

Cecilia Huang Arts Award Outcome Report

March, 2024

For my annual award project, I've chosen a powerful and unconventional act from Tanya Barfield's play, "Bright Half Life." The play chronicles the lives of Vicky and Erica, a lesbian couple, through a fragmented narrative that jumps across different points in their relationship. We witness their initial meeting, budding romance, marriage, children, divorce, and a potential reunion, all presented in a non-linear fashion. This intricate storytelling technique not only challenges conventional narrative structures but also offers a profound exploration of love, identity, and the passage of time within relationships.

Diving Deep: Script Analysis and Character Development

The first phase of my process involved a thorough examination of the script. I meticulously annotated questions and facts, then revisited the play to answer those questions. Three key questions emerged, each delving into the layers of Barfield's narrative and the complexities of the characters' emotions and motivations.

1. Barfield's Purpose: Why break the story into non-chronological segments? Understanding Barfield's intention is crucial for establishing a consistent style in directing and presenting the narrative. By dissecting the text and exploring Barfield's artistic choices, I aimed to uncover the thematic significance of the fragmented structure and its impact on audience engagement and interpretation.

2. Erica's Conflict: Why does Erica want a divorce despite still loving Vicky? Furthermore, why does she initiate most aspects of the relationship while pushing for a split? Erica's internal conflict serves as a driving force behind the narrative tension, highlighting the intricacies of love, desire, and personal fulfillment within the context of her relationship with Vicky. By delving into Erica's psyche and motivations, I sought to illuminate the nuances of her character and the emotional landscape of the play.

3. Relationship Dynamics: What are the underlying complexities that define their relationship and how does their interaction change over time? The dynamic interplay between Vicky and Erica serves as the heart of the story, offering a multifaceted exploration of intimacy, communication, and resilience in the face of adversity. Through meticulous script analysis and character development, I aimed to unravel the layers of their relationship dynamics and portray them with authenticity and depth on stage.

To address these questions, I created a detailed spreadsheet that tracked consistent elements across the fragmented scenes. Despite the varying lengths of these segments, one constant remained – the characters are always communicating with each other. This communication, whether during arguments, pre-wedding, or playtime with their children, is rooted in a deep care for one another. Though this care may fluctuate throughout their relationship, even fading at times, it ultimately represents their enduring love. This realization, confirmed by Barfield in a study guide ("their story is for all of us touched by love"), provided the foundation for analyzing the characters and developing directing and blocking choices.

Unveiling the Characters: Erica and Vicky

With the theme of persistent love established, I delved deeper into character analysis, peeling back the layers of Erica and Vicky's personalities to uncover their motivations, desires, and inner conflicts.

Erica: Erica's conflicting behavior towards the relationship reflects her internal struggle. Despite her uncertainty about her needs and life choices, her unwavering love for Vicky remains. However, her extroverted and expressive nature manifests this uncertainty in all aspects of life, including their relationship. This internal conflict drives the dynamic shifts between Erica and Vicky, creating a rich tapestry of emotions and tensions that propel the narrative forward.

Vicky: In contrast, Vicky is reserved, goal-oriented, and assertive. When paired with the less consistent Erica, Vicky adopts a more reactive stance within the relationship, navigating the ebbs and flows of their connection with quiet strength and determination. By examining Vicky's character in juxtaposition to Erica's, I aimed to highlight the complementary nature of their personalities and the intricate dance of power dynamics within their relationship.

By identifying these core personality traits, I envisioned their dynamic. Erica's expressiveness translates to externalizing her internal struggles, while Vicky observes and reacts. With these clear characterizations, I began drafting a detailed blocking and casting strategy, envisioning how their interactions would unfold on stage and how their physicality and presence would convey the subtleties of their relationship dynamics.

Bringing the Vision to Life: Casting, Blocking, and Rehearsals

Based on the character analysis, I drafted a casting strategy seeking an actress who embodies Erica's extroverted, turbulent nature. Vicky, on the other hand, would be played by an actress who portrays her reserved, observant demeanor. Identifying these key features allowed me to quickly envision their dynamic and create an initial blocking plan that capitalizes on their strengths and nuances as performers.

With potential actresses in mind, I considered clothing choices that complemented their skin tones and accentuated their character traits, paying attention to subtle details that would enhance their embodiment of the roles. Moving forward, I planned detailed casting notes encompassing characterization, embodiment, and acting style, ensuring that each performer would bring authenticity and depth to their portrayal of Erica and Vicky.

Planning for the Final Product: Rehearsals and Production

A clear plan facilitated the next stage – preparations for the final outcome. I contacted a photographer for rehearsal photos, secured rehearsal space, and ordered costumes upon receiving the actresses' measurements, meticulously planning every aspect of the production process to ensure a seamless and cohesive execution of my vision.

To further refine my vision, I conducted table work sessions with the actresses, fostering open communication and collaboration to explore the nuances of the script and deepen their understanding of their characters' motivations and relationships. We revisited the first step, allowing me to gain their interpretations of the play and tailor acting instructions to elevate their performances, refining their blocking and interactions to create moments of authenticity and emotional resonance on stage.

Since the photographer's availability fell in April, I planned to pre-photograph the scene to ensure the best possible performance on the photo shoot day, leveraging technology to overcome logistical challenges and maximize the artistic quality of the final product. Additionally, I sent photos of the rehearsal space and sample blocking to the photographer – these allowed us to discuss ideal shots, lighting considerations, and ultimately, a decision to relocate the shoot outdoors to better capture the actresses' facial expressions and convey the emotional intensity of the play's pivotal moments.

Capturing the essence of the play also involved taking photos during rehearsals to determine the perfect publicity image, leveraging visual storytelling techniques to engage and captivate potential audiences. This image, along with the final production, will serve as a highlight for my potential graduate school applications in directing and a powerful culmination of my undergraduate journey in drama, showcasing my artistic vision, creativity, and dedication to the craft of theater.

Conclusion

Directing "Bright Half Life" has been a rewarding experience, challenging me to explore new creative avenues and delve into the complexities of human relationships with depth and authenticity. The play's unconventional format and the complex relationship between Vicky and Erica offer a unique challenge that compels me to push my creativity and delve into the intricacies of human connection, pushing the boundaries of conventional storytelling to create a deeply immersive and emotionally resonant theatrical experience. By meticulously analyzing the script, developing a clear directorial vision, and collaborating with talented performers, I am confident that this project will be a success and leave a lasting impression, both on stage and in the hearts and minds of my actresses.

Expenses

Photographers and Photo Editing (Includes two 4-hour-time blocks: one for directing and publicity shoots, and one for rehearsal processes; photo editing, and follow-ups): \$2500

Personal tripod and sound equipment for photo tryouts: \$268 (out of pocket)

Costume: \$364 (3 costumes for the production)

Printed scripts: \$65.25 (3 copies at \$21.75 each; \$14 out of pocket)

Props: \$84

Total Expenses: \$3,281.25. (282 dollars out of pocket)

Photo Documentations of the Project:

of Commitment (or perhaps a Ritual of Delusion that concludes with betrayal and broken hearts) but/
VICKY. Why are you here // *wants Erica to understand why she's here. Erica to explain herself.*
lower head (Beat.)
ERICA. My father's dying
VICKY. Oh.
 Oh oh oh no/
ERICA. Will you marry me/
VICKY. What? No You — this is grief *wants Erica to understand why she's here. Erica to explain herself.*
 You should
ERICA. I am, I'm grieving and
VICKY. You're not, you're proposing
ERICA. I'm so happy to be here
VICKY. I broke up with you/
ERICA. We were together for a while/ and
VICKY. Oh my god, how's your mother ta *wants Erica to understand why she's here. Erica to explain herself.*
actually care. still at distance 5

ERICA. Yeah
VICKY. You're gripping the handlebar
ERICA. No
VICKY. This is totally not fun for you
ERICA. No it is
VICKY. No it's not
ERICA. No
VICKY. I shouldn't have made you
ERICA. No no
 You like the stillness
VICKY. And also the rocking back and forth?
ERICA. It's like a cradle
(A slight bump and the sound of creaking.)
VICKY. We're stuck
ERICA. No
VICKY. It stopped
ERICA. It's just a pause
VICKY. Okay
ERICA. You believe in it
VICKY. I don't know
ERICA. You're still moving
VICKY. I'm not
ERICA. Stop moving your eyes
VICKY. Okay, look straight ahead, fix your eyes on that blue rooftop.
 hold my hand, breathe
(She does. They wait.)
 stand up
 So
ERICA. You're still moving
VICKY. I'm not
ERICA. Stop moving your eyes
VICKY. Okay, look straight ahead, fix your eyes on that blue rooftop.
 hold my hand, breathe
(She does. They wait.)
 stand up
 So



ERICA. Not good, / not good
VICKY. You should be with her
 Get on a plane, get on a plane right now and go be with
 your mother, that's what she, you need
ERICA. Come with me/
VICKY. What, no
 I can't
ERICA. You can't
VICKY. It's just ... not a good time
ERICA. The doctor said it'll be quick
 You'll be back soon
VICKY. I'm going skydiving, I can't go with you
ERICA. What
VICKY. I'm going skydiving
ERICA. I heard you
 Why?
VICKY. I've always wanted to and you never/
ERICA. You've never! asked
VICKY. And I just decided screw it, I'm sick of waiting for, so I'm
 going and
ERICA. And
VICKY. And so there
ERICA. Can you postpone
VICKY. No Erica I'm going skydiving, this is just another one of your
 You want me there not because of me, oh my god, you're so
 (What am I saying?)
 Your father's dying?
 *
(A rapid shift in time. A street, but we don't know that yet.)
ERICA. Ahh
 My heart
VICKY. (Sympathetic.) Ooh
 It was like a pound of

Vicky.

Erica

