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TOWARD A CROSS-CULTURAL AESTHETIC:

DIRECTING A KABUKI INSPIRED *MADAME DE SADE*

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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## Abstract

### TOWARD A CROSS-CULTURAL AESTHETIC: DIRECTING A KABUKI-INSPIRED *MADAME DE SADE*

By Kathryn Ruth LeTrent, MFA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014

Major Director: Noreen C Barnes, PhD.  
Director of Graduate Studies, TheatreVCU

This text is a record of the preparation and rehearsal of a kabuki-inspired production of *Madame de Sade* by Yukio Mishima in an English translation by Donald Keene. The goals of this production were both artistic and pedagogical. I applied my knowledge of Japanese theatre and skills in directing skills in a new way to create a work of theatre with a cross-cultural aesthetic appropriate to both the play and the audience. This production also gave the cast of undergraduate acting students the experience of combining truthful and stylized acting and introduced them to both kabuki and Stella Adler acting techniques. This text details the process of preparing the text, the discussions, exercises and techniques used in rehearsal, the impact of design elements on the performance and concludes with some thoughts on future development of this production concept with a fuller realization of the kabuki-inspiration.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2004, as an undergraduate acting student, I saw a production of *Madame de Sade* by Yukio Mishima at the Stella Adler Studio of Acting that left a deep impression on me. I had lived in East Asia from the ages of three to eighteen, and I did not get involved in theatre until I went to American boarding school. My whole experience of theatre was the standard Western student actor fare: high school productions of *You Can't Take it with You* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and undergraduate acting scenes from Shakespeare, Ibsen and Miller. Watching students just a few years ahead of me at Adler performing *Madame de Sade* was a revelation. First, I was interested to learn that cultural imports could go both ways: I had seen *Evita* in Taiwan and *Miss Saigon* in Hong Kong, but this was the first time that I had seen an East Asian play in the United States. Second, the low-budget production managed to suggest the opulent Eighteenth-Century French setting and yet the play was clearly Japanese, and not an American or French representation of that period. This cross-cultural aesthetic was completely fresh and exciting to me. Finally, I was mesmerized by the performances I saw. Even though I could not follow all of the details of the opaque plot, I was drawn in by the power of the actors' voices as they spun gorgeous images in my mind's eye.

After seeing this production, I looked everywhere for the script to no avail. I did find and read Mishima's *Five Modern Noh Plays*, and I bought some of his plays and kabuki scripts in a collection called *My Friend Hitler and Other Plays*, but the English translation of *Madame de Sade* eluded me, and after a few weeks I gave up. Years later, in 2013, in the span of a few days I



saw an announcement for a student production of *Quills* (a play by American playwright Doug Wright about the Marquis de Sade's later years) and happened across a used copy of *Madame de Sade*.

This brought the play back to my attention at just the right time for me to direct it as a culmination of several strands of my graduate study: Stella Adler's acting pedagogy, directing, and Asian Theatre. My own undergraduate acting training was Adler Technique-based, and during my MFA studies at VCU I taught an elective Adler Technique course. In this course I taught Adler's approach to playing heightened language and building roles based on social archetypes. These techniques would serve this play—with its heavily imagistic language and aristocratic characters—well, and so in directing the play I experimented with introducing these techniques in the context of rehearsal. Since I first saw *Madame de Sade* I had done quite a bit of directing, and specifically in my last semester of graduate course work I assistant directed the VCU mainstage *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* under guest director Ed Herendeen and took a graduate directing course from Wesley Broulik. Both of these experiences caused me to reexamine my directing process, and staging *Madame de Sade* late in that semester gave me the opportunity to immediately apply the changes that I wanted to make. In my first semester of graduate school, I had taken a classical Asian theatre course from Dr. Aaron Anderson, which sparked a fascination with the topic that grew into a research focus on Chinese and Japanese theatre. As an artist I wanted to see if my academic knowledge of Asian theatre could be used to create a piece of theatre that would be clear and compelling to an American university audience. As an acting teacher, I wanted to see what students might gain by incorporating kabuki-inspired stylized acting into the Stanislavski system training that they were receiving.

With these goals in mind I applied to direct *Madame de Sade* as part of the Shafer Alliance Laboratory Theatre (SALT) for the Spring 2014 season. This proposal was accepted and the play was performed three times on March 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. SALT is a student-run performance and directing lab affiliated with Theatre VCU, and as such was an excellent venue for this experimental production. Dr. Noreen Barnes assigned Joey Qiao, a fellow graduate student, to serve as my assistant director and I assembled the rest of the production team. The cast was made up of BFA track performance majors. Casting was done by audition.

### **The Play**

Yukio Mishima wrote *Madame de Sade* in 1965 and Donald Keene translated the play into English in 1967. The most recent major production of the play was done in 2009 in London under Michael Grandage's direction, starring Judi Dench. The only major production of the play in New York has been Ingmar Bergman's Swedish production that was presented in New York in 1993 and 1995 with English simultaneous translation on headsets (Gussow 11).

The play revolves around the historically based character Renée, the Marquise de Sade and wife of Alphonse, the Marquis de Sade. Two other characters are also based on historical figures: Renée's sister Anne, and Madame de Montreuil, who is Renée and Anne's mother. Three fictional characters make up the rest of the cast: Madame de Saint-Fond, an aristocratic libertine, Madame de Simiane, pious noblewoman and childhood friend of the Marquis de Sade, and Charlotte, Madame de Montreuil's housekeeper. When referring to the off stage character the Marquis de Sade, I will follow the usage of the characters in the play and call him "Alphonse", but when referring to the historical figure I will use "de Sade".

The play is set in Montreuil's salon. Act one opens in the Autumn of 1772 on Saint-Fond and Simiane who have been invited by Montreuil, who needs their help to rescue her family from

the dishonor of her son-in-law's death sentence for sexual crimes by the High Court at Aix. While they wait for Montreuil to appear, Saint-Fond gives a detailed description of Alphonse's sexual escapade that caused his present legal troubles. When Montreuil enters, she confides in the two women her sorrow over her daughter's marriage. In the nine years of Renée's marriage to Alphonse he has been imprisoned several times for sexual crimes. In the previous month he was sentenced to decapitation by the High Court, but since he could not be apprehended his portrait was burned in the public square in Aix. Seeing Montreuil's distress, Saint-Fond and Simiane agree to help improve Alphonse's situation each in their own way: Saint-Fond will use "the arts of a courtesan" on Chancellor Maupeou to persuade him to reverse the court's decision (19), and Simiane will ask her friend Cardinal Philippe to solicit the Vatican on Alphonse's behalf.

Renée appears for an unannounced visit and Montreuil urges her to divorce her husband, but Renée refuses with protestations of her devotion to him. Later, Anne also comes for a surprise visit, and discloses that she has been traveling with her fugitive brother-in-law, and with Renée's knowledge has been having an affair with him. Furthermore, Anne reveals his hiding place to Montreuil. At the end of the act, Montreuil writes three letters, two to Saint-Fond and Simiane retracting her request for their help, and one to the king, presumably to reveal Alphonse's hiding place and call for his arrest.

Act two takes place six years later. Relations between Renée and her mother have been icy, but have recently warmed as Montreuil has sprung back in to action on Alphonse's behalf. Anne breaks the news to Renée that a new trial has finally taken place and the court has determined that upon the payment of a fine he will be released and his criminal record expunged. Renée is overjoyed and tries to leave to meet him back at their home. Anne and Montreuil detain

her and they are interrupted by the arrival of Saint-Fond, who has just come from a black mass at the palace. Saint-Fond is still furious with Montreuil for refusing her help to free Alphonse six year ago. She reveals to Renée that Montreuil has obtained a royal warrant for Alphonse's arrest, and that as a result he was immediately re-arrested after his release. In the altercation between Renée and Montreuil that follows, Montreuil continues to urge Renée to leave her husband, but she continues to refuse on the grounds of her devotion to him. Montreuil confronts Renée with her knowledge of an orgy that a detective in her employ witnessed Renée's participation in, and she accuses Renée of becoming her husband's accomplice. Renée then attacks her mother for her hypocritical morality. When Montreuil threatens to slap Renée, Renée reveals her masochism, saying that she would curl up "with pleasure at being slapped" (75).

Act three is set in April of 1790, nine months after the outbreak of the French Revolution and twelve years after the events of act two. Renée has faithfully visited Alphonse in prisons, but because Alphonse's release is imminent due to the invalidation of Royal Warrants of arrest, she has stopped. Anne tells the horrible story of Saint-Fond's death in a riot when she was posing as a prostitute, and urges her mother to flee Paris. Montreuil stalls, and Anne leaves for Italy with her husband. Simiane, who is now a nun, arrives at Renée's invitation to discuss Renée's plan of joining Simiane's convent. Montreuil now advises Renée to stay married to Alphonse for the protection that a criminal relative will afford to their aristocratic family in this upside down time. The novel *Justine* that Alphonse has written in prison disturbs Renée, who sees herself in the abused and ill-fated title character. She sees that by perfecting evil, Alphonse has approached heaven, and she plans to devote her life to trying to understand the borderline between evil and God. At this point her plans to leave Alphonse are based on a fantastically exalted vision of him. Just then, Charlotte announces that Alphonse is standing at the door, and describes his prison-

wrecked condition. In the final moment of the play, Renée asks Charlotte to send him away, declaring that she will never see him again.

The body of this thesis is a first person narrative of the production of this play from my perspective as producer and director. In chapter one I discuss some of the key findings of my research on the Marquis de Sade, Yukio Mishima, and Japanese theatre. Chapter two is devoted to my preparation of the production text, and chapters three and four are concerned with the rehearsal process. Finally, in chapter five I will outline my thoughts on further developing the ‘kabuki-inspired’ production concept.

## CHAPTER 1 Mishima/Sade

*Madame de Sade* is an inherently cross-cultural play written by Yukio Mishima, “the premiere playwright of Japan’s postwar era” (Kominz 1), in the static style of French Neo-classicism. The subject of the play is the Marquis de Sade, French libertine, author and namesake of sadism. In his postface to the play Mishima wrote, “It is strange, when I stop to think of it, that a Japanese should have written a play about France, but I was anxious to make a reverse use of the skills Japanese actors have acquired through performing works translated from foreign languages” (108). *Shingeki*, Japan’s modern theatre of psychological realism, grew out of Japanese productions of translated Western plays in the 1920s (Kominz 4), so the theatre that Mishima was writing for was also cross-cultural. This production of *Madame de Sade* adds a further cross-cultural dimension to the mix with an American director, cast and production team.

Before presuming to add the third layer of meaning that a twenty-first century American production would inevitably bring to this twentieth-century Japanese play about eighteenth-century France, I needed to explore the resonances between post-war Japan and pre-Revolutionary France, and between Mishima and de Sade. Michael Grandage, who directed *Madame de Sade* in London in 2009, understood the play this way, “A Japanese writer uses another time, another completely different culture, to explore his experiences from his own time and culture.” The two similarities between Mishima’s cultural context and de Sade’s that Grandage mentions are the archetype of “the devoted wife” and “the relationship between the formality and reticence of Japanese manners and the dainty exchanges of the European Enlightenment salon” (Wilson). This observation was apt, and as I will describe in chapter four, I

highlighted these similarities in my staging. I was curious to find if the correspondences between the worlds and persons of Mishima and de Sade extended past the veneer of manner. In preparation for directing this play I studied the life and work of both writers. In this chapter, I will discuss what I discovered about why de Sade would have been a compelling subject for Mishima, specifically in regards to Mishima's philosophy, politics, sexuality and aesthetics.

### **Philosophy**

According to critic Roy Starrs, Mishima was a nihilist. In analyzing Mishima's novels, Starrs maintains that Mishima is a "dangerous thinker" heavily influenced by Nietzsche, "a man who challenges conventional wisdom and does so in great style" (6). During the Second World War, Mishima read Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, and Starr theorizes "the rest of Mishima's life was an attempt to recapture that apocalyptic wartime mood—that time when, as an impressionable adolescent, he discovered the exhilaration of being in constant proximity to violence and death" (18). Due to his poor health, Mishima was never drafted (Nathan 54), but during the war years he was a protégé of the Japan Romantic School, an ultra-nationalist group of writers and critics that glorified death both in the cause of Japanese traditional culture and in the cause of the divinity of the Emperor of which it is an extension (Nathan 46-47). In de Sade, Mishima would have found a fellow "dangerous thinker" who's "atheistic individualism and profound distrust of all collective enterprises and of the ideologies that underpin them" prefigured Nietzsche's skepticism by a century (Philips 118).

In Roy Starrs' interpretation of *Madame de Sade*, "it is the Marquis' 'treason' in turning himself into a passive nihilist which leads his wife to abandon him at the end of the play". Specifically his 'treason' is that he has given up action and is "satisfied at last with merely airing his fantasies in the pages of his books" (42). However, the text of act three does not support the

interpretation that Mishima saw de Sade's turning towards writing as a betrayal of active nihilism. While Mishima does have Montreuil take the position that de Sade's writing does not have the efficacy of his deeds, saying, "You can dispose of such books merely by throwing them in the fire. They disappear then without a trace. The effects of criminal acts may linger on, but written words, provided nobody sees them, disappear completely" (101), but she is undermined within her own line. The play would not exist if de Sade's books had not been preserved and remained influential in contemporary thought. Mishima gives Renée the opposite position. She calls his book "an imperishable cathedral of vice" in contrast to "the emptiness of acts of the flesh that vanish the instant after satisfaction" (103).

This debate about whether de Sade's taking up writing is a harmless resignation from the world or his most dangerous act is not, however, the end of the play nor is it the key to Renée's decision to desert him. Directly after this debate, Renée rapturously describes her glorious vision of Sade/Alphonse, the vision that must have been at the root of her faithful love for him. Renée was able to maintain this vision of Alphonse as long as they are forced apart by his indefinite prison sentence. At the end of the play, however, Alphonse's physical presence at the door smashes Renée's dearly held vision of him, and this destruction of the illusion that she loved him lies at the heart of her determination to "never see him again" (106). This is in fact an expression of Mishima's nihilism, as Starrs understands it: "the devastating honesty with which . . . he unmasked his fictional alter egos and revealed the void which gaped behind the mask" (7).

### **Sexuality**

There were aspects of Mishima's personal life that may have heightened his interest in the Marquis de Sade. Closely related to the subject of *Madame de Sade* is the correlation that like de Sade, Mishima's marriage was arranged by his family and his wife was extremely devoted,



despite irregularities in their life together (Gay 47, Nathan 140-141). In his reading of Tatsuhiko Shibusawa's biography of the Marquis de Sade, the point that fascinated Mishima and prompted him to write the play was the Marquise de Sade's long-suffering faithfulness followed by her sudden abandonment of the Marquis. He writes, "This riddle served as the point of departure for my play, which is an attempt to provide a logical solution. I was sure that something highly incomprehensible, yet highly truthful, about human nature lay behind this riddle (*Madame de Sade* 107). Perhaps this riddle was especially tantalizing to him because of how closely the truth behind it hit home.

Much is extrapolated about Mishima's inner life, including his sexual proclivities, from his autobiographical novel, *Confessions of a Mask*. By the time he wrote this work in 1949, he was "acquainted with the works of De Sade (*sic*)" (Mishima, *Confessions* 92). In the novel the narrator, who is understood to represent Mishima, recalls how as a middle school student he fantasized a "murder theater" where young men from "Roman gladiators" to "princes of savage tribes" to "circus roustabouts" "offered up their lives for (his) amusement" (92-93). His homosexual desires found expression in these sadistic fantasies. He writes, "I was one of those savage marauders who, not knowing how to express their love, mistakenly kill the person they love. I would kiss the lips of those who had fallen to the ground and were still moving spasmodically" (*Confessions*, 93). In de Sade's writing, Mishima would have found graphic representations of similar fantasies. In de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*, which was written in between the events of acts two and three of *Madame de Sade*, four libertines conducted a violent orgy reminiscent of Mishima's "murder theater", in a room of a castle "resembling theatre in the round" (Phillips 65-69).

## **Politics**

Mishima's politics may have caused him to be particularly interested in the period of history from which the subject for *Madame de Sade* was drawn. Unlike his left-leaning literary contemporaries, Mishima saw "the spread of democracy, the 'Peace Constitution' (and) the deification of the Emperor" as "inimical to the 'Japanese spirit'" (Starrs 156). Mishima regarded Emperor-worship as the "cornerstone of Japanese culture" (Starrs 92), and in the overthrow of the French monarchy Mishima would have found an echo of the upheaval he felt when the Emperor renounced his divinity.

Knowing Mishima's political point of view helped both me and the cast to understand certain aspects of *Madame de Sade*. Our democratic perspective, paired with rousing choruses from *Les Misérables*, puts us emotionally on the side of Charlotte and the masses taking to the streets off stage in act three. With our hindsight, it is easy to find humor in Montreuil's line, "I can't believe that the masses, however rashly they may act, would single out for their target an old woman like myself" (80). Our knowledge of Mishima's beliefs on the subject, however, lead us to take Montreuil and her declaration, "as long as the King is here, I shall remain in Paris," very seriously (80).

## **Aesthetic**

Mishima's theatre aesthetic was profoundly shaped by kabuki. Beginning in his thirteenth year, his grandmother took him regularly to see kabuki and he became, in his own words, a "kabuki-maniac" (Mishima, "Flower of Evil" 222). He attended the theatre regularly and took notes (Kominz 4), and at home he read the plays and copied out long passages that appealed to him (Kominz 9). As an adult he wrote plays for the kabuki and the *shingeki* theatre, but the influence of kabuki can be felt even in his *shingeki* plays. In 1966, Mishima gave an address to

students at the National Theater's newly instituted kabuki training program, and it is from the transcript of this speech, entitled "The Flower of Evil: Kabuki" that I discovered the underlying theatrical principles that Mishima most valued in kabuki.

Mishima observes that spectators of kabuki are often bored; he says, "you may begin to wonder how long will this thing go on, when in an electric flash you see something marvelous. The moment you realized it, it's gone. Then again, dumb dull things resume and continue. In another ten of fifteen minutes, there's another flash" ("Flower of Evil" 228). *Madame de Sade*, while probably not intentionally boring, has long passages of very static dialogue, is punctuated by "flashes" of action or shocking revelations that have the potential to be "marvelous". Mishima identifies the actor as the source of "this electric flash", and advocates against the use of expensive technology to achieve a "mechanically perfect" production, because in such productions "the actors don't look as impressive as they should" (228). In writing *Madame de Sade*, he "felt obliged to dispense entirely with the usual, trivial stage effects", relying entirely on the actors in their beautiful costumes for "the necessary visual appeal" (*Madame de Sade* 107), thus setting the actors up for whatever brilliant flashes are in their power.

Mishima declares, "In kabuki, eroticism is a very big factor". However, unlike modern and Western graphic portrayals, kabuki "didn't have to show anything so explicitly for the audience to sense the indescribable sensuality in kabuki" ("Flower of Evil" 232). Mishima gives this description: "To suggest a sexual act in kabuki, a man puts his hand in his sleeve, feigning to think, and a woman goes close to him hiding her face with a sleeve—that's all the suggestion there is" ("Flower of Evil" 231). *Madame de Sade* is notable to Western audiences as a play about the Marquis de Sade without any overt onstage sex or violence. Sade's sexual escapades, a

black mass, an orgy and the plot of his novel *Justine* are all described at length, but none are acted out. The erotic potential in the play resides in the power of the actors' words to work on the audience's imagination. As Mishima says of kabuki, "This eroticism is different from the kind of stripped-down eroticism you see in the rest of the world. It's something mysterious that you can't describe in words" ("Flower of Evil" 232).

Mishima proclaims, "Kabuki in itself is an evil". From its origins amongst beggars and prostitutes, to the cruelty of the strict backstage hierarchy that persists today, "Kabuki is the flower that has bloomed from a solid mass of such human evils" with a "mysterious charm that transcends morality" ("Flower of Evil" 236). This means that the loyal samurai *and* the thief, the devoted wife *and* the sex criminal are natural dramatic subjects. Mishima cautions that any attempt to clean up kabuki, to make it "something beautiful that depicts human beings only the way they ought to be" would destroy kabuki ("Flower of Evil" 236). In this caution I hear echoes of Saint-Fond's description of the de Sade family crest, which is a double headed eagle: "One is the head of pride in a family that dates back to the twelfth century, the other the head of evil plucked from the wellsprings of humanity" (Mishima, *Madame de Sade* 15). To cut off one head would mean to kill the whole creature. Of kabuki Mishima writes, "I know that there's something horribly murky and dark behind the flower, but I'd like to leave that dark and murky thing alone, as it is, as an important fertilizer" ("The Flower of Evil" 239). The Marquis de Sade never appears on stage in *Madame de Sade* but his existence off stage and in our collective consciousness is the dark and murky fertilizer of the play.

### **Kabuki-inspired Production**

*Madame de Sade* is a *shingeki* play (modern realism) and not a kabuki play. However, my choice to draw inspiration from kabuki for this production rests in part on Mishima's own

words, quoted in Laurence Komitz's introduction to a collection of Mishima plays, "*Shingeki* reeks of pedantry, didacticism, elitism, condescension, and spineless intellectual pettiness. Exciting theatre won't be possible until it banishes these qualities altogether. The solution is to learn from kabuki" (17). This criticism refers to the content of the plays his contemporaries were writing, and is an error of *shingeki* that Mishima corrected in his choice of a sensational subject for his play. However, I wanted to see how learning from kabuki might also affect the form of the presentation of the play.

Mishima argued that *shingeki* acting, unlike kabuki acting, does not pay enough attention to "patterns in acting that any drama demands" ("Backstage" 58). American actors, or to avoid generalization, Theatre VCU trained actors, are not taught to think of their performance in terms of patterns. To borrow patterns from kabuki would help the actors develop the discipline of filling patterns "with intense, psychologically believable emotion" as Mishima advocates (Komitz 31).

In his book *Landscapes and Portraits* Donald Keene writes of stylization and realism in kabuki, "An emphasis on one usually was accompanied by an almost equal emphasis on its opposite, rather than any diminution. The harmony of these opposites lies close to the genius of the Japanese theatre" (56). With *Madame de Sade*, I would try to emulate this harmony, embracing the actors' grasp of realism and using highly theatrical convention, borrowed from or inspired by Kabuki, in equal measure. The aim was not a kabuki version of *Madame de Sade*, which would go against the grain of the *shingeki* writing, but through the use of some kabuki techniques and principles to aspire to the "sensory charm" that Mishima identifies as a key to understanding kabuki ("Flower of Evil" 225).

## CHAPTER 2 Preparing the Script

The director should prepare his text *before* the first rehearsal. In plays that are too long, he must be very courageous and exact. One cuts the script to make it trim, stageworthy, and clear. – William Ball, *A Sense of Direction*

The text of *Madame de Sade* that I worked with was the 1967 English translation by Donald Keene. Its 106-page length, including production photos, seems deceptively reasonable. In fact, the play in its entirety would run well over three hours, as it is composed of long speeches that sit densely on the page punctuated only occasionally by spates of dialogue. I did not think that the primarily undergraduate audience would have the patience for such a long performance. The production also had to be mounted in three weeks, including technical rehearsals, so judicious cuts to the script were necessary in order to make it manageable within the timeframe.

### **Lessons Learned from the 2009 London Production**

In the course of preproduction research, I discovered a London production of *Madame de Sade* from 2009, also using the Donald Keene translation. The highly anticipated production was directed by Michael Grandage at the Donmar Warehouse and starred Judi Dench as Madame de Montreuil. While the production was praised in the press for its design and acting, the production was deemed a failure, with the text ultimately to blame. The critical reviews of this production gave me some warnings about potential pitfalls in the text, which partially guided my cutting of the play.

A very practical question that came up early in the text preparation was that of intermissions. The text is arranged in three acts, with large spans of theatrical time passing between the acts. The Grandage production's running time was one hour and forty-five minutes and it played without an intermission. In my estimation, this would have necessitated cutting the original text by almost half. An hour and forty-five minutes also struck me as too long to command an audience's attention without a break, and may explain one critic's conclusion that, "the kindest thing one can say about this cruelly punishing play is that it's lovely when in stops" (Spencer). While hoping to avoid punishing the audience, I also wanted to preserve a larger portion of the original text. The length of the play renders an intermission necessary.

Performing the play without intermission also had the potential to confuse the story. The three acts, in accordance with the neo-classical unity of space, are set in the same room, "the salon in Madame de Montreuil's house" (Mishima 1). However, a great deal of time passes between the acts: six years between acts one and two and twelve years between acts two and three. The Grandage production denoted the passage of time with quick changes of elaborate costumes and wigs, but in my production, multiple costumes for each character were not possible. (See the discussion on this point in the section on design.) Without the visual changes, I thought it prudent to take full advantage of the passage of real time that intermission affords to mark the breaks in theatrical time between acts.

I considered the possibility of the currently customary two-act structure, but concluded that it would throw the original structure out of balance. The acts as written are roughly equal in length, with approximately one hour run times each. While it is always important to consider the structure of a play text in a judicious trimming, in this case I felt a particular responsibility to preserve the structure. Mishima states in his author's postface, "this play represents a pushing to

their logical conclusions of views I have long entertained about the theater” (108). Laurence Kominz’s analysis of through lines in Mishima’s work suggests that these “views”, derived from “broad reading in classical and modern Japanese literature and world drama” (3), consist of privileging form and aesthetics above all. Kominz considers *Madame de Sade* “the most highly formalized play in Mishima’s opus” (43).

Performing the play with one intermission would mean choosing between three equally unattractive alternatives: putting the intermission in the middle of the second act, interrupting the unity of time of that act, and removing the breaks in time between the acts; or cutting two of the acts significantly more than the other to make two nearly equal halves; or cutting the acts with an even hand but putting the intermission two-thirds of the way through the performance. Faced with these alternatives, I opted for the old-fashioned choice of two intermissions, placed where Mishima originally put them, and cut each of the three acts with an even hand.

This brought me to the question of what to cut and what to keep. Along with my own impressions of the text, the reviews of the Grandage production lead me to privilege the poetic and imagistic over the philosophical aspects of the text.

My own initial impression of *Madame de Sade* was that heightened language and imagery were most at play. However, the London review consistently called it a “discussion-drama” (Billington), and “philosophical” (Coveney). This seems to have been the director’s interpretation, as Frances Wilson’s preview in the Telegraph quoted Grandage calling the play “a huge debate about good and evil”. The trouble is that the ideas in the play are not very original or brilliantly argued. It is telling that the sole positive review called it “less a play than a narrative poem” (Benedict). These reviews supported my judgment that the play’s strength lies in its



images, taken from the elements and the natural world, and not in the arguments the characters make about morality, love, sex or literature.

Therefore, as I cut the play, I preserved imagistic passages at the expense of philosophical passages. In practice, with both the exercise of cutting the script and in rehearsal, I was impressed by the degree to which thought and image are connected in *Madame de Sade*. I believe that Mishima's characters are not arguing or philosophizing, so much as trying to work out their thoughts, and the metaphors they use are the way that they experience and interpret their extreme experiences caused by their close association with the Marquis de Sade. In light of Mishima's goal with this play of proving that he could write fully developed female characters, it occurs to me that the thin philosophy and rich imagery are deliberate and may reveal an anti-intellectual view of women in the author.

Criticism of the Grandage production also points out Mishima's flawed emulation of Racine. Translator Donald Keene sums up *Madame de Sade*'s Racinian conventions: "a single setting, a reliance on the tirade for the relation of events and emotions, a limited number of characters each of whom represents a specific kind of woman and an absence of overt action on the stage" (Keene 213). Reviewers Michael Billington and Nicholas De Jongh were both disappointed in the lack of Racine's signature of characters "torn between passion and duty" (Billington). Mishima makes his characters stand for a single thing, removing most possibility for internal conflict. In the author's postface he lays out the key to the characters:

Madame de Sade stands for wifely devotion; her mother, Madame de Montreuil, for law, society, and morality; Madame de Simiane for religion; Madame de Saint-Fond for carnal desires; Anne, the younger sister of Madame de Sade, for feminine guilelessness and lack of

principle; and the servant Charlotte for the common people (Mishima 107).

These descriptions are not particularly playable for the actor, and don't do justice to the characters as written. In an effort to avoid the very real pitfall of two-dimensional characters, I preserved any shred of contraction or uncertainty expressed by the characters, and hoped culling the text world make these moments more prominent.

Most reviewers of the Grandage production also took issue with Donald Keene's translation. *The Standard* called his translation "often absurd" (De Jongh) and Charles Spencer of *The Telegraph* takes Judi Dench to task for insecurity in her lines, but casts the blame on Keene's "laborious translation" that makes her lines "hardly memorable". David Benedict's positive review in *Variety* spun the issue by calling the dialogue "self-consciously artificial". While I appreciate elegantly deliberate artifice, I agree with the critics that the English grammatical constructions are often awkward and unnecessarily wordy. One of many examples of Keene's wordiness is, "I have turned over and over in my mind the events that have occurred since our wedding" (Mishima 27), which I cut without loss of meaning to "I have turned over and over in my mind the events since our wedding".

This does raise the question of whether the fault lies with Keene's translation or Mishima's original. In 1964, three years before his translation of *Madame de Sade* was published, Keene wrote in his paper "Problems of Translating Decorative Language" about his personal evolution as a translator from freely omitting literary elements that he considered "stylistic fripperies" to committing to "translate everything, no matter how difficult or seemingly irrelevant" (Keene 4). This led me to feel confident that the layering of images to express a single idea belonged to Mishima. I did cut some of these distinct images, but more to the point of

the objections of the reviewers cited above, I did cut redundancies I found in the text in an effort to make the play shorter and the lines more memorable for the actors.

Finally, the reviews of the Grandage production consistently mentioned one line that is particularly laughable to Western sensibilities, “Alphonse has built a back stairway to heaven” (Mishima 104), which I decided to cut rather than try to sell it to the audience. Its proximity to the end helped it to leave a deep and negative impression on the reviewers, and Billington, Spencer and De Jongh all quote the line directly. Billington says that hearing it he “wanted to giggle” and Spencer calls it Renée’s “loony conviction”.

The line occurs in one of Renée’s more philosophical speeches, moments before the end of the play. The speech contains other sentences that are hard to play without inducing giggles, such as: “The Bastille was stormed from the outside, but he was breaking down his prison walls from the inside, without even using a file” (Mishima 102). Because it includes such sentences, this speech slows down and confuses the build to the end of the play. The warnings in the reviews together with these issues led me to cut this speech extensively.

### **Analyzing the Imagery**

Armed with these warnings about the play and the translation, I undertook the laborious process of preparing the text. However, I did not start with dark-marking pencil in hand. Since I had decided to emphasize the imagery, I began by combing through the text and taking an inventory of all the images, both concrete and metaphorical. I classified these into twenty-two categories with notations of act and character. (See Appendix One.) This allowed me to see the patterns of dominant images in a particular act and images associated closely with a particular character. This exercise also helped me see clearly what images were most thematically important. Rather than trying to preserve some of all twenty-two categories, I decided to keep

certain motifs at all cost, eliminate others as likely opaque to cast and audience, and leave others available for omission or inclusion.

Images of blood and wine, water (in particular the sea), and flowers (in particular roses) stood out as the prominent motifs. Given the bloody nature of many of the off stage events, it is not surprising that blood and its doppelgänger, wine, make up an important part of the play's imagery. Some of this imagery is in the context of literal accounts, such as Simiane's childhood memory of Alphonse sucking the blood from her thorn-pricked finger (11), Anne's nostalgia for the "pools of blood left in the morning mist" on the bridges in Venice (35), and Saint-Fond's lurid description of the spilling of the blood of a lamb slaughtered over her in a black mass (51).

Other blood in the play is figurative, with important strands related to Alphonse's scandalous behavior and his ancient and illustrious ancestry. Anne describes the bed she shared with Alphonse in Venice, "the bed turned crimson, as if with the blood of a hundred virgins" (36), evoking Alphonse's many past sexual escapades. Later she more explicitly claims, "The bloodsoaked (*sic*) memories that flashed into his eyes were the source of our infinite tenderness" (46). When Simiane believes that Alphonse has purposed to reform his behavior she exclaims, "the night smeared with blood has given way to the dawn" (98).

Alphonse's ancestry, his noble "blood", is suspected as the root cause of his perversion. Alphonse and the de Sade family were *noblesse d'épée*, or nobility of the sword (Gray 97), who won their nobility in centuries past through acts of military valor. Renée suggests that Alphonse's sexual appetites "may not be entirely unrelated to the glory of his distant ancestors who served in the crusades" (31). While Saint-Fond's more colorful description has him "admiring naked women through the arabesques traced by his ancestors' blood on their armor" (10). This strand of imagery comes to glorious fruition in the final moments of the play, when

Renée rhapsodizes about Alphonse as a “pious knight” “of his noble house” seconds before this image collides with the reality of Alphonse’s prison-wrecked physical presence (104-105). This speech is dense in images, but many concern the bloodshed that made the de Sades a noble house: his decoration of his armor is “traced in iron rusted with blood,” “he presses a sword sated with blood to his lips,” “his heart beats under the silver armor in anticipation of bloody massacres,” “his icy-cold sword makes lilies wet with blood white again” and his “white horse” is “dabbled with blood” (105).

Most characters use water imagery to talk about emotion. For instance, in describing the Marquis de Sade, Montreuil says, “Sometimes gentleness and purity gush from inside him like a spring . . . but the spring is immediately clouded over by his next outrage, and no one can tell when it will again flow pure” (13). Later, Renée explains her indifference towards her mother’s feelings upon her mother’s revelation that she knows that Renée has participated in the Alphonse’s deviant sexual behavior: “At the bottom of the depths of shame not even human feelings of sympathy survive. Sympathy is the clear water at the top. When the mind is agitated, the dregs rise from the bottom and make the clear water turbid” (67-69). Simiane describes her recently acquired spiritual humility using these words: “Once a person frees himself of that arrogance, his real purity and uprightness become like pebbles in a riverbed. Then, even if he notices that other pebbles happen to be glowing in the evening light, it no longer distresses him” (92).

The sea, however, is used exclusively to invoke Alphonse’s sexual behavior. Saint-Fond introduces this in act one in her description of the orgy in Marseilles, “He, Mariette, and the manservant joined in a fellowship of pain like galley slaves rowing their banks of oars in a trireme across the sea” (6), followed by this picture of his recovery, “It was as if he had buried

himself in the sands of a shore washed clean of debris from the sea, where the shells had crumbled into powder, the seaweed had dried, and the dead fish had turned to chalk” (7). Renée uses an ocean metaphor to explain her loyalty to her husband because of, and not in spite of, his perversity, “The worm-eaten boat shares with the worms that feed on it the nature of the sea” (30). “A bed that looked like seaweed washed ashore on the white sands of the beach, filled with the damp and odor of the sea” (46), stands in for Anne’s sexual relationship with Alphonse. Finally, in the tumult of the Revolution, Montreuil wonders if Alphonse’s sexual proclivities aren’t in fact morally relative, saying, “Hasn’t Alphonse merely been standing where the waves broke, keeping one foot in the water as he gathered shells? The shells are red as blood, and there is seaweed too, twisted into ropes, and delicate little fish shaped like whips” (97).

These sea images add layers of nuance as they build on each other throughout the course of the play. As a dominant motif it also calls to mind the Japanese author’s island nation origins and acts as a cultural bridge between Japan and maritime European cities like Marseilles and Venice, which are important settings of the plays offstage events.

Flower imagery pervades the play, and even became one of the few visual elements of the production, as will be discussed at greater length in chapter four. Some flowers are literal, as when Renée reminisces, “Alphonse stopped our carriage in the middle of a lily field and ordered a cask of red wine poured over the flowers, saying he wanted to make them drunk” (27). This remembered action of Alphonse calls to mind his drugging of sexual partners and victims, whom Renée calls “blood-colored flowers” (46).

One anachronistic flower image is interesting as it reveals Mishima’s Japanese point of reference. In Montreuil’s description of the masochistic part her spy saw Renée playing in an orgy, she compares the blood on Renée’s body to “raindrops coursing down a forsythia stem in

the rain” (66). Forsythia is a flowering shrub native to East Asia, including Japan, and was not introduced to Western Europe until after 1778, the year in which Mishima has Montreuil making this reference.

Roses take on several layers of meaning in the course of the play. They stand for pleasure, as when Saint-Fond asserts that Alphonse’s “sickness has roses under its surface” (15), or Renée claims: “Even the tortures of hell can be transmuted by a woman’s hands and a woman’s endurance into a single rose” (42). Anne later twists this meaning that Renée gives to roses when she makes fun of the domestic nature of Renée’s pleasure, saying “every morning at breakfast Alphonse will spread his bread with the rose jam you’ve made for him” (42).

Renée also uses roses to talk about the relationship between Alphonse and his taboo proclivities: “Can you distinguish between loving roses and loving the scent of roses” (31)? In a related sense, Renée also uses roses as a symbol for conventional sexuality as she argues to Montreuil that the line between convention and taboo is permeable. She says, “the rose and the snake are intimates and at night exchange shapes, the snake’s cheeks turning red and the rose putting forth shining scales” (73).

### **Types of Cuts**

These and other similar images I preserved in full. The repetition strengthened and enriched the theme, rather than causing redundancy. Many other imagistic strands I considered non-essential and preserved when it made sense, but did not hesitate to cut in order to keep momentum of the plot or emphasis the motifs just discussed. One major cut I made was of a Saint-Fond speech in which she, as a self-proclaimed “authority in matters of immorality,” gives her version of Alphonse’s sexual awakening using an extended metaphor about a child in a garden with a telescope. The child looks through the telescope the wrong way and sees only the

“pretty lawn and flowers around his house”. One day he discovers the possibility of looking through the other end of the telescope and sees “sulfurous fires sprouting from distant valleys and beasts with red jaws in the forests, baring their fangs” (16-17). This speech runs nearly two pages and is immediately dismissed by Montreuil with “I’m afraid I haven’t the least idea what you are talking about” (17). In a production that dealt with the play as a philosophical drama, this speech would be crucial as an argument for the culturally constructed nature of morality. However, neither the images of the telescope nor the garden and wilds are picked up elsewhere, so for this poetic drama interpretation of the play, this long speech was expendable.

There were quite a few instances of very short cuts of imagery that were done purely to shorten the run time of the play. For instance, Simiane’s description of Alphonse’s eyes as “a little green lizard scampering through the spring fields” (95). There were a few images that I cut deliberately. I thought that the references to classical mythology would be difficult to get across to the audience of this production. In the case of Saint-Fond’s “I have reaped a full harvest of the weeds that grow on Cythera’s isle,” I judged that the context would make clear that Cythera’s isle, which is considered to be the birthplace of Venus, has something to do with sex, and so left the line in. However, Montreuil’s lament to Renée “You were like Proserpine, carried off while she was picking flowers, to become the bride of the King of Hell,” seemed likely to trip up the ear of any audience member not well versed in Roman mythology, and so was cut.

Perhaps my most questionable and personally motivated cut was to the conclusion of Saint-Fond’s black mass story in act two. After recounting her experience serving as an altar over which a lamb was sacrificed, Saint-Fond declares that she now understands who Alphonse is:



He was myself. I mean, he was the blood-bathed table of flesh, a blind three-month fetus with shriveled limbs, the miscarriage of God. Yes, I knew that the Marquis de Sade was the bloodstained abortion of God who could become himself only by escaping from himself, and that whoever was there besides Alphonse—the women he tormented and the women who lashed him—were Alphonse too. The man you call Alphonse is only a shadow (52).

Aside from deeply offending my sensibilities, the image of the “miscarriage of God” is irrelevant in that it does not illuminate the main idea which though not entirely clear, is about the two-sides-of-the-same-coin relationship between sadism and masochism. The realization that “he was myself” came to Saint-Fond while in a degrading and literally objectifying situation. In cutting the sentence about the “miscarriage of God” in the above passage, I may have deprived shock-seeking audience members, but the play would disappoint the thrill-seeker in any case, with its distinct lack of onstage sex or violence, I felt justified in making the cut.

A more mundane category of cuts was my elimination of repetitive language. Mishima’s characters don’t say things one way when they can say it three ways. While this is likely deliberately part of the play’s style, and could be a tool in the hands of a skilled cast, given the time pressures, I kept the ideas intact while streamlining the expression. Saint-Fond refers to sadist and masochists as “the flagellants and the flagellated, the chastisers and the chastised” (50). I cut the first phrase, as it did not add meaning to the sentence, and the word “flagellants” sounded dangerously close to “flatulence” when the actor spoke the line. At the risk of being repetitive myself, I will give one more example. As Simiane celebrates Renée’s decision to become a nun she exclaims, “You stand supreme among the chaste wives of this world. You are

worthy of becoming a bride of God. In the course of my long life I have met many women, but never one more deserving of being called ‘chaste’” (98-99). I removed the last sentence as slightly weaker restatement of the ideas in the first two sentences, leaving “bride of God” as a much stronger ending.

When I initially read the play, I found act three difficult to follow. It was not until I did a close reading of it for the purposes of trimming it that I understood how the progression of action was meant to hang together. The problem was that the chain of cause and effect is interrupted by several pages of philosophizing about the impact of Alphonse’s novel, *Justine*, which Renée concludes is that “this world we are living in is now a world created by the Marquis de Sade” (103). This five-page discussion interrupts the pursuit of the central question of the act: will Renée join Simiane’s convent or will she wait for Alphonse, who is about to be released?

Renée has resolved to become a nun and Simiane joyfully agrees to accept Renée in her convent, but Renée raises the following qualification: “I am sure it was a light that strengthened my decision to leave my husband and take holy orders. But how shall I put it? I feel as if the light were different from the one you describe” (99). She continues with a plot summary of *Justine* and launches from there into a five-page discussion. When Renée finally comes to “I intend to spend the rest of my life in the convent, earnestly asking this of God” (104) the line of the action has already been lost. In an effort to reconnect the action, I drastically cut the intervening five pages and changed Renée’s line from “earnestly asking this of God” to “earnestly seeking this light”. These cuts and this change made the act three much easier to follow.

### **Preparing the Rehearsal Script**

As for the procedure of preparing the physical scripts that the cast and production team used in rehearsal I relied heavily on William Ball’s guidance offered in his immensely practical

volume *A Sense of Direction*. When I cast the play I had not started to cut the text, so I gave the actors full scripts. My unconsidered intention was to do exactly what Ball warns against: giving the cuts verbally at the first rehearsal. Ball gives three compelling reasons for giving the actors fully prepared scripts instead: actors value their lines and taking them away in front of the rest of the cast will sour the actor-director relationship from the start; the first rehearsal should take advantage of the fresh energy the actors bring to it, and ought not to fritter away that energy on a laborious slog through the cuts; finally, actors will become attached to certain lines that may need to be cut (Ball 99-100).

When I read this passage and was convinced of the necessity of giving the actors a fully prepared script I had analyzed the images and penciled into my own script the cuts discussed above. The first rehearsal was a week away and I was on a research trip for a different project. The front-desk attendant at my hotel kindly scanned my script, and I was able to convert the PDF files to text using a web-based optical character recognition service. Then I corrected the mistakes generated by that software and implemented my cuts. This process took approximately twenty hours and I was editing the document on my flight back to Richmond. I emailed the completed script to the inimitable production stage manager, Katherine Cairns, who had the scripts printed for the actors at the first rehearsal that evening.

Doing this took more of my time than it would have taken the company to make the cuts together at the first rehearsal, but the benefits were well worth the investment. As Ball promised, there was no debate from the actors about any of the cuts and the first reading was "pure, clean, simple, and joyful" (101). As I will discuss in the following chapter, it also turned out that we did not have rehearsal time to spare.

## CHAPTER 3 Casting and Early Rehearsals

### **Auditions**

The rehearsal process began with assembling the cast. I had considered casting the role of Anne with a male actor in order to explore some of kabuki's *onnagata* performance techniques. However, for both artistic and practical reasons I ultimately decided to cast all female actors.

The primary practical reason for doing so was the scarcity of male actors among the pool of candidates for casting. In order to attract the largest possible pool of actors to the auditions, I combined auditions with fellow graduate student directors Jorge Bermudez and James Stover. Jorge was also looking for an all female cast and James was looking for both men and women for a contemporary adaptation of *Waiting for Godot*. Jorge and I had many good options to choose from, but only three men auditioned and James had to hold subsequent auditions to get the male actors that he needed. At the time of these auditions, TheatreVCU was in rehearsal for a male-dominated main stage production of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, so the pool of available male actors was even smaller than is typically the case in academic theatre. Had I been looking for an actor who could handle the heightened language, fit the specific character and was willing to take on a cross-cultural experiment in female impersonation, I would have been hard pressed to find him amongst the three men who auditioned.

Another practical consideration was my desire to create acting opportunities for women in TheatreVCU's BFA program. As an acting teacher I know that the tools acquired and practiced in the classroom need to be applied in production. Given the relative scarcity of roles

for women on this spring's main stage, I chose to give the women who auditioned for me first consideration.

I also weighed Mishima's intentions in my decision not to cast a man to play Anne as an *onnagata* role. I had singled out Anne as the one role for which I had considered casting a male actor because Mishima's states in his postface that she stands for "feminine guilelessness" (107), which might be well served by the *onnogata*'s aspiration to "achieve femininity beyond femininity" (Leiter 154). However, I came to realize that singling Anne out in this way would place the emphasis of the play unduly on her, unbalancing Mishima's vision of the play where "everything had to form a precise, mathematical system around Madame de Sade" (Mishima 107-108).

It was no accident that Mishima wrote for a single-gender cast. In response to the prevailing notion at the time that Japanese playwrights could only write male or female characters well, Mishima set out to prove his abilities in writing both with a pair of plays: the all-female-character play *Madame de Sade* in 1965 and the all-male-character play *My Friend Hitler* in 1968. In talking about these two plays, he declared that he succeeded, stating, "Here I am standing before a pair of statues, male and female, representing for me a dream-come-true. Is there a sweeter bliss than this for a sculptor?" (Pugarelli, 146). The great challenge was being able to hold the audience's interest with finely drawn characters of one gender, so while an entirely *onnagata* production of *Madame de Sade* might be appropriate, having a mixed gender cast of the play would work against the gender-binary that Mishima deliberately chose for this play. While I don't believe that it is the director's job to guess at and follow all of the playwright's intentions, in this case, I will take on the challenge that Mishima set for himself: to make this play interesting without the dynamics that having men and women on stage together

affords. Casting the play with all women will also put Mishima's claim of success in developing female character to the test for a 21<sup>st</sup> century American ensemble and audience.

The audition procedure that I followed was influenced in part by holding joint auditions with two other directors who were casting contemporary American plays. We began with an initial screening in which each actor performed a prepared monologue. We asked the actors to bring in their best monologue, regardless of genre, whereas if I were casting independently, I would have asked for a monologue of heightened text, such as Shakespeare. As it was, I had decided whom to call back based on seeing mostly contemporary monologues. I did this by listening for dynamic voices with clear diction and looking for bodies that were relatively free of tension and distracting habits.

The two things I needed to know about each actor in the callbacks was how they would handle the imagistic language, and if they would bring creativity, cooperation, and good humor to theatrical experimentation. Because the play is made up of long narrative and descriptive speeches punctuated by dialogue, I chose four of these speeches to use for the callback. At the initial audition I gave one or two of these speeches to each actor when I asked her to come to the callback so that she had a few hours to familiarize herself with the text. Rather than have the actors come in and do the monologues one at a time, I had all the available actors in the room for the whole callback. (In fact, two actors that I was seriously considering based on the monologue audition were unable to be at the callback. One of them, Jess Rawls, read for Madame de Saint-Fond at the initial audition and I ultimately cast her in that role.)

After giving the actors five or so minutes to warm-up, I started off with a game, "Stop, Go, Jump, Clap", which I had learned earlier in the semester from James Stover. In this game, as the actors walk around the space the leader (in this case me) calls out the instruction word in the

title of the game and the actors follow the instructions. After the actors are comfortable with this, the game changes such that instead of following the instructions, the actors must do the opposite: when the leader calls “Go!” the actors stop, and when the leader calls “Jump!” the actors clap. My intention was three fold: first, in getting the actors to do something slightly difficult, I hoped that they would focus on the task and let go of feeling nervous; second, I wanted them to make mistakes and see that there were no terrible consequences; and finally, I needed a physical activity to get their heart rates up and shake them out of the often disembodied audition monologue mode.

This last factor was important because while I had asked them each to prepare one or more pieces of text, I wanted to see the speeches as text exercises rather than as audition monologues. I had just been introduced to Cicely Berry’s *Working Shakespeare Workshops* in Susan Schuld’s Shakespeare Voice and Speech class, and I considered them simple ways to connect text, body and emotion in a group setting. I adapted elements of Berry’s workshops for use in the callbacks, in order to hear their facility with the heightened text, to gauge their willingness to play in a non-realistic style, and to engage the whole group so that they would not sit in judgment on each other’s reading.

For instance, in one of Berry’s exercise, two actors speaking a segment of dialogue stand opposite each other, with three other actors standing behind each, acting as ‘attendants’. As the first two actors speak the text, the attendants repeat as much of the text of the actor they are attending as they can. Berry explains, “We want the two main actors to get a feeling that the language is their property and that they are speaking with power, authority, and dignity” (36). I had the actors that were reading for Saint-Fond and Simiane read their speeches with the rest of the actors divided between them as attendants. Since they were working with speeches rather

than dialogue, I asked them to put the speeches in dialogue with each other by reading one sentence at a time. While this did not result in a dialogue that made sense, it did give both speeches, Simiane's an excerpt from her act three speech about God as the fisherman and Saint-Fond's her introduction to her tale of the black mass, a sense of having an opposing position to push against. The attendants added to the authority both actors had in their perspectives.

Another Berry exercise I adapted was speaking a speech while imagining that the space is the character's mind. The actor moves to a different spot for each new thought, and does not speak until arriving. The exercise should bring to the surface "how a character's thoughts are moving and are structured—and that our ideas come from many different places in our mind or imagination" (Berry 48). I did this with Renée's description of three memories of Alphonse that have coalesced into a coherent understanding of his nature. She calls her new found understanding "a necklace of rubies" (27). I asked one of the actors called back for Renée to do the piece running from spot to spot in the room, with the rest of the actors spread out on the peripheries of the space, and speaking only when standing still to another actor across the room. This made the three memories distinct, and created a build within each one. It also gave the actor a sense of urgency and a need to speak.

A final example I will give is an exercise I made up in the spirit of the Berry exercises. I had four different actors reading for Renée using the above-mentioned Renée speech. I asked the actors to arrange themselves into a sculpture garden. Then one of the actors would walk among the sculptures as Renée while reading the speech, and discover each of the "rubies" hidden in one of the sculptures with the introduction of each new memory in the speech. We did this exercise three times, and in between each time I let the "sculptures" rest and then arrange themselves in new shapes. In addition to hearing each of the Renées read with a sense of



discovery, I was also able to observe all of the actors' degree of natural physical grace and ability to sustain attention.

I ended the callback by having my assistant director, Joey Qiao, sit in a chair in front of the auditor's table facing the rest of the room. I asked the actors, standing at the other end of the room, to imagine that they were at court, about to be presented to Joey, the king, and to imagine in detail what they were wearing. In particular, they were to imagine a special adornment that highlighted the attribute they took the most pride in. At this point in the production process, I planned to have the actor playing Charlotte play live percussion in the show. So I had the two actors I was considering for Charlotte alternately beat out an improvised rhythm on a desk with a stick as each of the other actors promenaded down the room and curtsied to the king. The walks were informed by the imagined adornment and the improvised percussion, allowing me to note each actor's aptitude for taking on an aristocratic bearing, while also hearing the sense of rhythm of the two actors called back for Charlotte.

At the end of the callback, it was clear in my mind what my ideal cast was and also who I had to have. However, I had to wait until Jorge held his callbacks to discuss our choices and coordinate our casting. Later that afternoon we found that we were interested in casting some of the same actors. With some negotiation, I was able to get the actors that I absolutely needed to fill certain roles in exchange for Jorge casting my first choice for other roles for which I had excellent back-up choices. At the end of the audition day, I had a list of six young actors of strong ability who were well matched to their roles. When offered the roles, all of them accepted.

### **First Meeting**

The auditions took place on January 26<sup>th</sup>, but rehearsals did not begin until February 26<sup>th</sup>. In the intervening time, I provided each actor with an uncut copy of the script, and arranged to

meet with the cast on February 17<sup>th</sup>. The original plan had been to read through the play at this meeting, but once I realized the extensive cuts that would be necessary, that idea was abandoned. The time was put to good use, however. Those present were the cast, the assistant director and I. The stage manager, who had signed on to the project in December, had quit in early February, and a replacement had not yet been found.

After opening the meeting with introductions of name and role, I talked to the cast about Mishima and the play. Jess Rawls shared that she had seen the 2009 London production, but did not remember much about it except that she had fallen asleep part of the way through it out of boredom. I emphasized that we would be approaching the text not as a philosophical argument, but as a banquet of images that we would prepare together for the audience to feast on. This led to a discussion of the key images in the play, which I closed by asking the actors to read the play again before the first rehearsal to notice how their character used the key images and if there were other images that seemed important to their own characters.

I then showed the Ted-Ed video “Kabuki: The People’s Dramatic Art” (Mattes) as a quick and simple introduction to kabuki, followed by an excerpt of *The Tradition of Performing Arts in Japan* (Hajime) from the section of the film on kabuki. This second clip showed examples of *mie*, entrances and exits on the *hanamachi* and on-stage costume changes, which I highlighted to the cast as elements that I planned to experiment with in our production.

Throughout our time together, I also worked with Joey to make molds of the actors’ heads, using plastic bags and masking tape, as the base for paper wigs that I planned to make. Once these were done, we dispersed until the first rehearsal. A few days later, Katherine Carins signed on to the project as production stage manager, and soon after recruited John Alley as assistant stage manager and Breanna Potter as dresser and running crew.

## **Table Work**

With the assembled cast and crew, we gathered on February 26<sup>th</sup> for the first rehearsal and a read through of the now cut script. To my relief, we found that the cut ran under two hours. In the time remaining after the reading, I told the cast that all of them except Carmen Wiley, who was playing Charlotte the housekeeper, would carry fans. This led to a discussion of the images or colors in the text that each actor connected to their character, from which I took ideas for the selection of fans used in the production.

In the following rehearsals, the cast and I stayed at the table to work closely with the script. The stage management team and I were all leaving for the Southeastern Theatre Conference on March 5<sup>th</sup> and the university's spring break was the following week, so we had six rehearsals between the first reading and a week-and-a-half hiatus. I wanted to send the cast off with plenty to work on and think about on their own so that the break could allow actors to ruminate on the play. My original plan was to do three days of table work and block the play in the following three days, tackling one act each day. However, once we began the table work I realized that our work together with the text only was both time consuming and fruitful and I chose to stay at the table for all six rehearsals.

The goal of the first rehearsal was a simple understanding of the text. The actors read the text with the instruction to stop whenever they came across a word they did not know or that was unfamiliar in the context. In my own preparations I had looked up the handful of words that I did not know, and when we got to those words I called a stop and asked for the actor who had spoken it to define the word. In either case we consulted the dictionary application on my computer. What we found was that most of us had a vague idea of the meaning of each word, but the dictionary's precise definition illuminated the meaning of a particular idea or image.

However, this read through of the text did not catch all of the points of confusion the actors had with the language. There were some words that I assumed the actors knew and that the actors thought they knew but were entirely mistaken about. I did not know to call attention to these words and they did not know to stop and ask about them.

The most notable example of this problem was in Renée's line, "The reason why I keep mentioning my devotion, Mother, is that I have freed myself from the yoke of what the word commonly implies" (70). A few days after the read through for understanding the language, I noticed that the actor's line reading was strange, and I asked her to tell me the meaning of the line. Her explanation had to do with the yolk being the most essential part of the egg. It turned out that she had confused "yoke" and "yolk" and created an alternate metaphor. As much as possible, I identified and corrected such misunderstandings of the text.

As the table work progressed, I noted that the readings were getting lost in the beauty of the language and largely disconnected from the intended recipient of each line. For a painstaking two hours, I had the actors, who were still very far from off-book, speak their lines only when they had eye contact with the person they were speaking to. This had the effect of exposing the violence underneath the ornate language and got the actors to listen to each other. Even though we only got through ten pages this way, the exercise set the tone of tightly focused ensemble playing.

This exercise also was a good transition into the actors beginning to make choices about objectives. I usually leave these choices to the actor, and do not discuss it explicitly with the actor unless a point of confusion arises during blocking. However, the events of *Madame de Sade* are very subtle and embedded in descriptive speeches, and it was necessary for the company to excavate the action together. This insight of Peter Brook in *The Empty Space* proved

useful in acting Mishima's text: "A single line of speech can have certain pegs of natural speech round which twist unspoken thoughts and feelings rendered apparent by words of another order" (122). Reading through the text, the scraps of "natural speech" emerge from the "words of another order" to guide our way in moving the action forward and provided clues as to the intention of the speeches. As each actor gradually put together a chain of objective, the action became clearer for all of us, and informed the choices of the rest of the company. It is important to note that the choices the actors made at the table were by no means set for the rest of the process, and ultimately these choices were the actors' private work.

### **Exercises, Discussions and Workshops**

Thus the six days of table work were primarily devoted to the understanding of the play, first of the language, and then of the chain of events. However, we interspersed this with Adler-based work with imagery and playing aristocratic characters, as well as experiments with hand fans and kabuki techniques.

I used an adaptation of Stella Adler's "Three Ways of Seeing" exercise to help the actors connect the imagistic language to mental images so that the lines would be vivid thought and not just recited words. Adler's original exercise involves observing objects in the world and seeing them in three different ways: *Banking* which is "exclusively concerned with the facts of a thing" (Rotté 54), as in "the strawberries are red and cost \$4.99"; *Seeing the Life* in which the object is seen to have a nature and life of its own that the observer relates to (Rotté 55), as in "the strawberries are juicy, especially when they are in season in early summer. I would like to have some sliced on top of my chocolate pie"; and *Traveling* in which the observer allows the object to call up a series of associations (Rotté 55-56). Adler believed that traveling allowed the actor to

take stock of the memories and images in his or her own mind, asserting, “every object contains one’s whole life” (Rotté 56).

I introduced the three ways of seeing to the cast by having them observe an object on their lunch break and come back ready to describe it to us. Once they had shared their object in each of the above modes, I asked them to choose an image that their character describes in the play and visualized it fully. The next day, they each shared the image with us, first in the mode of *Seeing the Life* and then in the mode of *Journey*. The first way ensured that their words were backed up with vivid images in their minds and the second evolved into a character exercise, as the actors improvised the characters’ associations from the object to a string of memories. A happy result of doing this together was that the world of the play was simultaneously fleshed out for all of us.

Adler’s way of analyzing character in terms of socio-historical archetypes provided the basis for a discussion that began during table work. With the exception of Charlotte the housekeeper, all of the characters in *Madame de Sade* are members of the aristocracy. By understanding the five aristocratic women as members of the same delineated social group, the cast was immediately able to understand their character’s relationships with women as different as Simiane and Saint-Fond. Some of Adler’s observations of the nature of the aristocracy furthered our understanding of the characters. She says, “The aristocratic man is in pursuit of an articulate, creative self” and “When you’re an aristocrat even standing is a mode of self-assertion, self-affirmation” (Alder 216).

Adler asserted that “character is physicalization” and in the case of aristocratic characters, costume and hand props help the actor to make the necessary changes (Alder 215). To this end, as soon as the actors were on their feet I had them working in corsets, but even in

the table work stage they started carrying fans. At this stage, I had not gathered all of the fans for the production. I did own several fans, some that might have been appropriate as show props, had they not been destroyed by constant use as rehearsal props. At the first few rehearsals we had three fans and the actors passed them around as needed. By the end of the first week, before we left for our extended break, every actor who used a fan had one to take home to use for practice.

When the actors first held the fans in their hands as we read the play their natural tendency was to fan themselves. To push them towards more expressive choices, I instituted a rule that the fans could be used in character for anything except fanning oneself. I knew of the fan's potential from descriptions such as this from Angela Rosenthal's essay on the language of fans in William Hogarth paintings and prints. She writes of the cooling effect of the fan as follows:

These pragmatic services were subordinate to the primary function of the fan as means of focusing the gaze and enhancing communication.

Controlled by the hands and fingers of women, the fan was mobile and subject to permanent transformation. It thus registered and betrayed in its dynamic deployment—and even via the sounds produced by its sudden unfolding, nervous fluttering, or abrupt closure—the thoughts and emotions of its owner (122).

As the actors gained familiarity with the fans and became more skilled in handling them, expressive functions of the fan's "dynamic deployment" became possible.

As a break from our chairs on table work rehearsals, I set up a space with a bench and had the actors improvise shifting their relative status in pairs and groups, using spatial relationship and the fans as their primary tools. I noticed habits that certain actors were relying

on and side-coached them to find new possibilities. What was begun in the first week of work with fans continued to develop over the course of the rehearsals, with new ways of using the fans being suggested and old ideas refined during the blocking rehearsals and even through the final rehearsals in the theater.

The table-work rehearsals were also the time when I began to incorporate elements from kabuki. The schedule originally included several hours of kabuki workshops to teach the actors the techniques and to experiment with how these techniques might serve the play. This plan ran into two basic problems: it was necessary to extend the time spent at the table reading the plays, which cut into the time available for kabuki workshops; but the bigger problem was that while I knew something about kabuki from reading and watching filmed performances, I have no kabuki performance training. Presuming that I could teach the actors to do what that I myself could not do proved foolhardy. However, the work that we were able to do in this regard did have an impact on the staging and performances.

*Mei* are kabuki's "most powerful and characteristic poses" that are performed at "moments of intense emotion" such as "anger", "surprise, curiosity, resolution, and the like" (Leiter 60). Encouraged by Japanese theatre scholar Samuel L. Leiter's suggestion that these poses are "one of those too few elements of Asian acting technique that can, perhaps, be effectively transferred to the production of stylized Western drama" (72), I started by having the cast identify one moment in each act that was a moment of "intense emotion" for their character. Hearing the moments that they chose gave me insight into their thinking about the arch of each act.

The actors had all seen several examples of *mie* in the video we watched together before rehearsals began. Asian theatre scholar James Brandon provides the following description: "To



perform *mie*, an actor ‘winds up’ with arms and legs, moves his head in a circular motion, then with a snap of the head, freezes into a dynamic pose . . . *Mie* is held for several seconds . . . then gradually relaxed, and the play continues” (84-85). A typical *Mie* is performed to four beats of percussive accompaniment. “The first beat . . . is struck if the actor plants one foot forward in preparation for the *mie*. The remaining three beats . . . accompany the *mie* itself: the first beat as the head is brought up and the second and third beats . . . as the head locks into position and the *mie* position is held” (Brandon 108).

In an attempt to recreate this technique, I started with a familiar acting warm-up game in which the actors stand in a circle and pass a sound and movement around the circle. I then modified the game by asking the actors to imagine that they were passing energy to each other through their eyes. With the beat of taking in the energy they were to plant their foot in preparation. Then they were to process the energy by moving through two poses, ending in a frozen position and sending the energy on to the next actor in the circle. The actors played along, but they were clearly self-conscious. I had hoped that by starting with a game they had played many times before, they would be more comfortable. However, given the short amount of time, we had to move through the exercise quickly. My own uncertainty about how to do a *mie* may have also been communicated to the cast and undermined their confidence. Two of them bravely volunteered to try a *mie* in a scene, but the results were awkward and reinforced the resistance to using the convention amongst the cast. At the time, the actors were still not off book, and I wonder if I had had the time to move more slowly if the technique would have worked. I do believe, however, that choosing these moments of emotional intensity was beneficial as an early-stage exploration of character and plot arch. Attempts to incorporate other kabuki elements came in the next stage of rehearsals.

The time had come for all of us to leave for SETC and spring break, so I left the cast with exhortations to memorize their lines and to use and care for the fans I had entrusted them with. When we all returned, we needed to be prepared for our one week of blocking rehearsals before we moved into the theater.

## CHAPTER 4 Staging the Play

When we returned from spring break it appeared that we would be able to get the most out of the one week of blocking rehearsals: my closet was full of costume pieces and the actors had gained facility with their fans and they seemed secure in their lines. At our first rehearsal after returning, at which we blocked act one, I was liberal in my praise for all they had accomplished in our time apart. However, as we moved into act two it became apparent that most of the cast's spring break efforts had been spent on the first act. Blocking ground to a snail's pace as the actors entered less familiar territory. With books in hand, the actors' fan work was hampered and became generalized.

The most problematic passage was the sixteen-page scene between Montreuil and Renée. It is a long scene to be sustained by two actors, and is full of lengthy speeches for both characters, who repeat similar viewpoints with subtle shifts in the degree of tension between them, while there is no overt action. While I appreciated the difficulty of their task, there was not very much that I could do to help them. During the rehearsal that was scheduled for a run of act two, the situation was so dire that I left the rehearsal in the hands of the stage manager with orders to drill lines. Throughout, I tried to maintain in my demeanor a balance of empathetic encouragement and disappointment. After our first run through, the actor playing Renée apologized to me for her struggle with the lines and said that above all she did not want to let me down. I responded that I did not want her to let herself down since she was ultimately the one who was going to stand on the stage. After this point she took responsibility for her work and

organized line runs with her fellow actors outside of rehearsal. The improvement was swift, but some time had already been lost.

In the earlier rehearsals, I had already made the decision to sacrifice kabuki skill workshops in favor of sorting out the meaning of the language and the plot of the play. Now we were rushing toward the end of the week and I was determined to get in a full run of the play, so blocking was prioritized over kabuki workshops. This meant, of course, that the staging could not utilize the kabuki techniques, as the actors had not acquired them.

In the rest of this chapter, I will move away from a chronological narrative and instead discuss the various technical and design aspects as they affected my continued work with the actors.

## **Set**

All three acts of *Madame de Sade* are set in “the salon in Madame de Montreuil’s house” (Mishima 1). I served as set designer, and the resources I had at my disposal did not allow me to recreate a realistic Eighteenth-Century French salon, nor would realism have served the play. Instead, I left the stage largely bare, with black acting blocks and a small school desk covered in black cloth standing in for the necessary furniture. In addition to being the most cost efficient approach, the neutrality of the setting was open to projection of both French and Japanese atmospheres from the text and the other design elements.

Although all three acts take place in the same room, I changed the arrangement of furniture from act to act to denote the considerable passage of time, to vary the possible patterns for the actors’ movements, and to support visually the main action of each act. In act one there is a balance between the two guests, Simiane and Saint-Fond, who represent opposite moral poles, and the two sisters who narrowly avoid each other as they come and go through separate doors.

In this act, the symmetry of the two upstage doors was emphasized by the balance of a block down stage left and a desk up stage right. The stage pictures in this act often involved two characters balancing out the stage or two characters flanking a third to form an equilateral triangle.

In act two, the desk was replaced with two blocks in a couch formation far down stage. This two-person couch was a platform to physicalize the shifting alliances between the women. For instance, at one point Anne and Renée are having a tête-à-tête on the couch, when Montreuil enters and with the line, “let’s spend today here, the three of us together, as in the old days” nudges Anne off the couch and takes her seat next to Renée, revealing her preference for her older daughter that the cast discovered during our table readings. The downstage placement of the seating also made it easy for those seated there to give focus to Saint-Fond during her black mass speech in the middle of the act from a power position upstage center.

In act three, the furniture was pared down to a single acting block. In this act Renée has ceased her activity to secure Alphonse’s comfort and release because she knows he will soon be freed in the course of the upheaval of the French Revolution. I had her seated for the entire act, only standing briefly at the very end as she describes her ideal vision of Alphonse, and immediately slumping back again upon hearing Charlotte’s description of his actual state. All of the other characters standing and moving about in the room with no other chairs emphasized Renée stillness.

Amid all of the changes from act to act, a few things remained the same to mark the stage as being the same. The staging used the architecture of the theatre itself, including a downstage left pillar, a narrow platform that ran the length of the upstage edge and two upstage doors, which of course remained constant.

In addition, on a pedestal between the two doors there was placed a white Chinese vase, painted with a blue mountain and lake scene. In each act this vase held different colored roses. The rose imagery in the script had made a deep impression on me, and during the table work I had discussed with Katie Stoddard the significance of different colored roses as they relate to Renée's character arch. Katie's thoughts on the subject determined the progression of the colors of the roses: pink for act one because Renée is deeply in love with Alphonse, who has awakened her sexuality; red in act two, because she has been initiated into sadomasochism; and in act three, white, as she has been purified through suffering and ultimately makes a clean break with Alphonse.

The black curtains that hang into the doorways to shield the backstage area from the view of the audience were in very bad shape when we moved into the theatre, so I took them down and replaced them with a Japanese patterned cotton cloth, which I split down the middle. The specific door covering, as opposed to neutral black curtains, anchored the stage in a specific room. Once the curtains of the door were hung, an unexpected problem presented itself: each actor was exiting through the curtains a little differently, and by and large these exits were jarringly informal and incongruous with the precision and elegance of the rest of the play's vocabulary of gesture and movement. An exiting gesture needed to be devised, and in this case, Joey Qiao proposed the excellent solution of having the actors push aside one half of the split curtain with the closed fan, followed up with the other hand directly above or below the fan on the same side of the curtain. Perhaps because the gesture did not originate from the cast but was given to the actors as a convention, it was difficult for them to adopt. It required a brief halt mid-exit, but many of the actors had the habit of sweeping off stage, performing the gesture mid-stride. It took some practice, but when done correctly, it was subtly reminiscent of a Japanese

woman kneeling to open a screen. At the same time, it was a stylized gesture that was unique to the world of the play.

The Newdick stage is wider than the seating area of the theatre, with the stage extending farther past the midpoint of the building on the stage right side than on the stage left side. Productions in this space often do not make use of the extra area on the one side. For *Madame de Sade*, the large area was useful in creating a spacious feel of a wealthy house. I blocked using the extreme of the stage, and even found that far right was a good position for sightlines. Working on such a large stage opened up possibilities for a range of distances between characters. I used this dynamic to chart the subtle shifts that made up the events of the play.

The distance made it necessary for actors to move quickly around the stage. The actors' habit was to be in near-constant, meandering motion. I asked them either to plant their feet or to move with purpose. To mark the start of a cross clearly, I had the actors circle back in the opposite direction and then around to their destination. The initial inspiration for this was the idea that if the characters were wearing long rococo gowns, then this movement would help their trains to fall in line behind them. Though the costumes for this production ended up not having trains, this turn helped the actors remember to move deliberately. This circle also extended into the basic circular and curved topography of the production. I introduced the cast to the Viewpoint of topography with the image "the soles of your feet have red paint on them, and you are now painting the floor" from Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's *The Viewpoints Book* (47-48). Circular topography became the default, which elicited graceful movement from the actors and set up a pattern that could be broken to great effect in moments of uncharacteristic directness.

I tried using a variation of kabuki's *hanamichi* in the staging. Masakatsu Gunji offers this definition, "the *hanamichi*, or "flower path" (is) a raised passageway leading from the left side of

the stage, through the audience, to the back of the theater. It serves as a means of entry, and exit, to and from the main stage, and also as a secondary stage in its own right” (22). This architectural feature “facilitates an intimate bond with the audience” (Cavaye 24), and helps performers to make “the most vivid impression possible upon the audience” with entrances and exits (Brandon 93). The audience seating in Newdick is in one solid bank, with walkways on either side. These walkways each have several steps as they pass from the higher seating at the back of the audience down to the stage. In a previous production that I directed in this theatre, I used these walkways for entrances and exits, and found that the steps made these crossings awkward, even in modern dress. These areas are also out of range of the lighting instruments on the grid above the stage. I determined not to use these as a stand-in for a *hanimimchi*, because in addition to the other drawbacks, entering for either side would only bring the actors closer to one side or the other of the audience, and not achieve the desired effect of the *hanamichi*’s pass through the audience.

My solution was to use a walkway that runs next to the left side of the stage and then have the actor climb onto the stage by way of a step unit at the downstage left corner. I blocked all of the major entrances and exits along this route. One problem that arose was that the layout of the off stage world did not make sense and it was unclear where people were coming from and going to, much to the consternation of the cast. Once we moved into the theater, I discovered that there were not enough lighting instruments to fully illuminate the stage and this walkway, and so this solution was abandoned. I did, however, preserve the *hanamachi* principle of “the most vivid impression possible” with entrances and exits with the use of music, even as I changed these all to be to and from the doors that were already part of the stage architecture. I will describe the use of music in more detail in the section on sound at the end of this chapter.



## Costumes

In the sparse setting, the visual impact of the costumes became very important. Mishima anticipated this, writing in his postface, “I thought that the necessary visual appeal would probably be provided by the beautiful rococo costumes” (107). My original idea was to work with an undergraduate costume design major to create costumes that blended French rococo and traditional Japanese silhouettes, textures and patterns. I wanted the costumes, along with the other design elements, to contribute to the world of the play that would be not France and not Japan, but an imaginary world in-between that bears the markings of both. It was not until after *Madame de Sade* was selected for the Shafer Alliance Laboratory Theatre’s season that I found out about a policy change in the theatre department’s costume shop that prohibited loaning costumes to or the participation of costume design majors (both graduate and undergraduate students) in Laboratory Theatre’s productions. This change of policy put me in a tough position: since the *Madame de Sade* is a costume drama in its very nature, staging the play with ‘neutral’ costumes (for example, in all black clothing) was out of the question. The only alternatives I saw were to choose a different play or costume this one myself.

I opted to take on the added role of costume designer, aided by the assistant director Joey Qiao, whose skills as a seamstress were previously unknown to me. My first step was to find sources of affordable rococo and Japanese costume pieces. A few years prior to this project, as a high school drama teacher, I had rented costumes for my school in North Carolina from Playmakers Repertory Company in Chapel Hill at very low cost. Playmakers has a vast stock of period costumes and they had some rococo gowns and a more limited number of kimonos and arranged a flat-rate rental fee of fifty dollars.

In advance of my spring break trip to pull costumes from Playmakers, graduate costume designer Emily Atkins came to an early rehearsal to get measurements of the cast. I arrived at Playmakers with only general ideas about the color palette for each character: for Renée, white, pink, red and gold to express her innocence gradually awakening to sensuality and her close relationship to the rose imagery of the text; for Anne, light oceanic greens and blues to highlight her youth and her heavy use of imagery related to Venice and the sea; for Montreuil, rich but dark colors like purple and dark blue to give her some age and gravitas; for Saint-Fond red and black to tie her closely to the bloody sexual imagery she is so fond of; for Simiane in act one, somber colors such as gray and brown and in act two, a black for her nun's habit; and for Charlotte sober colors and plain textures to distinguish her as the one non-aristocratic character.

As it turned out, my choices were very limited by the sizes of the available rococo gowns. The cast was made up of young women of varied body types, but it appeared that Playmakers predominantly employs extremely slender women in its period pieces. I rented nine or ten rococo gowns with the hope that corseting would help with the fit. As it turned out, two-thirds of the cast could not fit into any of the gowns. I was able to rent corsets in a more diverse array of sizes, which I then supplemented by borrowing from two other graduate actors in the department.

In retrospect, I should have spent much more time looking at the kimonos in the Playmakers stock. In the last ten minutes of my fifty-five minute appointment, I clambered up a ladder to the top level to look through the 'ethnic' costumes. My thought at this point was that they would be layered with the gowns, and not knowing how well this would work or if I could actually accomplish it, I took only three kimonos that fit with in the color pallet I had in mind for certain characters: a light pink one for Renée, a dark blue-green one for Montreuil and a light

green and blue one for Anne. There were probably other kimonos there, but I did not have time to take a thorough look.

When rehearsals resumed after spring break I used some rehearsal time to experiment with costuming options. The first thing we figured out was the assignment of corsets so that the actors could start rehearsing in them immediately. The next thing I did was to try the gowns on the actors that I thought would be easiest to fit. For these gowns to look right and to be wearable, the fit in many different aspects has to be correct, a precision that is best achieved by building the gown for the actor. Even though I pulled almost twice the number of gowns needed, it quickly became clear that there were only one or two that would be passable on our actors.

The kimonos, on the other hand proved much more flexible in fit. I had pulled some sashes to approximate *obis*, but found that putting the corsets on over the kimonos gave the impression of *obis* and was a simple way to blend the Japanese and the French silhouettes. The only problem was that I had only rented three kimonos. To these three I was able to add one authentic Japanese kimono, light gray and shot through with threads of silver and dark red, from my thesis committee chair, Dr. Noreen Barnes. I purchased the other two from vintage stores on West Cary Street, one bright blue, one with a pattern of redheaded cranes and one short, gray and maroon one with a torn sleeve that fortunately Joey Qiao was able to repair.

For modesty's sake and to smooth over the difference in length between the various kimonos, the costumes were underpinned with floor-length skirts. At this point I regretted not renting petticoats from Playmakers, but between my own rehearsal skirts and those of the cast, we were able to come up with good color pairings and fits for the whole cast.

I deliberated for a while over the assignment of kimonos for Montreuil, Saint-Fond and Charlotte. The bright blue one with the redheaded cranes was not what I had envisioned for any

of the characters. Joey Qiao pointed out that redheaded cranes are a longevity symbol in East Asia, so it would be more appropriate for Montreuil as the one character of an older generation than for any of the other characters. However, I thought the vibrant colors of that kimono read as youthful and the symbolism of the pattern would be lost on our audience. The gray and maroon kimono seemed right for Saint-Fond, except that its short length made it look less formal than the other kimonos. Ultimately, Montreuil wore the dark green-blue kimono over a red rehearsal skirt and over a cream corset; Saint-Fond wore the crane kimono with a black corset and skirt; and Charlotte was set apart as a commoner with the short kimono. Charlotte was also the only character who wore an *obi*-like sash instead of a corset.

Carmen Wiley, the actor playing Charlotte, also had different hair and make-up from the rest of the cast: her hair was tied in a simple low ponytail and her makeup was naturalistic. In contrast, the rest of the cast wore their hair in large, teased up-dos. My original plan to make paper wigs proved far too time consuming. I completed one wig in the two-foot high rococo style, but it was difficult to affix to the actor's head, and even if I had completed five more, the wigs might have hampered the actors or even fallen off mid-performance. The actors' real hair could not achieve the impressive heights of the wig I made, but the style was consistent across the cast and suggestive of French rococo.

Makeup for the aristocratic characters was a stylized blend of 18th century French court and kabuki *onnogata* makeup. The similarities between the two fashions made the fusion interesting and fairly straightforward. Both use white face bases, and I opted for the more transparent white of the French complexion but combined it with the kabuki practice of putting the base on the front and back of the neck. I considered having the actors put the white on their arms and hands as well, as an *onnagta* would, but we did not because the white makeup we used

would have gotten on everything they touched. The eyebrows were painted in light and high and the corners and bottoms of the eyes were lined in red in the kabuki style. The lips were “red and made smaller, with a slightly thicker lower lip—the ideal of feminine beauty” in kabuki style (Cavaye 84). We experimented with a French and a kabuki cheek rouge option and settled for something in-between. In *onnagta* makeup the rouge is blended to an almost imperceptible light pink and placed near the hairline. We kept a similar placement but made the color darker in the French style because it helped to define the actors’ features.

### **The Impact of Makeup and Costumes on Performance**

The first time that the actors were in makeup for rehearsal, they were shocked by the way that their acting partners looked. Sean Purgarud, who played Montreuil, could barely keep from laughing for the first half-hour. After they got past the initial shock of their collective transformation, we found that the heavy white makeup made their faces more placid. Appropriately for both eighteenth-century French aristocratic women and *onnogatas*, the emotions that came across their faces were muted and the thoughts that would have come across on their faces now had to be expressed through their whole bodies and their fans. The makeup heightened the theatricality of the performances.

The actors began rehearsing in parts of their costumes within a few days of our return from spring break, so we had more time to process the influence of the costumes. As soon as the actors put on the kimonos, it was obvious that the large steps they were taking to sail across the wide stage pulled the kimonos open in a way that looked wrong. So I spent some time drilling the cast on walking quickly but keeping thighs together and moving only from the knees. The actors ultimately performed with more relaxed walks. My intention was not for the actors to

focus on how they were walking (we did not have the time to imprint new habits), but to influence their natural gaits so that they would walk without disrupting the line of the kimonos.

Sitting was another challenge in the kimonos. The actors' instincts were to sit like Western ladies, with ankles crossed, but in that position their knees would drift apart, pulling open their kimonos. The solution was to have the actors focus on keeping the thighs and knees together and not to cross the ankles, which were covered by the floor-length skirts. To sit, the actors had to drop straight down with a bend at the knee to arrive with thighs together. Standing from this position likewise required one smooth straightening from the knees, with the corsets preventing a bend in the waist for forward momentum.

The most physically active scene in the play was naturally affected the most by the costumes. The opening of act two has Anne teasing Renée with a letter, and Renée chasing her around the room to get it. Even while running, the actor's legs had to remain close together. The chase was in a narrowing circular topography. My interpretation was that since Anne was sent by Montreuil to give Renée the news of Alphonse's retrial, she really wants to give Renée the letter and is only having some fun at her expense first. Thus Anne closes the circle as she runs away, until at last she is at center stage, where she lifts the letter above her head (the actor playing Anne was about half a foot taller than the actor playing Renée) as a final torment before handing over the letter. We blocked this scene before Anne's kimono had been settled on, and when we ran it with her in her kimono we found that the long sleeve pouches of that garment blocked her face when she raised her hand above her head. Joey suggested an elegant gesture of holding the sleeve with the other hand, but the actor had trouble adopting the gesture and it caused her to hold the letter lower which in turn made the gesture unnecessary.

The final impact of the costumes that I will mention is that the corset highlighted a misalignment in the neck of the actor playing Renée. Her habit was to thrust her chin forward, shortening the back of her neck, which created an odd line in her body. When I pointed this out to her she told me that her acting and movement teachers had urging her to correct the habit. The corset proved to be a tool for correcting this as it made her more aware of the habit. When she lengthened the back of her neck and put her chin down, her whole aspect was transformed from a wide-eye young girl to a graceful woman. As Renée, her arguments with her mother had come across as whiny, but with this adjustment in posture she read as a woman with the strength of her convictions. To encourage her to keep the adjustment, I was extravagant in my praise of the transformation, and with the help of the corset, she worked hard to change her posture. I also showed her and another actor, Sean, a simple massage technique called “thumbs up the neck spin” that I learned from Joanne Edelman at the Stella Adler Studio, to do as part of their warm up. Sean would stand behind the actor playing Renée, holding the base of her head between her fingers and pulling gently upwards while running her thumbs up the back of her neck. The extreme requirements of the costume for this performance opened up an opportunity for her to address her posture, which will hopefully serve her well in her ongoing training.

Although I initially envisioned the costumes as a much more equal blend of French and Japanese, ultimately, the heavily Japanese visual impact of the costumes brought out Japanese cultural resonances in the text that were not obvious on the page. This struck home for me during the first dress rehearsal, shortly after Renée’s entrance in act one. Montreuil directs Renée to thank Simiane and Saint-Fond for agreeing to help secure a retrial for Alphonse, and Renée steps forward and says, “I deeply appreciate what you are doing for us. I have no choice now but to rely on you” (21-22). The playing of this line, with the adjustments in posture and gate that the

costume engendered in the actor, sounded simultaneously like the words of a well-bred French lady and a filially pious Japanese daughter. Cultural harmonics like these are buried throughout the play and the costumes brought some of them to light in this production.

## **Sound**

Sound was an exciting design element to incorporate, as I had a designer, John Alley, to collaborate with. Sound was not brought into rehearsals until we had moved into the theatre. By that point I was tired of seeing mostly only my own ideas stamped all over the set, props and costumes, and I was eager for the challenge and stimulation of another perspective. John was already familiar with the project and had been present at most rehearsals in his other role as the assistant stage manager. Sound had two important tasks in this production: to establish the world of the play as a blend of times and cultures, and to underscore the planned *hanimachi* entrances and exits. I asked him to use sound recordings of kabuki and music by Eighteenth-Century French composer François-Joseph Gossec who had served as orchestra conductor to the Prince de Condé (Brook, et al.), a relative and childhood companion of the Marquis de Sade (Gray 18).

For preshow and entr'acte music, John ingeniously combined tracks from these two types of music. He found pairings with complementary tempos for a barely perceptible bleeding fade from one to the other, as well as switches that made for interesting and even jarring contrasts. This music very plainly set up a European and a Japanese mode and put them in conversation with each other, preparing the audience for the production's aesthetic.

John also selected musical phrases as themes for each character to be used for entrances and exits. As described earlier in this chapter, the *hanimachi* had to be significantly adapted and truncated, so John had to shorten these cues. In the technical rehearsals we also discovered that



using the cues every time was repetitive and risked being boring, or worse, comical. Instead, we chose the most dramatically interesting entrances and exits to highlight with music.

Both Montreuil's and Renée's entrances in act one were accompanied by their respective themes. This not only signaled to the audience that they were important characters, but also pushed the actors to play the entrance as opposed to slipping in unobtrusively. I directed them to make strong entrances, but the music gave them a mood and duration. Initially they were thrown off by the music cue, but once they became familiar with the music, their entrances drew the necessary focus. Saint-Fond's entrance in act two and Simiane's entrance in act three were likewise highlighted with their own musical strains. The other actors on stage for these entrances then wondered if their characters were meant to hear and react to the music. My answer was that the music was the aural manifestation of the character's presence, so hearing the music should be played as the same thing as becoming aware of the character entering.

When Anne enters in act one she is sneaking on, so music that projects her presence would have been inappropriate. Her final exit in act three, as she is fleeing the French Revolution with her husband, was beautifully accentuated by the lingering harp music that John had chosen as Anne's theme.

John also found a way to use sound that had not occurred to me. At the very end of the play, Alphonse is standing at the front door and Charlotte comes on to announce him. At this point John brought in a low and insistent drum beat taken from a kabuki recording, reminiscent of reverberations of Alphonse's pounding on the door, a heart beat, and the crumbling of Renée's idealized vision of Alphonse (104-105) in light of the ragged reality of Alphonse that Charlotte describes (106). The drumbeat continued through Charlotte's speech as the lights gradually dimmed, until for Renée's last line, "Please ask him to leave. And Tell him this: 'The

marquise will never see him again” (106) the lights had contracted to merely illuminate her face. The loudest boom of the drum accompanied the final blackout before the stage erupted with a joyous burst of Gossec for the curtain call.

## CHAPTER 5: Directions for Future Development

Making theatre is often a process of compressing vision to fit resources, and compression can result in dust or diamonds. Even in the most well funded productions, time, talent and treasure are finite resources. For *Madame de Sade*, it was very clear to me what a big difference another week or another designer would have made. I was very pleased with the way that the production came together and proud of the hard work that the cast, crew and I poured into the project. We made the most of the time and resources, but the process did give me some ideas for how my concept of *Madame de Sade* could be more fully realized with more time, money and a more complete team of collaborators.

### **Lighting**

After some unsuccessful efforts to recruit a lighting design student for this project I decided to use lighting only for illumination, using a general wash throughout the play. The only designed element was the speed of fade-ups and blackouts between acts. As it happened, our tech week coincided with the light hang for the department's main stage production of *Arabian Nights*, for which all of the lighting design students were required to be present. When we arrived in the theater I found that the last production had not restored the repertory light plot. Chris Hershey, a graduate student with extensive technical theatre experience happened to be in the building but was not involved with the other light hang, and he refocused the lights to cover the entire stage.

In my ignorance of lighting, I thought that I could do without gel in the lights. After a headache-inducing run of act one, however, it became clear that some gel was needed. Amber gel was found in SALT's stock and John Alley, the assistant stage manager, put it up during a break. The effect of the lighting was still unpleasant, and I am sure that a skillful lighting designer would have helped to create a more beautiful production and to highlight the subtle shifts that make up the plot of the play.

### **Costumes and Wigs**

As discussed in chapter four, the costumes were effective in bringing out the Japanese undertones of the script and supported the actors' characterizations. However, I was only able to pull together one costume for each character, which deprived the production of the power of costumes to connote the passage of time. This would have been particularly helpful given the years that are supposed to pass between the acts. In act three, the characters are supposed to have aged visibly, and costuming could have helped to tell that story. As it was, that was a point that could easily have been missed. I had exactly six kimonos at my disposal, but ideally the costuming would involve fourteen distinct looks, assuming that Charlotte's costume remained the same from act to act. A dedicated costume designer and use of the department's costume shop recourses would have made costuming the play on this scale possible.

Use of wigs could also have helped to tell the story of the passing of time and of the characters aging, by quickly changing the color and style of the characters' hair during the intermissions. Wigs could be used to trace the fall in fortunes of the nobility by switching from decadent confections of hair in acts one and two to humbler looks in act three. However, to realize this, fourteen to sixteen wigs would have been necessary, depending on whether Charlotte's wig style would change. Wigs would also have been an opportunity to blend the

eighteenth-century French setting and the kabuki inspiration, as kabuki actors always perform in wigs (Cavaye 81). I did not have the chance to find out if paper wigs would survive performance conditions, but the idea of using them appeals to me as a very theatrical convention and a potentially cheaper alternative to traditional wigs. Based on my experience making one paper wig, I think that a wig designer would need to be included in the production team, preferably a sculptor or someone with wig expertise.

### *Kabuki Performance Techniques*

In this production, many of my choices were guided by the kabuki principle of making the play a sensory experience. Discussions with the cast about kabuki and exercises to incorporate specific techniques influenced the performances, but were not explicitly used in the final production. The main lesson I learned from this was that my academic knowledge of kabuki did not equip me to teach these performance techniques. If I had the opportunity to stage *Madame de Sade* again with the same production concept, I would either first seek out performance training in kabuki for myself, or better yet, a kabuki actor with whom to collaborate. As it was, it was much better to leave these performance techniques out than to do a poor imitation of the original. Two elements from kabuki that would serve *Madame de Sade* well are the use of live music and on-stage costume, wig and makeup transformations.

### *Live Music*

Borrowing the whole kabuki orchestra would require a host of musicians trained in the musical style and instruments, and is probably impossible except in the most ideal of scenarios. Much more practical to implement would be the use of *tsuke uchi* or “accompanied beating”, rhythmic patterns beaten with sticks on a wooden board “to emphasize and to punctuate the actor’s movements” (Brandon 107). This type of accompaniment would further formalize the

actors' movements. It could also shape the somewhat static action and give the play a sense of propulsion and build. In kabuki the *tsuke*-player is either an assistant playwright or "a scenery-man" (Brandon 108), but in *Madame de Sade* it would make sense for Charlotte to perform this function. She has relatively little stage time in the play as written, but her presence is felt in each act and having her play the *tsuke* from a visible position would emphasize this. Furthermore, the *tsuke*-player is in service of the performer, "watch(ing) the actors intently so that he can time his beats precisely to match their movements" (Brandon 108). Having Charlotte fulfill this role would underscore her servant status in a theatrical way.

### **On-Stage Transformations**

Kabuki has several techniques for transforming the appearance of the performer before the audience's eyes. These can be used to connote an internal change in the character (Gunji 41), to dramatize the revelation of a character's true nature or to accomplish a shift in mood without the benefit of lighting effects (Gunji 43). *Madame de Sade* has several pivotal moments during which characters have drastic changes of heart or make surprising revelations about themselves. These moments would effectively be made more tangible using these techniques. For example, in the play *Kanadehon Chūshingura, The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*, a character who is ordered to commit suicide faces upstage at one point during his ritual preparations, and when he turns back around to the audience he has painted his lips blue (Leiter 114). A similar device could be used at the end of act one when Montreuil learns that Alphonse has seduced her younger daughter Anne, and in that instant not only abandons her mission to get his sentence reversed but determines to ensure his imprisonment. She sits down at her desk to write three letters to retract her requests for help and to reveal his hiding place (36), and when she turns around, her countenance could have been transformed with a makeup change to express her

hardening. This makeup look would persist through act two and could be changed again for act three to show her self-interested softening towards Alphonse.

There are two kinds of on-stage costume changes in kabuki: *hikinuki*, or “pull out”, in which “the upper and lower sections of the actor’s kimono are separate, but this is hidden by the wide sash. At the appropriate moment, threads are pulled from the sleeves and skirts, loosening the top and bottom halves of the outer kimono, which can then be removed at great speed from the sash to reveal, in an instant, a new kimono beneath” (Gunji 42). The other type of on-stage costume change is *bukkaeri*, or “flip down”, in which threads are removed from the shoulders and sleeves of the outer kimono, “so that the front and rear panels of the upper garment come away and hang down like skirts to create a new costume” (Gunji 43). *Hinikuki* is used for visual effect and *bukkaeri* is meant to represent a revelation of character (Cavaye 31). Both of these techniques require specially made costumes with loose basting stitches on the seams that need to come apart and stage assistants to undo the threads (Brandon 110). If these requirements could be met, *bukkaera* could be effectively used in *Madame de Sade* when Renée unmask herself as a masochist or when Renée’s glorious vision of Alphonse is crushed by the description of his dilapidated physical presence. *Hinikuki* for purely visual appeal might confuse an American audience, who would likely take it as a revelation of character.

## **Conclusion**

This production of *Madame de Sade* taught me the necessity of practical skill as well as academic knowledge when borrowing from other performance forms. At the same time it has convinced me that the artistic potential of such borrowing would be worth the additional effort. The student actors involved had the experience of balancing stylization and truthfulness in their

performances, a skill that I believe will be valuable to them in a range of non-realistic theatre forms in which they may work in the future.



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## APPENDIX A

### Categorized Imagery in *Madame de Sade*

#### Armor/Weaponry

“ . . . my sword is broken, my arrows exhausted.”	Montreuil	Act I, pg. 15
“He derives his greatest pleasure from admiring naked women through the arabesques traced by his ancestors’ blood on their armor, the blood-rust that can’t be polished away.”	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 9-10
“Yes, your whole body, from the top of your head to the tips of your fingers, is sheathed in armor glittering with the thorns of hypocrisy.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 71
“The world is filled with people who despise what they cannot imagine. They enjoy their afternoons napping in the hammock. But before they know it they acquire breasts of brass, a belly of brass, and they sparkle if you polish them.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 73
“Yet suddenly his hands became iron and cut me down.”	Renée	Act III, pg. 104
Extended metaphor of Alphonse as a pious knight	Renée	Act III, pg. 104-105

#### Beast/Monster

“The reason I keep mentioning my devotion, Mother, is that I have freed myself of the yoke of what that word commonly implies. Ever since that terrifying night I have been swept clean of the arrogance of a devoted wife.” “This intractable beast called a woman discovered she had been nothing more than a brute, a devoted wife. . . . You, Mother, are still a beast, pure and simple.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 70
“You have ripped Alphonse to shreds with your teeth and your fangs.” “What foolishness! I’m the one that has been ripped to shreds by the gleaming white fangs of that monster.”	Renée Montreuil	Act II, pg. 71

“Your breasts, your belly, your thighs, were plastered like an octopus against the usages of society. The two of you slept with convention and morality and normality, and you emitted groans of pleasure. That, surely, is how a monster behaves.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 72
“The enemy I have fought for twenty years with tooth and nail was just a mischievous boy.”	Montreuil	Act III, pg. 96

## Birds

“And the pigeons, a sky full of pigeons . . . The crowds of pigeons walked proudly and disdainfully over the Piazza di San Marco as long as nothing bothered them, but when frightened they rose up in flocks, with a powerful beating of wings.”	Anne	Act I, pg. 35
“When the grass around the château turned green, and the warm sunlight and the twittering of the birds fell on the frozen floors from the high, round windows like huge, shining, brass trumpets, I felt a surge of hope that Alphonse would soon be released.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 40
“The long black whip darted about the room, like a swallow under the eaves of the château.”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 66
“He is a dove. His is not a lion. He is a small, white, golden-aired flower. He is not a poisonous weed. Anyone who saw a dove or a flower brandishing a whip would feel like a wild beast himself.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 69
“I have become the accomplice of a dove, the accomplice of a small, white, golden-haired flower.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 79

## Black

“When the purest work in the world is used in relation to Alphonse, it turns black as Chinese lacquer.”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 62
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## Blood /Red and White

“He derives his greatest pleasure from admiring naked women through the arabesques traced by his ancestors’ blood on their armor, the blood-rust that can’t be polished away.”	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 9-10
“Alphonse carefully pulled out the thorn and even sucked the wound.”	Simiane	Act I, pg. 11
“He already had acquired a taste for blood.”	Saint-fond	
“The different elements that were scattered in bits and pieces in my memory have suddenly, miraculously, assembled themselves into a kind of necklace. A necklace of rubies, precious stones of blood red.”	Renée	Act I, pg. 27

“Alphonse stopped our carriage in the middle of a lily field and ordered a cask of red wine poured over the flowers, saying he wanted to make them drunk. He watched, fascinated, as the red drops of wind dripped from the white petals.”	Renée	Act I, pg. 27
“ . . . how he tore with his bare hands the heart from the bloodstained breast of a white rabbit he had shot. He gave me a smile of pleasure as he said that all hearts in love look alike, even a rabbits.”	Renée	Act I, pg. 27-28
“Alphonse’s yearning for blood may not be entirely unrelated to the glory of his distant ancestors who served in the crusades.”	Renée	Act I, pg. 31
“Every night there was the noise of a duel, and pools of blood left in the morning mist on the little bridges.”	Anne	Act I, pg. 35
“A red moon rose up from the canal, and when it shone on our bed, the bed turned crimson, as if with the blood of a hundred virgins.”	Anne	Act I, pg. 36
“For six years I kept pounding on a door that refused to open. My nails were ripped away, my fists were covered with blood, but still I couldn’t open the door.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 39
“You don’t remember a red, liverish moon rising from a canal veiled in mist.”	Anne	Act II, pg. 46
“He never mentioned a single memory of blood, but the bloodsoaked memories that flashed into his eyes were the source of our infinite tenderness.”	Anne	Act II, pg. 46
“Then the blood of the lamb, hotter than the sweat poured over me by any man, more abundant than any man’s sweat, flooded over my breasts, my belly, and into the chalice between my thighs . . .”	Saint-Fond	Act II, pg. 51
“I drew diagrams in my head, plotting the gambits of a game of chess, and pitted the ivory pieces against one another in different combination, mulling over the moves until the white ivory turned the pale-red translucence of carnelian in the flames of my thoughts.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 60
“The happiness of knowing that worse and worse scandals of blood are spreading out everywhere like the scarlet trains of coronation robes.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 64
“It’s not surprising, considering you pawned your silver for firewood, that the fireplace gave off a glow bright enough to turn the trunks of the barren trees outside a brilliant red.”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 66
“Drops of blood, like raindrops coursing down a forsythia stem in the rain, shone on your body in the firelight, as you dangled, half-unconscious with pain.”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 66
“He is a kind of threshold between me and the impossible, or perhaps between me and God. A threshold soiled by muddy feet and by the soles of feet bleeding from thorns.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 69
“You never realize what blood they (rabbit and lion) shed in the nights out of love for each other.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 73



“The shells are red as blood, and there is seaweed too, twisted into ropes, and delicate little fish shaped like whips.”	Montreuil	Act III, pg. 97
“The night smeared with blood has given way to the dawn, and its holy light shines into his heart.”	Simiane	Act III, pg. 98

### Bondage

“ . . . he discovered inside a watchman’s hut a pile of firewood bundled together with straw ropes. Alphonse said how lovely it would be if, instead of that ugly firewood, they were bundles of white birchwood, bound with ropes of gold”	Renée	Act I, pg. 27
“ . . . in your heart you too would like to keep Alphonse like a bird in a cage.”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 62
“Then they take in their hands the souls so miraculously caught, and carry them to the prison of light, the jail of bliss.”	Simiane	Act III, pg. 91
“Alphonse in his prison cell, mulling over his thoughts and writing down page after page, locked me up inside a novel. We on the outside have all but been shut up in prison.”	Renée	Act III, pg. 102
“This man, who has abandoned all human feelings, has shut the world of men behind iron bars, and goes walking around it, jingling the keys. He is the keeper of the keys, he alone. My hands can no longer reach him. I have no longer even the strength left to thrust my hands through the bars and beg in vain for his mercy.”	Renée	Act III, pg. 104

### Cloth/Clothing

“ . . . you and your entire family are walking about in transparent clothes.”	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 22
“During the past six years my determination to obtain Alphonse’s freedom has been the warp of a fabric I have woven into many different patterns with the tangled threads of the woof.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 39
“How to describe happiness? It is a piece of tedious work, performed by a woman, something like embroidery. She painstakingly weaves in, eye by eye, solitude, boredom, anxiety, loneliness, terrible nights, frightening sunrises, and makes of them a little tapestry with the usual roses.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 42
“Your face is as white as a sheet.”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 67
“You have divided people into compartments, the way you put handkerchiefs into one drawer and gloves into another,”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 74
“You would be quite satisfied to buy me back, the way a prostitute buys back the wardrobe she has pawned.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 75

“You never tried to see what lies at the end of the world or beyond. Far from it—you cover your windows with pink curtains.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 75
“You haven’t a single taut thread to bind together the scraps of what you’ve lived through.”	Renée	Act III, pg. 82
“I wonder if time, that transfigures us in the twinkling of an eye, hasn’t slipped through this room, trailing its skirts, and our ears have merely failed to recognize the rustle of the silk?”	Simiane	Act III, pg. 91

### Corpse/Insects

“People are all alike – as soon as something suspicious occurs, they suck out the facts, like flies swarming over a corpse. When they’ve finished with the corpse, they record what has happened in their diaries and give it a name.”	Renée	Act I, pg. 28-29
“When it grew light, the crowd retrieved her corpse. They lay it on a shutter and carried it through the streets, mourning her as a goddess of the people, a sublime victim.” “In the morning light the corpse of the Comtesse de Saint-Fond, like a slaughtered chicken, had turned the colors of the tricolor—red blood, white flesh, blue bruises.”	Anne	Act III, pg. 82
“ . . . banquets where a million corpses lie befuddled with carousing, the quietest of banquets.”	Renée	Act III, pg. 105

### Door/Wall

“For six years I kept pounding on a door that refused to open. My nails were ripped away, my fists were covered with blood, but still I couldn’t open the door.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 39
“Mother’s strength slammed shut the door between Alphonse and myself and, when I least expected it, Mother’s strength has now opened that door.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 39
“Alphonse’s heart was my heart, through prison walls stood between us.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 60
“He is a kind of threshold between me and the impossible, or perhaps between me and God. A threshold soiled by muddy feet and by the soles of feet bleeding from thorns.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 69
“You two were a ready-made key and keyhole, and when you were put together the door of happiness always opened.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 72
“You never attempted, even in your wildest dreams, to imagine what it would be like to unlock the strange door that opens on a sky full of stars.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 72-73

“Your whole life, from the moment you were born until the day you die, will have been spent in staring all day long at one, unmoving, blank wall. It’s only a blank wall, though if you examine it carefully you can see the races of blackened clots of blood and raindrops looking like tears.”	Anne	Act III, pg. 83
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### Evil/Sin

“Immorality has always been for me a perfectly appointed, completely self-sufficient preserve.”	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 16
Extended metaphor of looking the right way through the telescope	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 16
“It isn’t as if he suddenly sprouted a tail or horns. Perhaps I have loved the shadows that lay hidden behind his radiant forehead and his shining glance.”	Renée	Act I, pg. 30-31
“People dread sin and unhappiness as if they were contagious diseases you might catch by getting too close.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 40
“He crystallizes with the cool morning air water that has soaked in the filthy ground, and turns it into fragile, holy frost, merely so that he may crush it under his foot. Prostitutes and beggar women have turned into saints for one moment, so he might lash them afterward. But the next instant the spell is broken, and he chases away these wretched women, kicking them as they go.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 45
“The convent is where evil is extirpated at the roots. Alphonse’s wicked deeds have stopped, but even in prison he has clung to the deep-rooted sources of evil.”	Simiane	Act III, pg. 101

### Extremes/Opposites

“I meant only that if my husband is a monster of immorality, I must become a monster of devotion.”	Renée	Act I, pg. 29
“Alphonse is a kind of music with only one theme, and I have sworn my devotion to that music. Sometimes his theme sounds gentle, sometimes it roars with blood and whips.”	Renée	Act I, pg. 30
“At that moment Alphonse’s sins and my unhappiness seem to have fused into one.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 40
“You understand through your poetry. Perhaps that’s the only way to understand the extremely sacred or the extremely profane.”	Anne	Act II, pg. 46
“You know nothing of nights when holiness and shame imperceptibly switch appearances.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 73
“In these times the advantage goes to the person who veers neither to the right nor the left.”	Montreuil	Act III, pg. 80

“The world may turn upside down, but God draws a line, sharp as the line a child scratches in the pavement with a stone, between right and wrong.”	Simiane	Act III, pg. 97
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## Fruit

“The ripe fruits bursting with poisonous juice that weigh the boughs were still green then. Why didn’t I pluck them from the branches before it was too late?”	Montreuil	Act 1, pg. 16
“If you had, you would have killed the marquis. Those were blood oranges, and the red blood flowing in every capillary belonged to the marquis.”	Saint-fond	
“And the fruits were doomed to slip from his hands in the twinkling of an eye.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 61
“ . . . that devotion you bandy about every second word, is in reality a rotten, worm-eaten, sick fruit.”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 65
“I have come little by little to realize that when you run up against the thing you thought you wanted least in the world it generally proves in reality what you unconsciously most craved. That alone is qualified to become a memory. That alone can be trapped in amber. That alone is a seed that will mature into the fruits of memory which never cloy, no matter how many thousands of times you taste them.”	Renée	Act III, pg. 84
“That was the final stamp of the foot of the wine-presser trampling the grapes.”	Renée	Act III, pg. 90

## God

“That’s what give people such a thrill when they spit on the invisible Master, provoking him and arousing his wrath. But sanctity is a lazy dog. While he’s stretched out in the sun, abandoned to his nap, you may grab his tail or pull his whiskers, but he won’t open his eyes, let alone bark.”	Saint-Fond	Act II, pg. 49
“Are you implying that God is a lazy dog?”	Montreuil	
“Yes, a decrepit one.”	Saint-Fond	
“One man attempts to provoke the dog by whipping somebody, another y being whipped, one by shedding blood, another by allowing his own to be shed . . . and still the dog doesn’t even deign to open his eyes.”	Saint-Fond	Act II, pg. 50
“The world may turn upside down, but God draws a line, sharp as the line a child scratches in the pavement with a stone, between right and wrong.”	Simiane	Act III, pg. 97

## Gold

“ . . . he discovered inside a watchman’s hut a pile of firewood bundled together with straw ropes. Alphonse said how lovely it would be if, instead of that ugly firewood, they were bundles of white birchwood, bound with ropes of gold”	Renée	Act I, pg. 27
“If gold were outlawed, you can imagine how proud copper and lead – to say nothing of silver – would act. After all, silver, copper, and lead are alike in not being gold . . .”	Montreuil	Act III pg. 96

## Greek and Roman Mythology, allusions to

“I have reaped a full harvest of the weeds that grow on Cythera’s isle.”	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 8
“You were like Proserpine, carried off while she was picking flowers, to become the bride of the King of Hell.”	Montreuil	Act I, pg. 26

## Heaven/Hell

“The flames licking at the gentle smile and blond hair of my son’s portrait, while the mod cheered.”	Montreuil	Act 1, pg. 18
“This was the first time the flames of hell were visible in this world.”	Simiane	
“You were like Proserpine, carried off while she was picking flowers, to become the bride of the King of Hell.”	Montreuil	Act I, pg. 26
“I have learned that happiness is something like gold dust in the mud, glittering in the pit of hell.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 40
“Even the tortures of hell can be transmuted by a woman’s hands and a woman’s endurance into a single rose.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 42
“He peeps of a bit through the window at hell, then soars up to heaven, only to descend the next moment to the kitchen”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 47
“I’m sure he’ll portray me as a witch, or else he’ll set himself up as the King of Hell and give himself airs!”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 47
“Then they take in their hands the souls so miraculously caught, and carry them to the prison of light, the jail of bliss.”	Simiane	Act III, pg. 91
“He piles evil on evil, and mounts on top. A little more effort will allow his fingers to touch eternity. Alphonse has built a back stairway to heaven.”	Renée	Act III, pg. 104

## Honey

“He toils and gathers the honey of tenderness under the dazzling summer sun, then brings it to the cool, dark nest where I am waiting and bestows it on me. He is a worker bee of pleasure. The blood-colored flowers that produce the honey are certainly not his lovers. They are sanctified, trampled on, and their honey extracted.”	Anne	Act II, pg. 46
“I’ve tried telling myself it was love, but all I tasted was ashes mixed with honey.”	Saint-Fond	Act II, pg. 49

## Horse

“His desires flare up with desecration, the way it arouses a horse to trample pure crystals of frost beneath his hoof.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 45
“No one will ever know what I have suffered on account of the wild horse of my family.”	Montreuil	Act I, pg. 9
“Your wild horse is a thoroughbred”	Saint-fond	

## Light/Fire

“When the morning sun lights from the front the statue of Venus standing in some great courtyard, its brilliant rays pierce even the flanks of snowy marble. Can you tell me what part of Venus the sunlight will penetrate when, having circled the garden for half the day, it sinks at dusk in the woods?”	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 4-5
“The sunrise glowed like blood for, I neglected to say, it was still morning.”	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 6
“The gold of the June sun of Marseilles filtered through cracks in the shutters and dappled his bare white chest rising and falling with his breath.”	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 7
“At night torchlight flickered over the great walls, and bats flew back and forth, screeching . . .”	Renée	Act I, pg. 21
“When the grass around the château turned green, and the warm sunlight and the twittering of the birds fell on the frozen floors from the high, round windows like huge, shining, brass trumpets, I felt a surge of hope that Alphonse would soon be released.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 40
“A hope of faith has shone like a faint ray of light through some of his letters.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 47
“It’s not surprising, considering you pawned your silver for firewood, that the fireplace gave off a glow bright enough to turn the trunks of the barren trees outside a brilliant red.”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 66
“Drops of blood, like raindrops coursing down a forsythia stem in the rain, shone on your body in the firelight, as you dangled, half-unconscious with pain.”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 66

Extended metaphor about holy light in the soul.	Simiane	Act III, pg. 98
“The light was holy, I am sure, but it seemed to be shining from a different place.”	Renée	Act III, pg. 99
“What are you saying? There is only one source for the holy light.”	Simiane	
“Yes, that’s true. The source was the same, I suppose. But the light was deflected somewhere and shining from a different direction.”	Renée	

### Lizard

“ . . . when he was a child, his eyes would dance like a little green lizard scampering through the spring fields.”	Simiane	Act III, pg. 95
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### Roses/Flowers

“This sickness has roses under its surface.	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 15
“My teachings and ideals have found in you a glorious flowering.	Montreuil	Act I, pg. 25
“Alphonse stopped our carriage in the middle of a lily field and ordered a cask of red wine poured over the flowers, saying he wanted to make them drunk. He watched, fascinated, as the red drops of wind dripped from the white petals.”	Renée	Act I, pg. 27
“Can you distinguish between loving roses and loving the scent of roses?”	Renée	Act I, pg. 31
“Even the tortures of hell can be transmuted by a woman’s hands and a woman’s endurance into a single rose.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 42
“From now on, every morning at breakfast Alphonse will spread his bread with the rose jam you’ve made for him.”	Anne	Act II, pg. 42
“He toils and gathers the honey of tenderness under the dazzling summer sun, then brings it to the cool, dark nest where I am waiting and bestows it on me. He is a worker bee of pleasure. The blood-colored flowers that produce the honey are certainly not his lovers. They are sanctified, trampled on, and their honey extracted.”	Anne	Act II, pg. 46
“Drops of blood, like raindrops coursing down a forsythia stem in the rain, shone on your body in the firelight, as you dangled, half-unconscious with pain.”	Montreuil	Act II, pg. 66
“He is a dove. His is not a lion. He is a small, white, golden-aired flower. He is not a poisonous weed. Anyone who saw a dove or a flower brandishing a whip would feel like a wild beast himself.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 69
“I have become the accomplice of a dove, the accomplice of a small, white, golden-haired flower.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 79
“You know nothing of the world where the rose and the snake are intimates and at night exchange shapes, the snake’s cheeks turning red and the rose putting forth shining scales.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 73

## The Sea

“He, Mariette, and the manservant joined in a fellowship of pain like galley slaves rowing their banks of oars in a trireme across the sea.”	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 6
“It was as if he had buried himself in the sands of a shore washed clean of debris from the sea, where the shells had crumbled into powder, the seaweed had dried, and the dead fish had turned to chalk.”	Saint-Fond	Act I, pg. 7
“But the present experience has taught me the powerful lesson that a woman’s devotion is not the recompense she pays her husband for his occasional words or acts of kindness. It must be bound directly to her husband’s nature. The worm-eaten boat shares with the worms that feed on it the nature of the sea.”	Renée	Act I, pg. 30
“And a disordered bed by the window enveloped by the sweet voice of a man singing to his mandolin on the bridge, a bed that looked like seaweed washed ashore on the white sands of the beach, filled with the damp and odor of the sea.”	Anne	Act II, pg. 46
“I wonder if that line, like the line left by the tide on the shore, isn’t constantly shifting. Hasn’t Alphonse merely been standing where the waves broke, keeping one foot in the water as he gathered shells? The shells are red as blood, and there is seaweed too, twisted into ropes, and delicate little fish shaped like whips.”	Montreuil	Act III, pg. 97

## Water

“Sometimes gentleness and purity gush from inside him like a spring”	Montreuil	Act I, pg. 13
“And when the canals overflowed, so much water in the Piazza di San Marco you couldn’t walk across.”	Anne	Act I, pg. 35
“The sound of bells, bells across the stagnant waters.”	Anne	Act I, pg. 35
“The gondolas and the boatmen’s songs must have been lovely.” “Gondolas? Boatmen’s songs? Yes, I suppose that is what Venice means for most people.”	Charlotte Anne	Act I, pg. 36
“At the bottom of the depths of shame not even human feelings of sympathy survive. Sympathy is the clear water at the top. When the mind is agitated, the dregs rise from the bottom and make the clear water turbid.”	Renée	Act II, pg. 69
“My memories are insects in amber. They are not, like yours, shadows that flicker briefly over the water.”	Renée	Act III, pg. 83
“But I long ago detected a gentleness that most people never noticed, something like a hidden stream, flowing at the bottom of his heart.”	Montreuil	Act III, pg. 84



<p>“Nevertheless, the bed of the river was imperceptibly being deepened each time water overflowed into its course.”</p>	Renée	Act III, pg. 90
<p>“You are the fish caught on the line of God, the fisherman. No matter how often you may have slipped from the hook in the past, you have known in your heart that someday you would be caught, and you have been longing for the moment when you lay wriggling and glittering in the intense evening light of the eyes of God, your scales shining with the waters of this earthly life.”</p>	Simiane	Act III, pg. 90-91
<p>“Once a person frees himself of that arrogance, his real purity and uprightness become like pebbles in a riverbed. Then, even if he notices that other pebbles happen to be glowing in the evening light, it no longer distresses him.”</p>	Simiane	Act III, pg. 92

APPENDIX B

S.A.L.T. presents

*Madame de Sade*  
by Yukio Mishima  
translated by Donald Keene

*directed by Kathryn LeTrent*

*March 28th - 7:30 pm*  
*March 29th - 3:00 and 7:30 pm*

Shafer Street Playhouse  
Free Admission

Handicap accessible restrooms are located in Shafer Dining Court

## APPENDIX C

The program cover is the same as the poster, as in Appendix B. Program page 2:

### Cast in Order of Appearance

Comtesse de Saint-Fond	Jess Rawls
Baronesse de Simiane	Shelby Marie
Charlotte	Carmen Wiley
Madame de Montreuil	Sean Pugerude
Renée, Marquise de Sade	Katie Stoddard
Anne	Emma Humpton
Director	Kathryn LeTrent
Assistant Director	Joey Yiyuanfang Qiao
Stage Manager	Katherine Cairns
Sound Designer and Asst Stage Manager	John Alley
Voice and Speech Coach	Erica Hughes
Production Assistant	Breezy Potter
Production Manager	Lauren Davis
Technical Supervisor	Weston Corey
Graphic Design	Stephen LeTrent

### The Place

The salon in Madame de Montreuil's house in Paris.

### The Time

Act I - Autumn 1772.

Act II - September 1778. Six years later.

Act III - April 1790. Twelve years since Act II, and nine months since the outbreak of the French Revolution.

*There will be two seven minute intermissions.*

### Director's Notes

When Yukio Mishima encountered the transgressive Frenchman in the pages of *The Life of the Marquis de Sade* by Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, he found an ideal subject. Like the Marquis de Sade, Mishima, in the words of critic Laurence Kominz, was “fascinated by the tyranny of forbidden carnal desire, by the allure, the passion, and the danger inherent in beauty, transgression, and death”. Mishima was a prolific and diverse playwright, writing new plays for both the traditional theatre form, *kabuki* and the Western influenced spoken drama, *shingeki*. He drew inspiration from *kabuki* and *Noh* as well as from Ancient Greek and French Neo-classical drama. Japanese critics have praised the *shingeki* play *Madame de Sade* for its ability to pass for a French play. In this production, I chose to think of the play not as French or Japanese, but as cross-cultural. This production acknowledges and seeks to illuminate the French story, the Neo-classical style that Mishima emulated, as well as the underlying Japanese perspective that Mishima had on his subject.

Program page 3:

**John C. Alley** (Assistant Stage Manager/Sound Designer) is happy to be working with the wonderful cast of *Madame de Sade*. This is John's first SALT show, as well as his first time working as both an Assistant Stage Manager and a Sound Designer.

**Katherine Cairns** (Production Stage Manager) is a Stage Management major in the theatre program here at VCU. This is her third SALT production. She just finished working as a PA on *One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest*.

**Erica Hughes** (*monitrice de prononciation française et d'énergie vocale*) is in her first year in the MFA Theatre Pedagogy program, specializing in Stage Voice and Speech. She has a *certificat d'immersion* from the *École de Langue Française et de Culture Québécoise at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi*. She has a bachelor's degree in Theatre and French from Denison University, and has also trained at Carnegie Mellon University, the Gaiety School of Acting in Dublin, and Brandeis University.

**Emma Humpton** (Anne) is a sophomore Theater Performance student. You may have seen her as Jamie in Stage B's production of *None of the Above*. This is her first SALT show.

**Kathryn LeTrent** (Director) is a Theatre Pedagogy MFA candidate. She directed SALT's production of *Green Square*. Past directing credits in New York and North Carolina include *Howie the Rookie*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Suspense*, *Fool for Love*, *'Art'*, and *This is Our Youth*. She is a graduate of the Stella Adler Studio of Acting and holds a BFA in Drama from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. She has been a member of Burning Coal Theatre Company in Raleigh, North Carolina since 2008.

**Shelby Marie** (Baroness de Simiane) is a sophomore performance major. Past credits include *Dog Sees God* (ensemble), *A Romeo and Juliet* (Nurse/Montague), and *The Rising of the Moon* (Sergeant) with SALT and VCU Theatre's *Ramapalooza*.

**Sean Pugerude** (Madame de Montreuil) is a second year performance major. Her most recent productions include *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* as Nurse Ratched U/S, *Contractions* as Manager and *Bachelorette* as Becky.

**Joey Yiyuanfang Qiao** (Assistant Director) is a Theatre Pedagogy MFA student, and a graduate in directing of the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, China. Past directing credits include *Emperor Qin*, *The Doubt*, *The Peach Blossom Land* and *No Exit*. As an international student, she has some acquaintance with East-Asian culture especially for China and Japan.

Program page 4:

**Jess Rawls** (Comtesse de Saint-Fond) is a junior Theatre BFA performance major and has previously been seen on the SALT stage as Van's Sister in *Dog Sees God*, Maire in *Translations*, Grania in *Grania*, and Lainie in *Two Rooms*. She recently co-directed *Never Swim Alone* with Colleen Murphy on the SALT stage and has been seen on the VCU main stage in the ensemble of *Sweeney Todd*.

**Katie Stoddard** (Renée, Marquise de Sade) is a Sophomore Theatre Performance Major. She is both honored and excited to start her involvement with SALT in this particular performance. Her most recent project was *30 in 30: The Medea Project*.

**Carmen Wiley** (Charlotte) is a freshman performance major. This is her second performance on the SALT stage. She was previously in *Pun: A Play on Words* as Barmaid.

Costumes on loan from:  
**Playmakers Repertory Company - Chapel Hill, NC**

#### **Special Thanks**

Emily Atkins  
Dr. Noreen Barnes  
Wesley Broulik  
Brittany Ginder  
Hannah Hammond  
Chris Hershey  
Kate Salsbury  
Susan Schuld  
Eva LeTrent

## VITA

Kathryn Ruth LeTrent (née Milliken) was born on December 30, 1984 in Ithaca, New York. She graduated from Morrison Academy in Taichung, Taiwan in 2003. In 2007, she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Drama from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where she studied at the Stella Adler Studio of Acting. She subsequently worked as an actor and director in Raleigh, North Carolina for four years. She was on the staff of Burning Coal Theatre Company from 2007 to 2009, first as a directing intern and then as the Associate Artistic Director. She taught drama at Cardinal Gibbons High School from 2011 to 2012.