good at bullshitting in Latin and reading useless books and driving the rent up. You're *brilliant*, all of you brilliant, useless men. Lucky to have you.

JAMES

What did we ever do to you?

JOAN

Please, I work at a fucking bar. I get the pleasure of serving you *brilliant men*. I get to overhear, whenever you deign to speak English at all, how simple we are, how foolish, how bestial! You think we're animals, we're just trying to work the best we can here. We're trying our best here. *We're trying our best*.

JAMES

Okay, listen—

JOAN

No, you listen. I've never gotten the chance to tell one of you to your face how much I hate the way you condescend, look down on us, spit in our faces while you rent out our houses and eat our food and drink our beer. You take us for granted, our obedience. You take it as a given, our ignorance. I can't do what you do but I can be honest, share, be fair and kind. I would I could learn each of you some of that, but I can't. And now you think, in your heart of hearts, that you're God's given gift to me because you can speak Greek. You really thought you were so special that you'd get under my skirt with just some Greek and a brisk walk. (*she laughs*) You said you speak four languages?

JAMES

Yes.

JOAN

You know what I thought of? One day, nobody's gonna speak the languages you speak, you know that? Everyone will read everything and learn everything, and then you'll all be sorry. I think one day all the laws will be written in English.

JAMES

The Bible isn't even written in English.

JOAN

That can't go on forever. It can't. Maybe for a while, but not forever. Everything's built for the men on top, but nothing ever stays and none of it matters forever. And you can write all the papers in the world, speak every language, recite every chapter of every book in Latin, and I still wouldn't be impressed. How's that make you feel? I think that must make you realize: if there's one woman out there who can't be impressed by my knowledge, there must be many. Many men, many women, maybe: all my work pleases so few people that all my work will rot away on a shelf and I'll never have anything left of me in the world one day.

I'm sorry, I really thought— I lost my head, coming out here.

JAMES

I could have you whipped for the way you're speaking to me.

I could strike you and nobody would ever blame me.

You certainly wouldn't be the first, wretch.

JOAN

I enjoyed talking with you. Foolish me, I thought you were nice. Go fuck yourself.

I'm going home.

JAMES

*(seething)* Wait.  
Come here.

JOAN

What? No.

JAMES

Are you afraid of me?

JOAN

No, I'm not.

JAMES

Wrong.

JOAN

What the fuck did you just say?

JAMES

Come here.

JOAN

No.

JAMES

Come here.

JOAN

Get away or I'll scream.

JAMES

I'm going to make you eat your words—

JOAN

Fuck you.

*JOAN throws the bottle at him, and runs, and he darts after her.*

JOAN *(off)*

LET FUCKING GO—

*JAMES yelps and comes back on, hand over his bloodied eye.*

JAMES

SHE SCRATCHED MY FUCKING EYE.

*He sees the broken head of the bottle, grabs it, wields it, and runs back after her.*

*Blackout.*

## 5.

*The dark. Night noises: toads, an owl, wind.  
Voices in the distance. They get closer.*

VOICE 1

There she is.

VOICE

Holy shit, is that?

VOICE

Oh shit, it's Todd's girl.

VOICE 1

I heard a scream, so did my wife, so I let my dog out, and he ran off to this field and I followed and I smelled it before I saw it, and I slipped in the blood, and now it's all over me—

VOICE

Cover her up.

*A door opens, a stark beam of light. There's a body, covered in a bloody wool blanket.  
A small group of people are clustered over her.*

VOICE

Who do you think it was?

VOICE

She was dragged.

VOICE

She was stabbed.

VOICE

Was she... you know...

VOICE

Don't tell Todd.

VOICE

Someone at the bar said she was going to meet a student.

VOICE

Christ...

Who said that?

That drunk Fred. VOICE

Find the drunk, bang on his door, ask him who. VOICE

*Lights out.*

HEY. VOICE

YOU, STAY RIGHT THERE. VOICE

*Flashlights illuminate a crowd facing down HENRY.*

Can I help you? HENRY

Where's your friend? VOICE

Why is he covered in blood? HENRY

Get your friend, step aside. We're searching your home. VOICE

*Two go in, one brings ADAM out.*

What's happening? ADAM

I think they're looking for James. HENRY

What did he do? ADAM

A woman's dead. VOICE

Oh my god. ADAM

*Someone exits with rags, black with blood.*

ADAM

Oh my god...

VOICE

Come with us.

*Blackout.*

## 6.

*The court of King John. A regal affair.  
A fanfare of sorts.*

ESSEX

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN of the court, the King of England.

*THE KING and QUEEN enter, and they don't touch the ground.*

KING

Good e'en, lords and ladies.

QUEEN

*(glowing) Bonjour, monsieur ou madame, merci beaucoup.*

KING

Your requested audience has been well met, lords and ladies. As you know:  
*(from Shakespeare) Arthur Plantagenet, lays most lawful claim  
To this fair island and the territories,  
To Ireland, Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine,  
Desiring me to lay aside the sword  
Which sways usurpingly these several titles.  
We disallowed, and what followed?  
The proud control of fierce and bloody war,  
To enforce these rights we forcibly held.  
Here have we war for war and blood for blood,  
Controlment for controlment: so answer France.*

*50's sitcom sound effect: awwwww.*

KING

As you also know: quite a bit has been lost, our favorite vineyards in Poitiers, our favorite mines in Normandy, our chalets in Maine and Anjou.

QUEEN

*Oui.*

KING

It's an English carnage. Assault on two separate fronts. A double penetration if you will. Furthermore and foolishly, our church disputes have also led to combat with the Pope, who has, as you heard, recently excommunicated me.

*50's sitcom laugh track.*

So you have heard.

The world is against us, ladies and gentlemen, the wind is shifting against England, *this royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle, this earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, this other Eden, demi-paradise, this happy breed of men, this little world, this precious stone set in a silver sea (which serves it in the office of*

*a wall or as a moat defensive to a house, against the envy of less happier lands), this blessed plot, this realm, this England, this teeming womb of royal kings, feared by their breed and famous by their birth, c'est moi. We are hated for this. This beauty makes us hateable, and to hate another for their beauty, thereby good sirs, is jealousy. The world is jealous of what we have, the beauty we hold in our hand, and they can hate us all they want to, the continental kings and all the Popes of Rome along with their sluttish sycophants who denigrate us, homegrown from Oxford, who takes the continental side — any side but our side.*

ESSEX

Hear, hear.

KING

*This **English** carnage stops right here and stops right now. We are one nation – and their pain is our pain. Their dreams are our dreams; and their success will be our success. We share one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny. You have me, his greatest blessing, and I will resceper this isle once more. Nothing will keep me from it...*

ESSEX

Hear, hear.

*50's laugh track: sad aww.*

ESSEX

Shit. (*He slaps a wall.*)

*50's track: romantic awww.*

KING

Now, a song.

*Enter pageboy who sings a glorious song of national love.*

**[SONG: RULE BRITANNIA]**

*When Britain first, at heaven's command,  
Arose from out the azure main,  
Arose, arose from out the azure main!  
This was the charter,  
The charter of the land,  
And Guardian Angels sang this strain:*

*Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves!  
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.*

*The nations not so blest as thee  
Must, in their turn, to tyrants fall,  
Must in their turn, to tyrants fall.*

*While thou shalt flourish great and free:  
The dread and envy of them all.*

*Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves!  
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.*

*Still more majestic shalt thou rise,  
More dreadful from each foreign stroke,  
As the loud blast that tears the skies  
Serves but to root thy native oak.*

*Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves!  
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.*

*Thee haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame;  
All their attempts to bend thee down  
All their attempts to bend thee down  
Will but arouse, arouse thy generous flame,  
But work their woe and thy renown.*

*Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves!  
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.*

*The Muses, still with freedom found,  
Shall to thy happy coasts repair,  
Shall to thy happy coasts repair:  
Oh, blest isle! with matchless beauty crowned,  
And manly hearts to guard the fair.*

*Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves!  
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.*

*Enter ESSEX with HEADMASTERS.*

ESSEX

*My liege, here is the strangest controversy  
Come from country to be judged by you,  
That e'er I heard: shall I produce the men?*

KING

*Let them approach.  
What men are you?*

HEADMASTER 1

Good sir, our liege, our rightful protector of the realm, our master: we come most hastily from Oxford University with nothing but the utmost respect and somber reverence for—

QUEEN

*Merdre!*

KING

My love, do contain these paroxysms of emotion. Oxford, despite our amicable relations in the past, has, of late, been a, as you may term it, an insulting thorn in the Crown's side, has it not?

HEADMASTER 2

We assure you, it is not our intention to—

KING

Our kingdom employs a great many clergyman, lawyers, physicians educated at your school, does it not?

HEADMASTER 1

It absolutely does.

KING

Is it not, then, a bit insulting, how you opposed my agenda and aligned yourself with the continental Pope, and seem, in every instance, to subtly undermine my rule. What's your matter?

HEADMASTER 2

Good sir, our liege, our rightful protector of the realm of England, our master, we have come unfortunately upon at a dispute that has disrupted life in Oxford wherein two scholars have come under the charge of a local mob—

KING

What caused the dispute? Speaketh plaineth.

HEADMASTER 1

A woman was killed.

HEADMASTER 2

Yes, a woman from the town was sadly killed, disposed of in a field, good sir our liege our rightful protector of the realm of England our master, but the townspeople have over hastily imprisoned two of our scholars...

HEADMASTER 1

Clerks, they're only clerks.  
Not scholars, but clerks. They're different.

KING

And?

HEADMASTER 2

Pardon?

QUEEN

*Et?*

KING

They killed someone, they ought to be imprisoned.

ESSEX

Hear, hear.

HEADMASTER 1

Well we're not so sure it was them, we can't be sure because, *as we all know, (they don't know)* these matters are settled in ecclesiastical court and not by the town court, we handle these things at the judicious judgement of —

HEADMASTER 2

It is how these things are done.

HEADMASTER 1

How they've always been done.

HEADMASTER 2

How they should be done—

HEADMASTER 1

Thereby, would be done—

HEADMASTER 2

Would be done would we could do them that way, good sir, good sir our liege our rightful protector of the realm of England our master.

KING

Interesting.

QUEEN

*Interessant.*

KING

You know, m'lady, something I just can't get out of my head—

QUEEN

*Ah, oui, monsieur?*

KING

Every nation state deserves its universities. Paris has hers, Bologna has hers. Even backwater Iberia has one.

QUEEN

*Oui, monsieur.*

KING

Every nation state deserves its universities, and deserves quality ones at that, to discuss the ideas of the realm, to parse and understand that which, you know, must be parsed and understood, and that, in turn, is why we pour money into our universities. Pounds of gold, we heap and heap for those books and those halls.

HEADMASTER 1

Ah, yes sir, well—

QUEEN

He's not done.

KING

All those books, all those shelves, all those libraries, all those buildings, all that land, all those roads and bridges, all that material wealth to produce all that immaterial wealth: knowledge. Knowledge to help the nation, to help her subjects, to make us all better. *All of us*, not just you, but all of us.

HEADMASTER 2

And that's what we try to do: to better all of England.

HEADMASTER 1

Yes, good sir our liege—

KING

You have not tried hard enough. I think the only people you try to better are yourselves. In the light of the excommunication, it becomes obvious what passes for knowledge in your halls. Please translate the following passage for us.

QUEEN

*(Reading from Aquinas) Respondeo dicendum, quod potestas superior et inferior dupliciter possunt se habere. Aut ita quod inferior potestas ex toto oriatur a superiori; et tunc tota virtus inferioris fundatur supra virtutem superioris; et tunc simpliciter et in omnibus est magis obediendum potestati superiori quam inferiori.*

HEADMASTER 1

*(Over her)* Ah yes, Sir Aquinas. What a brilliant young mind. Well, in that passage—

HEADMASTER 2

On the question of a divided authority, wherein two higher powers clash—

HEADMASTER 1

We must choose which to obey.

HEADMASTER 2

We obey the superior power, that which has dominion over the issue at hand.

HEADMASTER 1

The secular authority for secular matters, the religious for religious matters.

KING

Interesting. How about this one?

QUEEN

*(Flips page, reads from Locke) ...the authority of the rich proprietor, and the subjection of the needy beggar, began not from the possession of the lord, but the consent of the poor man, who preferred being his subject to starving. And the man he thus submits to, can pretend to no more power over him, than he has consented to, upon compact.*

ESSEX

*(to the audience, condescendingly)* Sound familiar? *(If they don't know)* It's Locke.

HEADMASTER 1

I don't—I'm not—

HEADMASTER 2

We are not familiar.

HEADMASTER 1

*(to the other)* Why isn't it in Latin?

KING

Or this?

QUEEN

*(reading from Rousseau) The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right, and obedience into duty. Force is a physical power, and I fail to see what moral effect it can have. To yield to force is an act of necessity, not of will ... Let us then admit that a force does not create right, and that we are obliged to obey only legitimate powers.*

ESSEX

*(to the audience)* Who published this trash? *(condescendingly)* It's Rousseau.

HEADMASTER 1

I'm sorry, I'm not, uhh—

KING

The mind is so powerful, a powerful tool, and any tool can be used improperly. If I could fear something lower than me, I'd fear this drivel. But I have been made the head of this place, the shepherd of these people, the protector of this realm, and no Latin can change that.

Sir Thomas Aquinas is wise indeed. "We obey the superior power, that which has dominion over the issue at hand."

So it seems a civil murder of a milkmaid deserves a civil case and a civil hanging.

HEADMASTER 2

Oh dear God.

*The Queen laughs and laughs, tossing the treatises into a trashcan or a fire or simply away. The HEADMASTERS are pushed out.*

KING

Ah, what a beautiful day to be vindicated. Teaching a lesson.

If anyone would like to see what happens to people who think they can outthink me, humiliate me with their words and thoughts, let them know there will be a hanging at Oxford any day now. I will save them a seat.

## 7.

*ADAM and HENRY in a jail cell, dark and damp.*

HENRY

They think we strangled some woman.  
 I've never hurt anything in my life.  
 Once when I was a child my dad came home from a hunt with our dog.  
 She'd hurt her leg, chasing something down. Hurt it really bad.  
 She wouldn't stop crying, whimpering in the next room.  
 I hear my dad tell my mom: *The bitch has hurt her leg,*  
*I think she's got to go. She's old anyway, maybe shouldn't have brought her,*  
*but what am I supposed to do? Go to hunt without a dog?*  
 Mom agreed: *She should go. Take the hatchet, and Henry.*  
 And so my dad brought me outside and laid the dog down in the grass,  
 I think he thought it'd be good for me.  
 It was very hot, a very hot summer. We were wet with sweat.  
 And he asked me if I would raise the hatchet but I just started crying.  
 I couldn't stop crying. Wailing.  
 The dog was whimpering soft on the grass.  
 My eyes were closed when he did it. When the dog stopped.  
 I've never hurt a thing in my life. I would never kill someone.

ADAM

*(painfully aware they are going to die)* They're not listening to us.

HENRY

I'm scared they won't listen.  
 I'm scared they won't let us tell them we didn't do it.

ADAM

Me too.

HENRY

I'm scared... I uh...

ADAM

What are you scared of?

HENRY

I'm scared they've hurt my papers.

ADAM

Your translation?

HENRY

Yes.  
 I know, I'll work on it while we're in here. I'll work from memory.

Waiting for James to turn up.

ADAM

You think James will turn up?

HENRY

They'll find him, they'll figure out the mess he's made, they'll figure out we're innocent, they'll set us free.

It's all a very big misunderstanding.

ADAM

Yes.

A very big misunderstanding.

HENRY

I hope they didn't fuck up any of my pages, I'll kill 'em.

ADAM

I'm sure they're fine.

The pages.

HENRY

I'll send them a bill.

If they've fucked up my pages, even the order, I'll send them a bill for the vellum and the ink, and then they'll be sorry.

ADAM

But what if James doesn't show up?

And they don't start listening?

And they don't let us make our case?

And we—

HENRY

*(stern) He'll show up.*

You should work on what you were working on, it'll pass the time.

ADAM

I don't have my books.

HENRY

Work from memory.

ADAM

I can't. I'm not like you.

HENRY

... What were— are you working on?

I told you a long time ago.

ADAM

I'm sorry I—

HENRY

You forgot.

ADAM

I forgot.  
I'm sorry.

HENRY

ADAM

I know. You and everyone else at Oxford. All you focused on was you and yours, so you'd have your backpatting and symposiums and meetings. And that made you feel good, didn't it? To feel like a real man for once, a part of the boy's club.

HENRY

Please stop.

ADAM

I don't think any of it was worth it.  
I just wanted to learn, help others learn, make things better. What's it all for? To get a job in some place, to read what people say we should be reading? If that's all it's for then that's *not worth it*.

HENRY

The joy of learning?

ADAM

How far did that fucking get us? Not very far. I think we were naive to ever think it was just about the joy of learning. Our papers are going to be burnt, we're going to die, James will do well as he's always done, and nothing we've written will ever be read.  
Everyone will think we're murderers and no one wants to remember murderers.

HENRY

Stop, you're killing me.

ADAM

Not me.  
I've realized we're a part of something big and very wrong, something's gone wrong.  
No one's gonna know our names.

*A long silence.*

HENRY

Will you tell me what you were working on?

ADAM  
Some commentary of some Aristotle or other. Who cares.

HENRY  
What were you really working on?

ADAM  
Honestly?

HENRY  
Yes.

ADAM  
... Love ballads.

HENRY  
No way.  
Translations?

ADAM  
No, my own.

HENRY  
Oh. I didn't know you wrote ballads.

ADAM  
They make— made me very happy.

HENRY  
Can I hear one?

ADAM  
No.

HENRY  
Please?

ADAM  
No.

HENRY  
It might be the first and last time anyone hears any of them.  
It might be the last time it is just you and me in a room.  
If you're right.

*A moment, then ADAM nods.*

[A LOVELESS LOVE BALLAD SONG: HERTHA BY SWINBURNE]

*I am that which began;  
 Out of me the years roll;  
 Out of me God and man;  
 I am equal and whole;  
 God changes, and man, and the form of them bodily; I am the soul.*

*Before ever land was,  
 Before ever the sea,  
 Or soft hair of the grass,  
 Or fair limbs of the tree,  
 Or the fresh-coloured fruit of my branches, I was, and thy soul was in me.*

*First life on my sources  
 First drifted and swam;  
 Out of me are the forces  
 That save it or damn;  
 Out of me man and woman, and wild-beast and bird; before God was, I am.*

*Beside or above me  
 Nought is there to go;  
 Love or unlove me,  
 Unknow me or know,  
 I am that which unloves me and loves; I am stricken, and I am the blow.*

*I the mark that is missed  
 And the arrows that miss,  
 I the mouth that is kissed  
 And the breath in the kiss,  
 The search, and the sought, and the seeker, the soul and the body that is.*

## 8.

*The executioner puts a rope 'round their necks, they don't fight it.  
 The executioner puts a hood over their head, they don't fight it.  
 They have lost their place and are part of something big and violent and abstract.  
 ESSEX is viewing the proceedings from afar.*

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

On the charges of the violent and brutal killing of a woman of this town, how do you both plead?

CLERKS

*(deadpan unison)* Not guilty.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

How do you explain this then?

*He holds up the bloodied rag.*

CLERKS

Not ours.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

Likely story. I know it must be uncomfortable, having to answer to crimes in a normal civil court, not in your ivory tower closed room affairs, having to deal with hard evidence in the face of a crime you've committed, nothing more and nothing less.

*The CLERKS don't speak.*

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

A woman is dead, the bloody proof found in your lodgings.

CLERKS

Not ours.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

Save your rhetoric, good sirs, your wicked double speaking, your wicked turns of phrase designed to clothe vice in the robes of deprav'd sin.

ESSEX

*(entering with a flourish, maybe a fanfare)* An interjection if I may...

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

You may, esteemed sir.

ESSEX

Esteemed? Me? Not at all. *(practically blushing, pulls out notecards)*  
 I come from London, the court of the King the good sir our liege the protector of our realm etcetera etcetera, knowing that which has occurred here: the shameful death of a woman, what'shername? Joan.

JOAN. Horrible and sad, how she was (*looks at cards*) strangled to death. What a blessing, a blessing to have found her murderers so expediently. These two clerks are meek enough taken now, at the brink of their punishment, how pale with fear they are, their quivering is not for fear of death but for fear that the Good Lord after will know, in his heart of hearts, what they've done, and cast them down to the depths of Hell for what they did to Joan.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

Hear, hear.

ESSEX

(*a little off script, some genuine anger*) Look at them. Why do you look so scared? All that smugness and condescension is vanished with no strength underneath.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

You take our wealth, our land, and our authority from us.

ESSEX

And what do they do with what they take?

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

What?

ESSEX

(*leading*) The foreigners.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

Everything we know is under attack. From outside, and, with you, from within. You harbor strange foreigners, Jews and Spaniards and French, who hate us, don't speak our language, call them students, you harbor their perversities and hatred, and there's no recourse.

ESSEX

You write strange books, that call our government illegitimate, call our sovereign conditional.

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

You call us simple beasts, you use us as an example of life in ignorance, you speak down to us, you tell us that we think wrong, and that's a sin.

ESSEX

*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

*For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:*

*Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

ESSEX

*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?  
And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.  
Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them—*

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

*(genuinely hurt, genuinely outraged, genuinely sad and unsure what to do with the strange world and the strange place he finds himself in, what the world means going forward, what to believe in, and who to trust) — I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:  
And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.  
And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:  
And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.*

*Beat.  
Finally:*

ESSEX

*(stifling laughter at the sincerity) And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:  
For he taught them as one having **authority**, and not as the scribes.*

JUDGE/JURY/EXECUTIONER

We sentence you to death. For the murder, for everything else.  
Let them now say their last words.

*A dramatic flourish, the lights dim and a harsh spotlight centers on them.  
The CLERKS are frozen and cannot speak.  
Momentarily:*

I'm scared. ADAM

Shh. HENRY

I'm sorry. ADAM  
Do they know what they're doing?

It doesn't matter. HENRY

I'm sorry. ADAM

*They stop talking, ADAM begins to quietly cry under the hood.  
HENRY cannot.  
They are hanged.*

## 9.

*A meadow overlooking Oxford campus.  
People yell and scream distantly.  
JOAN enters, leading a sheep. She smells strongly of lavender.*

## JOAN

I have a feeling they don't care that I died. Not really. The show they put on... it is all very flattering, but I have a feeling they would have murdered me themselves if they could've gotten same outcome. Being martyred is a real fucking drag.

*The sheep bleats.*

*(to sheep)* Shh, shh.

*(out)* I wish you could see what I see now. It is a beautiful sight. All of England, all the world, is one flat field, endlessly burning to each corner. Everything's in disarray, on fire, and I think it will never go out. It is a candle burning on both ends, whatever that means.

I know the problem: One single life is too small. Everything else beyond a life is just too vast. The forces that govern are too big, the world is too wide, history is too deep; that's the problem. A single life is stone in a wall, a book in a library, a sheep in a flock; these are tired metaphors, I'm sorry.

*(to the sheep)* I'm sorry. Had to.

*(to the audience)* But you know what I mean. When I lived, I truly believed in the logic of these mounds: they have stood here forever and always will. I thought things would never modify. This felt true, in the span of my tiny life and maybe it was true for that span of time, but everything is vaster than I thought. I know that now, and now I am watching distantly as Oxford burns. The students are packing their bags, and that's smart, because the common sense would say: *Those two got hanged because they killed a woman, and I'm not a killer so I'm fine.* But they have shreds of wisdom, wisdom in them that tells them there is something bigger at play than just the death of one woman, the hanging of some clerks, and the demise of one school, and that they are not safe here. But if they could see what I see, they'd know a burning castle and a dying university look awfully similar, the more you see it.

It would all be so sad if I didn't know how it would end up.

But for now, Oxford University is burning. And I can't help but laugh.

*She laughs. The sheep bleats.*

*One HEADMASTER drags a heavy sack of books down the road, the other trailing behind.*

## HEADMASTER 1

Good sir, wait, good sir, in this dark time, Aristotle would say—

## HEADMASTER 2

*(the one with the books)* Wait for what? For us to get hanged too? Fuck you, good sir.

## HEADMASTER 1

Now is not the time to flounder, now is when they need us most.

## HEADMASTER 2

No, now is when they need to kill. That is what they need, because that is what those people always need. Them and their king.

## HEADMASTER 1

They needed revenge, they had their revenge, and now we can all go back, business as usual, short two clerks is all!

We'll give the students Monday off, then on Tuesday—

HEADMASTER 2

Oxford is over. It is done. They will not have us anymore, and that is that.

HEADMASTER 1

Where are you going to go?

HEADMASTER 2

To Cambridge. Me and some others will give Latin lessons there, and then they'll run us out from there too and then we'll probably go to France, or Wittenburg. I will go anywhere they'll have us, until they decide they won't have us anymore, or someone decides for them...

HEADMASTER 1

How can we call ourselves just in our quest to spread knowledge, to better our pupils, to improve upon this firmament our holdings of the world, our advancement of technologies and furtherance of the good wisdom that flows just underneath the surface of life. At stake now is the great ever-burning torch of knowledge that says to each and every scholar—

HEADMASTER 2

If the torch of knowledge came to me, and with thunderous voice said: *Goodest of all sirs, I hath chosen thee, thou needs must die that I may burn, that the light of knowledge shall live in all men. What say you?* I would put it out.

HEADMASTER 1

Good sir, the wise heart seeks knowledge.

HEADMASTER 2

The wise heart keeps itself beating.

*He goes to go.*

HEADMASTER 1

Wait!

HEADMASTER 2

What?

HEADMASTER 1

Let me help you.

*They drag the sack out together, JOAN follows out.*

*TWO PEOPLE stumble on, a man and a woman from the town, one with a rucksack on their back.*

GREGOR

It's your turn to carry the bag, it's heavy.

GWEN

Just drop it. Let's rest.

GREGOR

Okay.

GWEN

*(looking out at the scene)* Look at it.  
Look at all of it. The fuckers.  
Lemme see the bag.

GREGOR

Here.

*She rummages, and pulls out a candlestick, polishing it a little with spit and her skirt.*

GREGOR cont.

What're you polishing it for if we're just gonna melt it down anyway.

GWEN

Because it's beautiful. You can see your reflection in it if it's clean enough. Warped though. My face looks huge in it, *(moves it)* look, now it's tiny. *(She laughs, and then it dies.)*  
Did you know Joan?

GREGOR

Not really.

GWEN

*(bitterly)* I did...

GREGOR

I'm sorry. Did you know the guys they hanged?

GWEN

Never. Never will, I guess. *(laughs)*  
Can you believe they have these just sitting out?  
Imagine, every house in the world having one of these.  
Imagine, every house in the world having two.

*GREGOR goes in the bag, and pulls out a book.*

GREGOR

Imagine every house in the world having hundreds of these.

GWEN

Imagine everyone in the world reading one. Imagine everyone in the world knowing what to do with it.

GREGOR

I wonder what it says.

GWEN

Imagine the things you could do if you knew what it says.

*(She gets close to him)* The reason they don't want you to know what it says is because they're afraid of all the things you could do if you knew.

Imagine everyone in the world rising up! All at once, rising up. *(She stands, brandishing the candlestick like a revolutionary leader.)* No you can't have my house! No you can't raise my rent and force me out. You can't. No you can't tell me I'm less than, and you can't take my land. No you can't close my business, no you can't make me serve you and you can't make me accept your behavior, and you can't make say, Yes sir, no sir, while you step on my feet and spit in my face and smack me, and no matter what anyone says I will NOT turn the other cheek—

GREGOR

*(underneath her tirade)* I realized something. Hey, hey, I realized something. Hellooooo...

GWEN

WHAT GREGOR.

GREGOR

When we burnt down that scholar's house, we were all dancing and everything—

GWEN

Yeah?

GREGOR

I realized that the house didn't belong to the scholars, it belonged to Bill, who just renting it out to the scholars. You know Bill, the blacksmith. With the house.

GWEN

Oh fuck.

I uh...

GREGOR

Maybe we should give the candlestick to Bill, since we burned down his house.

GWEN

NO, no. No. No one's innocent. That's the problem. We've let things slide because we thought it was out of our control. Let me tell you something Gregor, it's not. We let them buy our stuff, rent our homes, drive us out, without a word, because we thought it was permissible, it was fine, the money's good, no big deal. So we didn't punish the perpetrators, and we didn't punish the people who helped them either. No one's innocent.

GREGOR

People have to live, Gwen.

GWEN

*(suddenly)* Not everyone.

That's not what I meant... I mean, uh, I mean: *(suddenly she grabs the book, and tears out pages)* People.  
*(rip)* Have. *(rip)* To. *(rip)* Fight. *(rip)*

GREGOR

What the fuck are you doing?

GWEN

People have to fight. Are you going to fight?

GREGOR

Stop, fucking stop, that's worth so much money.

GWEN

This is more about money. My money, your money, their money. This is about being strong.

GREGOR

But—

GWEN

No buts. *(holds up the paper)* I'm gonna start a big fire, right in the center of town, and it's gonna burn four stories high, and it's gonna clear everything off of England and everything will start over: no money, no scholars, no kings. No one will rule us. Does that sound like something you want, Gregor?

GREGOR

I don't know. Yes, I mean, yes of course but—

GWEN

We've been given the biggest gift, Gregor, you don't even realize.

GREGOR

The book?

GWEN

Not the book. Freedom, Gregor. Freedom is the gift. They took it but now they've given it back and I'll die before they take it back. I'll die fighting. I'll die.

*(shreds several pages from the book with her hands, and then dead serious:)* ARE YOU GOING TO FIGHT GREGOR

GREGOR

STOP YES FUCK YES I'LL FIGHT

GWEN

ARE YOU GOING TO FIGHT GREGOR

GREGOR

YES FUCK YES

GWEN

ARE YOU GOING TO BURN AND KILL AND FIGHT UNTIL WE CAN'T ANYMORE OR UNTIL EVERYTHING HAS BEEN GIVEN BACK OR THERE'S NOTHING LEFT

GREGOR

YES YES YES

*GWEN throws the book down, grabs the candlestick, brandishes it high in the air and screams and GREGOR screams to and in a passionate fit of screaming they run off.*

## 10.

*The palace throne room, dark except for a beam of moonlight.  
The KING and QUEEN look out the window at the stars. There's a faint rumbling underneath.*

KING

On the night I was born, my father had a star chart drawn for me. He told me the seer had all the torches extinguished and he went to the roof to look at the naked sky and he set down all the constellations, and my father watched him all the while, and when the seer read over all the things the stars told him, he paused a moment and then tore the paper into pieces.

My father asked him what it had said, why he tore it up, what poor omens it portended; all the old man said was, how would they know? The stars, how would they know? They are faint fixtures of light God put there for our amusement, they can never know what a king knows in his anointed bones.

I think he was scared to say what he knew.

QUEEN

*Ominique.*

KING

*Oui, madame.*

*Enter ESSEX, spattered in blood.*

ESSEX

Good sir, our liege, our rightful protector of the realm of England, our master, it is done.

KING

What is?

ESSEX

At your wisdom, the clerks were tried, found guilty, and hanged.

KING

Good.

QUEEN

*Bien.*

KING

Perhaps, going forward, Oxford will know who they serve and—

ESSEX

Oxford is, my liege, no more.

KING

What?

ESSEX

As soon as the hanging was over, the scholars packed their things and, in fear, fled. Their halls empty, their lodgings abandoned, the townspeople went through the campus and rifled through what was left, dragging the tables out for bonfires, yelling, *the King has given the power back, the King has given Oxford back*. In your name, priceless chronicles and almanacs were fed to the fire, and they danced around them, chanting about freedom.

It was a... it was a sight.

KING

Freedom.

I see.

I, uhh..

QUEEN

Essex, send in some guards tomorrow, tell them to establish some order, or something. Put them in their place.

KING

Isabella.

QUEEN

John.

KING

Do you think we've done something wrong?

QUEEN

No.

KING

Are you sure?

QUEEN

How would I know?

ESSEX

These things will be settled, over time.

I'm sure.

Good night, your highnesses.

*ESSEX rushes out.*

*The KING goes to follow, but looks back at the QUEEN, who is staring out at the stars. Slowly, he goes to her to see what she sees, and as they stare, the sounds of carnage can be heard from afar, but approaching. Maybe music, maybe screaming. It gets closer, and closer, and closer until*

*Blackout.*

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