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LOST IN AUSTEN: AN IMMERSIVE APPROACH TO *PRIDE & PREJUDICE*

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

by

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Abstract

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By Erica Hughes, M.F.A.

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

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2015

Director: Susan Schuld
Assistant Professor, Head of Voice & Speech, Department of Theatre

This paper is an account of the Theatre VCU mainstage production of *Pride & Prejudice*, in which I played the roles of Mrs. Bennet and of the vocal coach. In order to address the various skill levels of the cast, I planned to coach the production in a manner inspired by immersion language learning programs, with the cast speaking in dialect throughout the rehearsal process so as to learn the necessary vocal skills and to grow together as a theatrical ensemble. When the director of *Pride & Prejudice* was not receptive to this plan, I had to compromise and adapt while fulfilling my duties as actor and coach. The paper includes my initial ideas, a detailed account of pre-production,

rehearsals, and performances, and an analysis of the many lessons I learned about artistic collaboration and the art of dialect coaching for the stage.

Introduction

The genesis for this project was a seemingly innocuous annual event in the theatre department of Virginia Commonwealth University: the “Holiday Hoo-Ha”, where each December, the student body and faculty gather to celebrate the season with pizza and ugly holiday sweaters. But the Hoo-Ha is not well-attended because of the refreshments. Its highlight is the unveiling of the next mainstage season. At the Hoo-Ha of December 2013, the season announcement set me off on an artistic journey that would teach me immeasurable lessons about myself as an actor, a dialect coach, and a collaborator. The journey began with three words: “Pride and Prejudice”.

At that point in time, I had no concrete ideas for my thesis. I had just finished a frenetic first semester of graduate school; my brain was expanding every minute of every day. I knew that my thesis did not have to be just a giant research paper, but that seemed like the most familiar path to take. I knew it had to have a focus in voice and speech for the theatre, since that was the focus of my graduate track. But I did not feel qualified to write some prescriptive treatise, and I couldn’t imagine a topic on which I would ever have more answers than questions. (I now know that this is the usual state of scholarship, but, at the time, I thought my thesis must be on a topic on which I already had some level of acumen and expertise.)

My first thought when it was announced that Theatre VCU would be producing *Pride & Prejudice* was not actually thesis-related. I immediately knew that I wanted to play the role of Mrs. Fanny Bennet, the comedic matriarch of the family. I had put my acting passion aside for the last few years to focus on voice work, but I missed it terribly. Admittedly, there was an even more personal reason that I coveted the role. My mother, who had not seen me perform in many years, had expressed a wish when I was around 13 years old for me to play Mrs. Bennet. I wanted to play the role as a gift to the neglected performer in me, and as a gift to the most supportive figure in my life. I also felt that the more acting experience I had, the more I could specifically tailor my voice teaching to the performers in my classrooms.

I went to the director of graduate studies, Dr. Noreen C. Barnes. She said that this was certainly possible, since graduate students occasionally played adult roles on the mainstage alongside the undergraduates. However, noting the production dates, which were in the last semester of my graduate studies (the thesis semester), she advised that if I wanted to play Mrs. Bennet, I should make the production work my thesis as well. "Otherwise, you'll drown," she cautioned. I left her office feeling deflated. I wanted to play Mrs. Bennet so much, but what kind of thesis could I make of it? Other VCU graduate students had written their theses on acting in and vocal coaching the same production, but I did not want to simply retread their ground. And I had never coached a VCU mainstage on my own before; could I handle the work of that as well as acting? I felt passionately about acting in the show, but did not want to

shoehorn the biggest paper of my academic career into *Pride & Prejudice* without a clear plan.

In a rather cinematic moment, I woke with a start in the wee hours of the morning just a few days later. Though I had never coached a VCU mainstage show on my own, I had assisted on them enough to see the difficulties of this particular academic theatre environment. Hodges Theater, where VCU mainstage productions are performed, is an acoustically difficult space, and rehearsals are held in much smaller rooms that do not adequately prepare the actors for what will be required to be heard by the audience. Dialect work was often addressed so late in the rehearsal process that no real improvements could be made, stage projection while maintaining vocal health was not allowed to be spoken of until tech week, when actors were often already falling ill, and (perhaps the most difficult obstacle of all) casts were mostly comprised of student actors who may or may not have completed courses in the theatre department's voice and speech curriculum. Vocal and dialect coaching had to cater to novices, graduate students and faculty with years of professional experience, and everyone in between, in an extremely limited time frame. I felt I could not act in *Pride & Prejudice* and effectively coach it in this encumbered manner. But what if there was a different way?

Pride & Prejudice would most likely use only one dialect: Received Pronunciation, or Standard British. If the cast could learn it at the beginning of the rehearsal process, and be using it all the time, they could make each other's vocal work stronger by struggling and improving together. And if a regular regimen of voice-strengthening

warm-ups could be put into place at the start of rehearsals as well, the transition into Hodges might not be so jarring, and the actors' words would have a better chance of reaching the audience.

This idea of concentrating on voice and dialect work from the beginning in order to teach and drill new skills as a group was not foreign to me, though it had never been incorporated into my theatre work. It is the foundation of immersion language learning, where a group learns a new language by speaking it around each other all the time, in different contexts. The group improves by noticing each other's mistakes and progress over time, and by practicing constantly while doing a variety of different activities, there is less pressure to immediately produce. I had experienced this type of learning firsthand during my undergraduate years, when I spent a summer at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, at their École de langue française et de culture Québécoise [School of French Language and Quebecois Culture]. It was one of the most transformative educational experiences of my life, and I thought many of its principles would lend themselves well to theatre, particularly Theatre VCU.

And so, in the spring of 2014, my thesis was born. To aid actors at every level of voice and speech training, I would coach *Pride & Prejudice* in the style of an immersion-language program. Vocal warm-ups would be a part of every rehearsal, and dialect work would begin right away, with the cast speaking it throughout every rehearsal. This would be a very new approach for a mainstage, and so, to help implement it, I would also act a role in the show, thus serving as a role model by being a constant presence throughout rehearsals and performances.

Of course, my thesis concept's implementation would depend on the cooperation of the production team, most importantly, of the director. When that cooperation did not manifest fully, I had to adjust my concept and attempt to still serve the cast and production with as high a quality of coaching (and acting) as possible. This is an account of my immersive coaching concept, my compromises putting it into practice as a coach and an actor, and its effect on members of the cast and myself. This is how I was lost in Austen.

Chapter 1 An Immersive Ideal

Does the language belong to the actor, or is it being worn like a nice period costume to which the actor has little relationship?

- Susan Sweeney

I had heard of the concept of “immersion dialect work” in the past, but it was never fleshed out by those who claimed to have experience with it. “The director told us to speak in dialect all the time at rehearsal” was the common explanation, but it was not described as being especially effective at acquiring the dialect, as there was no enforcement of the policy, or a coach to help adjust the actors’ sounds. However, it was praised for the ensemble-building and sense of play that it contributed to the rehearsal process. I was not able to find much scholarly research or writing on this practice, and so began to develop my own ideas for how this immersive approach might be applied to *Pride & Prejudice*.

Immersion dialect coaching would be impossible and unhelpful for a show in which many different dialects were required, but *Pride & Prejudice* requires one dialect above all: Received Pronunciation, or Standard British. “When a single model is being sought for British-English pronunciation, RP is the obvious choice” (Upton 75), a statement that has proved true for every dramatic adaptation of Jane Austen’s work. For many Americans, RP requires major shifts in oral posture and in most vowel

pronunciations, as my experience assisting in Theatre VCU's Accents and Dialects class had clearly demonstrated to me. The actors would have much work ahead of them to acquire this dialect.

Language immersion scholar Stephen D. Krashen believes that simply speaking the sounds of a second language does not allow one to acquire the language itself. Having studied the successes of French immersion programs in Canada (of which I had firsthand experience), he found that "speaking, actual production, does nothing to directly cause second-language acquisition, since it is only *input* that counts. Speaking is a *result* of acquisition; the ability to speak a second language "emerges" or develops on its own only after the acquirer has built up enough competence by listening and reading" (Krashen 61). He also found that immersion is most successful because students are not just exposed to the second language in a language class, but rather are taught a variety of subjects in the second language itself. The second language is not the subject of learning, but it simply the "comprehensible input" through which other lessons are taught.

Krashen's study directly corresponded with my positive experience with immersion language learning. And I felt that these principles could help me teach RP effectively to the cast of *Pride & Prejudice*. If, in the usual model of dialect coaching (particularly at VCU), I only had an hour or two to teach the dialect, and then gave sporadic notes to the actors on their progress, the chances of true acquisition of RP (at a comfortable performance level for the actors) would be slim. "The comprehensible-input hypothesis maintains that the way to achieve this [second language acquisition] is

not to force speaking and writing but to provide massive amounts of comprehensible input. The ability to produce will be a result of this input" (Krashen 63). If the actors were speaking RP throughout the rehearsal process, during blocking, on breaks, during dance rehearsals, etc., they would be providing each other would tons of "comprehensible input", and I would be there to steer their development. Our dialect work wouldn't be limited to a dialect session or "class", but could be practiced in every aspect of our bringing the show to life.

This approach would also help overcome one of the biggest hurdles of coaching dialects at VCU: the various levels of voice and speech training that must be accommodated at once. Master dialect coach Bonnie N. Raphael states:

In a training situation, the ideal solution would be for the potential cast members to have participated in a class in stage dialects in which they have learned the International Phonetic Alphabet, have become familiar with a number of frequently used stage dialects and with the methodology for the acquisition of other dialects...Or, in the absence of such a course from their training curriculum, they might take a pre-audition workshop devoted to the particular dialect needed for a show so that, by the time auditions are held, they are already familiar with the general characteristics of and specific sounds associated with a particular dialect. (Raphael 47)

This is an ideal that is not present at VCU. The auditions are for two shows at once, and even if I could offer a pre-audition workshop, the students would not be required to attend it, and the director of either show would have the right to object to the students using what they learned in the workshop during their audition. I knew that I could be teaching the dialect to freshmen with no vocal training whatsoever, to graduate students with a myriad of professional experiences with dialect work, and to students whose experience with dialects was everywhere in between. Immersion from the ground up, for everyone, would allow me to reach all these levels of skill and knowledge.

A more consistent focus on dialect work would also allow for more focus on the cast's vocal health, which had also been a source of difficulty in coaching VCU mainstage shows. Actors, especially those in training, have many demands put on their voices. And to perform in the acoustically challenging Hodges Theater would take a much higher level of projection and skill than that required to rehearse in the basement rehearsal room of the Singleton Performing Arts Center. Jeff Searl and Erika Bailey found in their study of student actors that "when voice users experience a lack of sleep and high stress levels, careful warm-ups before rehearsal and performance are essential... For actors in a vocally demanding show and a training program that challenges them daily, a consistent vocal warm-up is paramount. Regular, effective warm-ups would hopefully lower the incidence of the perception of voice use deteriorating over the course of the day" (Searl 19). I had seen many student actors lose their voices in the transition from rehearsals in the basement to rehearsals and performances in Hodges, and I wanted to avoid this pitfall for the cast of *Pride & Prejudice* (including myself, who would be using my voice more than the average actor as a dual member of the production team). If my dialect immersion also included daily warm-ups for the voice (that perhaps included a dialect component as well), the cast would have very solid foundation from which to work.

Though I could not find scholarly accounts on immersive coaching, the strategy I was developing seemed to be supported in the reflections and production case studies of various master dialect coaches. Paul Meier, in working with an inexperienced cast, stated that his strategy "would be to saturate the untrained cast with tutorials and/or

rehearsals that were dedicated to granting them ownership of their speaking” (Zazzali 255). Evangeline Machlin’s treatise on dialect acquisition spoke directly to my concern of limited dialect coaching only hampering the cast’s overall performance by giving them dialect information, but no avenue by which to truly embody it.

Dialect speaking on the stage must be relaxed and natural. Do not let the use of the sound changes and the lilt put a straitjacket on your acting. Rather wear them so often in improvising in the dialect both out loud and in your head that they come to fit comfortably at last over your regular speech, like a well-worn coat. This effort may take one week; it may take six weeks...Surprisingly, you can become fluent in a dialect working from a single good model if you immerse yourself in it until you have words and tune by heart. (Machlin 4)

I felt emboldened by these statements from some of the most venerated coaches in the field. If I could incorporate dialect and vocal work into the *Pride & Prejudice* rehearsal process much as a language immersion program incorporates the second language into a student’s curriculum, I could help the actors develop their RP skills in the context of their characters’ place in the world of the play (and likely give them a strong enough foundation that they could use RP for other roles in the future), stay vocally healthy while being heard in Hodges Theater, and become a stronger theatrical ensemble. I explained this idea to various members of the Theatre VCU faculty, who enthusiastically supported it. Bonnie Brady, the head of stage management, even proposed that some of the tenets of the immersive approach (warm-ups, speaking in dialect throughout rehearsal), could be part of the Rehearsal & Performance contract (which dictates what actors must do in order to receive credit for performing in a mainstage production). If students did not participate, their grade would be lowered. With that institutional support in addition to my near-constant presence throughout, I felt that this approach

could make *Pride & Prejudice* a very vocally successful show. Now, I just had to convince the director.

Chapter 2 The Compromise Begins

If actors work on technical things at the same time as they are working on their parts, at least they come to understand that these things belong together.

- Robert Lewis

Dr. Dorothy Holland of the University of Richmond was hired to direct *Pride & Prejudice* in the summer of 2014, and I was elated to be working with a female director with such an impressive resumé. Dr. Barnes told me that Dorothy was aware that I would be playing Mrs. Bennet and vocal coaching the show, and that I should meet with her to discuss my immersive plan and figure out the logistics. At this point, I had found some works on dialect coaching that espoused the virtues of a more immersive style, primarily *The Dialect Handbook* by Ginny Kopf: "When I dialect coach a play, I make a pact with the actors that the minute they arrive at rehearsal, they speak in dialect. Ask your director to help support this discipline" (62). I hoped that once I explained the common pitfalls of voice work in VCU mainstages, Dorothy would allow me to implement my immersive model.

Our first meeting was on September 24th, a few weeks before the auditions for the show. I first addressed my acting role, asking if Dorothy would like me to read for her, since my playing Mrs. Bennet had already been agreed upon before she was hired. She responded, "No, you're perfect", and so we moved on to discussing my other role as vocal coach. I told her of my goals for the show's dialect work: to make it part of the

actor's skin, to introduce it as a technical skill but (with enough practice and guidance) have it transition to a human and organic process, and to do it in an immersive style, so as to explore techniques of communal and personal dialect study as well as helping the actors live as themselves, and as their character's selves, in dialect. Dorothy balked at the immersive idea, stating that it might get "annoying" and would hinder an "organic" rehearsal process (which would become her refrain throughout the next few months). I felt some internal panic rise, but tried to assure her that I also desired organic voice and dialect work, and that an immersive approach would, I believe, bring about the most natural and successfully consistent results. She said no to immersion.

But she did acknowledge that dialect is an essential part of a successful production of *Pride & Prejudice*, confirming my assumption that the cast would be speaking Received Pronunciation. As explained in *English Accents and Dialects*, "Whenever British rather than, say, American English is taught, the accent presented as a model for the learner will almost always be 'received pronunciation' or 'RP'. 'Received' here is to be understood in its nineteenth-century sense of 'accepted in the best society.' While British society has changed much since that time, RP has nevertheless remained the accent of those in the upper reaches of the social scale, as measured by education, income and profession, or title" (Hughes 2). I then put forth methods of teaching RP, hoping to keep some of my immersive ideas. We came up with a list, including: doing general dialect sessions with the whole cast during the beginning of the rehearsal process (using neutral text, not that of the play), running scenes twice (first with Dorothy to focus on blocking and acting moments, then with me to focus on dialect and

voice work), and doing early readings of the play in dialect, to have the cast try it in a low-pressure environment. I also asked for and received permission to organize immersive activities outside of rehearsal (having “teatime” while speaking RP, for instance); however, attendance for these activities could not be mandatory. At least I would begin working with the cast immediately, and perhaps once Dorothy saw how effective the early coaching was, I could renegotiate the immersion model.

She then asked me about my thesis’s specific focus; cautioning me on how hard it will be to switch “hats” between actor and dialect coach. How will these dual roles affect my portrayal of Mrs. Bennet? Already a very shrewd and judgmental character, perhaps my Mrs. Bennet will focus more on other characters’ vocal qualities when interacting with them. This inspired the idea of another possible benefit of immersion coaching: helping the actors get to know their characters (who are in a very specific geographical and period setting). I then asked Dorothy if I could interview or survey the cast during the process and received permission. Speaking of the actors made me recall a passage from *Vocal Direction for the Theatre* by Nan Withers-Wilson: “In light of the production’s vocal challenges, the director and the vocal director need to discuss what they will be listening for in the audition process. This includes numerous vocal qualifications ranging from vocal expressiveness, flexibility, and stamina to vocal quality, pitch, and articulatory clarity as they relate to the demands of the play’s various characters” (58).

So I inquired about auditions, and Dorothy explained that though she did not want actors speaking in dialect for them (she would only be casting their “organic

selves”, and it would be my job to give them the tools of the dialect in rehearsal), I should be present for the auditions as “thesis fodder”, and participate in callbacks as an actor to help cast my scene partners. I left the meeting feeling somewhat defeated, but hopeful that Dorothy would continue to recognize the importance of dialect and voice work in rehearsals and endorse my efforts.

Her refusal to let me implement the immersion model stopped me from pursuing having amendments made to the department Rehearsal & Performance contracts, as Dorothy did not want too much focus put on the voice work. If I did not have her support in enforcement, it would be practically impossible to justify changing department policy. I hoped that by being in the cast myself and continuing to dialogue with Dorothy, I could still give voice work more focus in rehearsals than had been possible in past mainstage productions.

My cautious optimism took its next major hit a few days before auditions, when Dorothy emailed me to say that she did not feel she would find the “right balance among the family members” if I did not read for the role. When I asked for clarification, reminding her of her previous statement that I attend the initial auditions, she replied that that would not be allowed, and to prepare to perform a monologue along with all other auditionees. I felt confusion and some embarrassment. She had asked that a notice be displayed in the department stating that I was playing Mrs. Bennet, so that the women auditioning would not prepare material hoping to be cast in that role. Certainly I understood her desire to see my work so as to cast a believable family, but this reversal from our previous conversation (and her refusal to comply with the

department's instruction that I play Mrs. Bennet as a component of my thesis) made me wary of working with her in two very demanding capacities. But I had did not want to give up before the process had even begun. I prepared a monologue, convinced her of my ability to play the role, and was officially cast.

The audition experience made me very unsure as to what plans made during our September conversation would still hold true when rehearsals started in January. I was unsure how much dialect and vocal work to prepare for, and in what manner to best execute it to keep Dorothy happy (which would be essential to our working relationships as director and coach/actor). I now had more trepidation about being able to renegotiate for my immersion model; however, the strongest case I could make for my concept of coaching the show would be to give the cast the strongest foundation possible in dialect and voice skills with whatever time and I support I was given.

Chapter 3

"I Shall Go Distracted"

Journals of Rehearsals and Performances

Pre-Production

12/5/14

Tonight was the first read-through of the script. Susan Schuld, head of Voice & Speech at VCU, had suggested that I try to conduct a dialect session during this time, since this was the only scheduled meeting of the cast before winter break and before the official beginning of rehearsals. I prepared a "Standard British Dialect Basics" packet, modeled after Paul Meier's *Accents & Dialects for Stage and Screen*, in hopes of doing dialect work after the read-through. However, stage manager Lydia Millet informed me via email that the schedule for the evening was already tight, and that there would not be time for dialect work. I decided not to push the issue, but instead to save the goodwill to try to get more dialect work on the docket for the first week of rehearsals in January.

Dorothy spoke about the "double-bind" that we will be caught in as cast members in trying to portray a natural, truthful Regency experience, which in itself requires lots of artifice in speech, movement, and emotional expression. She told us that we are creating the world of this story ourselves, beginning tonight. Despite my difficulties in working with her during the fall, I was invigorated by her energy and clear

expression of her vision for the show. She commanded us to use the novel of *Pride & Prejudice* as a source, but not to watch any dramatic adaptations. It was good that I knew this opinion of hers before planning a dialect-learning session, as I instinctually would have included dialect samples from other Austen adaptations. (This commandment of Dorothy's would continue to haunt me with her edict of "no actors!" as dialect samples.)

Though she said before the reading began that dialects were not necessary tonight, James Stover (Mr. Bennet), who has the first line of the play, said his lines in Received Pronunciation. The other actors followed suit, to the best of their ability. This was very helpful for me, as I was able to make note of the words being mispronounced in dialect. It became immediately apparent that the whole group would need a lesson in pronouncing the geographical locations in the play (Hertfordshire, Meryton, Derbyshire, etc.) and that the "ask list" would need to be addressed swiftly. Though all the actors were trying to add some British flavor (already responding to the trend of the ensemble), I was hearing several strains of dialect: an actor's personal idiolect (when they could not hold RP for more than a couple of words), Neutral American (trying to sound more "proper" than their idiolect but not sure of how to transition to and maintain RP), RP without making the "ask list" sound changes, and an Estuary-like blend of British, with some RP and some Cockney sound changes. But I was delighted that every actor made some sort of attempt to sound British, without stopping the reading of the play. I now had ideas of the actors' abilities and instincts when it comes to RP, as well as a specific list of initial words giving them trouble.

Dorothy then shared more of her thoughts on the script and story: though the plot may seem “light” or frivolous, it is not remotely superficial or without substance. She described the world of the play as “rich, linguistic, and confident”, with judgments being made on appearance (and that the “physicality and the dance” would help the actors and the audience understand the world more than anything). I didn’t quite agree with her emphasis on physicality; the “pace and animation” that she desires onstage will be accomplished largely through the actors’ speech, which would also have played a huge role in how one was perceived and received in Regency society.

I asked permission from Dorothy to address the place names, which she gave. I did a “listen-and-repeat” session for the geographical names in the script, as well as the character name of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, which had been giving some actors trouble. I assured the actors that I would be posting helpful dialect materials onto the communal Google Drive account (although I want to speak to Dorothy more about her wishes for these materials before posting anything).

Dorothy’s rules for memorizing lines: write them out, don’t speak them aloud. This way, actors won’t get trapped into a particular way of reading their lines. I fear this may keep the actors from practicing the RP dialect with their actual text from the play. Dorothy addressed dialect at the end of the night by saying that the actors must make the characters their own, and then add the technique of “accent”. However, she did say that the technique is needed, or the world of the play will fall. But she doesn’t want the “accent” to distance the actor/disturb the actor’s rhythm/make characters too mannered, advising them to “find the feelings and then add it”. (She mentioned the

exception of the character of Mr. Collins, whose dialect may be affected for humorous purposes.) Her hierarchy of focus is words → circumstances → world → relationships → dialect. I am in opposition to this, as the dialect is such an integral part of building this world, and the earlier that it can be concentrated on, the more natural it will feel.

12/13/2014

Before leaving for winter break, I met with Dorothy and assistant director Hannah Hammond to discuss what vocal and dialect work will be done when rehearsals begin in January. Dorothy stated that she does not want to use microphones for the show, and I told her that I believe that will require as much time in the Hodges Theater as possible to prepare the cast for the largesse and acoustic difficulties of the space. She agreed, adding that she will tell Lydia (stage manager) to ask for permission from the technical faculty to have vocal work in Hodges throughout the week.

She then asked me what I would like to do to teach the dialect. I listed several teaching tools: discussing stereotypes and impressions of RP before and after listening to sound samples, learning the sound changes (in the style of Paul Meier), phonetic pillows, and speaking text together in the dialect (perhaps with poetry from the Regency period). Dorothy liked these ideas, but instructed me to not use text from the play when learning the dialect. She told me that I will do a vocal warm-up at the beginning of every rehearsal, and have an hour for dialect work at the end of every rehearsal during the first week in January. This is thrilling, and certainly more focus on voice and dialect work than I have ever been able to get in a production (and so early in the process!).

She also said that I should not use any “actors” as examples of the dialect, preferring “real speakers” found in BBC radio broadcasts, political speeches, and addresses by members of the British royal family. Though I know that RP is primarily spoken by actors (and that many older actors have been so heavily trained in RP that they speak it in their everyday lives as well), I acquiesced to this. I later revised my dialect packet for the cast, which had a list of actors to listen to as examples.

I asked if it would be alright to plan immersive bonding activities for outside of rehearsal (a compromise from the immersion plan), and she said yes. I asked if the idea of running scenes for dialect work after they are blocked with her (discussed at our September meeting) was still part of the rehearsal plan. Aghast, she said, “absolutely not”. That was one of the compromises that I felt the best about, as it still meant that dialect work was being addressed consistently in rehearsal. But her reaction was so strong that I could feel that this subject is closed.

I asked if the read-through was typical of how she’d like dialect to be used in rehearsal (actors free to try it, but will not be corrected at the time). She said yes, that the actors can start trying it as soon as possible, but that the dialect is “a serious technical skill to be worked on outside of ‘class’”. She then repeated that she wants both of us to encourage the actors’ personal sounds, and not let the dialect change their natural cadence and warm sensibilities (mentioning Jess Rawls, who is playing Elizabeth Bennet, as a particular concern of this). I assured her that I do not wish to erase any actor’s individual sound in the service of gaining a good RP dialect. I asked about Caroline Downs, playing Mrs. Gardiner, who had spoken in more of an Estuary-

blend dialect at the read-through. Was that acceptable, or should I plan to steer her more in an RP direction? Dorothy said that her blend was fine; in fact, the Gardiners and Sir William Lucas are all characters who can sound a bit more lower class. This was not consistent with my research or my dialect-teaching plans, but I nodded and smiled. I will wait to see how things unfold in January.

Before leaving, she reminded me that I will need to find times to “switch hats” (between actor and dialect coach). She will be asking a lot of me as an actor, and I cannot be doing both jobs at once, to the detriment of both.

I emailed Julie Little, the production’s dramaturg, about Regency poetry to use for dialect practice. She sent me some helpful Internet resources.

Rehearsals

1/5/2015

Dorothy began by quoting Constantin Stanislavski: “General is the enemy of art.” This week of intensive rehearsals before the beginning of the academic semester would be about getting to specifics and beginning to create the world of the play. It would also be about focusing on “technical skills”: movement, voice, and dialect.

I had prepared a warm-up for Hodges, and told the cast that I have a four-point plan for audibility without microphones: Maximizing Breath, Resonance, Intention/Focus/Sending Energy, and Articulation. We only got through breath and resonator exercises today, as I added a component of having them lie on the floor for some of the exercises and then vocalize what differences they noticed between floorwork and standing work. I already see that doing this work in the performance

space will be incredibly beneficial (and certainly unusual for a typical VCU production), as the actors can immediately tell how much of an effort it will take to fill this space. I know it will be hard to keep that idea in their heads once we go downstairs to the basement for the bulk of rehearsals.

We read through the script for “facts” (back story, history, evidence of place and relationships), and instead of each actor reading their character’s lines, we read round-robin style in a circle, each actor reading whatever line comes next. Dorothy asked that no dialect be used, so that there is no “jumping to performance”. I still made word pronunciation notes, including terms that gave actors pause (“Hertfordshire”, “Rosings”), character names that I have heard pronounced unusually in other period dramas (“Maria”), and terms that I was unsure of myself and want to feel comfortable addressing as dialect coach (“ensign”, “chaise”, “entail”). Each actor was assigned some historical research to do for the following day. I realized that I will have more homework than anyone each night, preparing what Dorothy asks of me as an actor, as well as vocal and dialect session prep (and line memorization, should I choose to start it).

The dialect session began with talking about impressions of RP, listening to Ian McKellan and Karen Savage audiobooks, and discussing the features of their RP dialects. I told the actors to make notes on the blank first page of their dialect packet, and not to look inside yet. After listening to a few native British speakers from Paul Meier’s International Dialects of English Archive, some actors noted the more relaxed and inconsistent sounds (as compared to performers McKellan and Savage). I thanked

them for these observations, and told the cast that we are not aiming for “real” British dialects (in fact, pure RP isn’t actually spoken by too many people on the street today). We are aiming for a consistent and recognizable RP for our American audience: “We don’t have the luxury of doing a true British, because we have to be heard on stage and tell a story. We need an inauthentic, performative quality.”

I then asked for them to share any apprehensions about the dialect and applying it to this show. Some actors stated specific concerns (“I’ll go Cockney”, “It’ll sound Irish instead”) and others were more general (“I’ve never done an accent and I’m afraid of looking silly”). I told them that I will be here for them every step of the way and that we all share these fears together and will overcome them together as an ensemble.

1/6/2015

My vocal work time (an hour yesterday) was clipped to 20 minutes today to accommodate more dance rehearsal. We focused on breath capacity first. The cast got into a child’s pose on the floor to access breathing into the lower back, as well as lying on their backs with hands on their ribs for intercostal muscle stretching. I introduced Patsy Rodenburg’s forced capacity exercise, with releasing breath efficiently while rolling from one semi-fetal position to the other, as well as rolling up and down the spine while standing. The cast got to 20 breath counts! I also talked about the difference between nose and mouth breathing, reminding the cast to be aware of their breath needs while dancing and speaking. We also warmed up the chest, mouth, and nasal resonators, introducing the Linklater “hey” and Rodenburg “Da Vinci” pose for the mouth resonator.

I moved into the third section of my four-part plan by splitting the cast into two groups, one of which stayed onstage, with the other heading to the top tier of the theater. I explained the Estill cricoid cartilage tilt, which increases volume and vocal energy. The two groups chose a partner on the opposite side of the theater, and called "Hey! Francesca!" to each other one by one, tilting the cricoid on each word. I pointed out the jump in audibility and energy. I asked if anyone is feeling any throat tension or vocal discomfort (no affirmative response) and gave each actor some personal vocal attention. I introduced Rodenburg intoning, and each actor intoned counting 1-5 and then speaking to their partner, with me noting the positive shifts made.

We then moved into the fourth section of the plan, first by gurning (making extreme funny faces, using all facial musculature) and then isolating the tongue for stretches. I introduced a tongue stretch sequence to *The Addams Family* television show theme song, which I learned from Janet B. Rodgers. We did this sequence three times, first with just the tongue movements, then with the rest of the face muscles also moving where possible, then while jogging to activate breath. We ended with a breathing circle, closing our eyes and listening to achieve unison breathing as a way to build ensemble.

As we continued to mine the text for facts, I noted that I need to ask Dorothy how she would like "Mamma" and "Papa" to be pronounced. My instinct is /mə 'ma/ and /pə 'pa/, but I will ask Dorothy her preference at the next opportunity.

For the dialect session, we listened to Dame Judi Dench being interviewed and

discussed what we heard. I then had the cast turn to the second page of their dialect packet, which outlines the background of the RP dialect and detail sound changes. We learned and practiced each sound change, with a "listen-and-repeat" structure led by me. The actors first spoke the example words for each sound change in their own idiolect, and then switched to RP. While progressing through the sound changes, I pointed out features that the cast discovered during our session yesterday (particularly regarding oral posture, with lip corners brought in and the jaw dropped).

Page 4 of the packet features Keats' "A Thing of Beauty", a Regency-period poem. Each actor read a line of the poem in RP, and I gave some general corrections. We began to talk about sound changes that are character choices, such as the amount of "liquid /u/" or lip rounding making a character sound more "conceited" or "posh", and how making the /əʊ/ diphthong two syllables instead of one implies a point of view. I invited the cast to continue exploring the dialect as a character tool.

We were assigned geographical research as homework. I uploaded links to all of the dialect samples that I have played in rehearsal to the Google Drive, as well as other ones that I have found and that have been sent to me by Susan.

1/7/2015

Vocal work got expanded back to 45 minutes, and we began on the floor with laughter (letting it build, feeling the stretch in the breathing muscles, responding to the ensemble). We then focused sound in a lip trill, closing into a hum, and then opening into an "aahh" (a Linklater sequence). We stood and did intoning and forced capacity, which I expanded into a game of tag (whisper counting to expand breath capacity as

you run around, tagging as many people as possible until you run out of breath). I then talked about the danger of the “stage whisper” and how it puts so much pressure on the voice, imploring the actors to either actually whisper (meaning that no one should be able to hear you if they are more than a foot or so away) or use their full vocal apparatus to speak. We then did the Addams Family tongue sequence, adding a Linklater stretch afterwards (ingressive and egressive “kah” with the body of the tongue rolling out of the mouth with the breath). We finished with consonant drills: “tuh tuh tah, duh duh dah, nuh nuh nah, luh luh lah, puh puh pah, buh buh bah, muh, muh mah” at various speeds, and then with various extreme emotions. I explained to the cast that it’s easy to articulate while calm and still, but not so easy when one is full of energy and adrenaline onstage, portraying a variety of emotions; therefore, we must practice articulating in more extreme circumstances. It gave the group an energy lift, and I was easily able to correct when articulation became lax.

Dorothy started off the dialect session by telling the actors that they should not watch videos to learn the dialect (even of native speakers). “You’ll have them in your mind”, and therefore might begin imitating physicality and other features of the person in the video and not staying true to yourself. This was a complete surprise to me, as she had never mentioned this policy before and voiced it in front of the whole cast, so that I had no opportunity to speak to her about it and address her concern. I completely disagree, as an actor and a dialectician. Viewing oral postures of speakers is an extremely helpful way to learn a dialect, and oral posture was something that the cast was already picking up on and wanting to practice more thoroughly. I suggested

that perhaps actors could cover most of their screens with paper so that only the mouth of a speaker was visible for study, so as not to be influenced by other business onscreen. Dorothy liked this idea, and replies that “studying the mouth movements is ok”, as “there’s nothing wrong with working outside in—it all meets up in the same place.”

I then reviewed the sound changes we learned yesterday and handed out copies of “First Love” by John Clare (another Regency-era poet), which is written in stanzas that I had divided into A and B sections. The cast got into pairs and recited it dramatically to each other in RP, as if they were competing for the object of the poem’s love (one of the actors suggested it be “Francesca” from the cricoid tilt exercise, and this quickly caught on). I strolled around and listened to each pair, giving adjustments to their RP. Once I had heard a pair, I sent them to challenge another others to a British romantic poetry duel, which you would win by staying in RP and delivering your stanza with the most enthusiasm. A mob then moved around the room, and even the most hesitant or unsure RP speakers got into the spirit and were staying in the dialect, as a circle formed and “lovers” stepped one by one into it, delivering their stanzas with passion.

Dorothy emailed me after rehearsal, suggesting that perhaps actors could be assigned a particular RP speaker to emulate. She included a link to a video of the Duchess of Cambridge, which she wrote might be appropriate for the character of Miss Bingley. I replied with thanks, adding that I thought the Duchess’ jaw is a bit tighter than what will be consistently audible and RP in Hodges (and it affects some sound

changes), but that it is a good example. I added the video to the Google Drive. I am now confused as to the video policy. If she doesn't want the actors watching videos for fear of imitation, than why give the actors videos at all (and suggest that a particular speaker could be their "model")? This seems to contradict her repeated desire for actor authenticity and natural vocal qualities.

1/8/2015

For vocal work, we began on all fours, doing a Linklater exercise of a touch of sound, closed into a hum, and then opening into an "aahh" as the actor rolls through their spine. We then stood to do Linklater rib stretching, creating more space for breath and therefore capacity, which we used to do a Linklater panting sequence, with small to large pants of anticipation, followed by sighs of relief. For the resonators, I added the ideas of spreading sound across space. I taught the Rodenburg "Da Vinci" arm pose for the chest resonator, the "ooo..waaaayyy" Linklater mouth spread for the mouth resonator, as well as combining the Da Vinci with Linklater's "will you wait" for the nasal resonator. For the nasal resonator, we also did the Linklater "hee" teeth resonating exercise with the tongue inside and outside the mouth, and then massaged the nose and sinus pads while saying "me me me may may my my". I then instructed the cast to use each resonator in different parts of their range, so as not to fall into the trap of isolating chest resonance in lower pitches or nasal resonance in higher pitches.

For articulation, we stood in a circle and "passed the sound", keeping consonants crisp and expressive. I had the cast try to make alveolar consonants, such as /t/ and /d/, with the tongue outside of the mouth. When this proved impossible, the cast noted

the importance of pointed diction with the tip of the tongue. I also broke down consonant clusters, including /tʃ/ and /dʒ/, having the cast practice each consonant individually before combining them for the clearest sound possible.

This was the first rehearsal with acting work. All of the actors playing Bennets worked together on the first scene of the play. After reading through it, Dorothy asked for questions. Anna Grey Hogan (Mary Bennet) asked me a pronunciation question. Dorothy stopped me before I could answer, saying: "We cannot impose on her [Erica's] time as a creative artist. We need to respect what hat she is wearing. We can't ask her pronunciation questions as if no other questions exist when we're talking about character and circumstance. We must protect her as a creative artist." I was very moved by this. She then addressed me: "You're doing these two roles, and they're totally opposite—they don't feed each other." I think I will be constantly agreeing and disagreeing with that statement. I certainly wouldn't have minded answering a pronunciation question during early table work, but I also need to respect my acting duties as much as my coaching ones.

For dialect work, which was truncated to half an hour, I had the cast listen to Paul Meier (who is a native RP speaker) speak the "Signature Sounds in Sentence Context" and "Coordination Exercises" that accompany his RP lesson in *Accents & Dialects for Stage and Screen*, which I also typed up and gave to the cast. There was much laughter at the tongue-twister-like word choices, and discussion continued on character choices that could be made with tone, musicality, and pronunciation.

At the end of rehearsal, Dorothy handed me a flash drive, which contained sound samples of Maggie Smith. There were also sound samples of unidentified native speakers, whose text was written in a packet that Dorothy also provided. She said she couldn't remember where she had obtained it, but thought it might be helpful. (I was eventually able to identify the materials as excerpts from *English Accents & Dialects* by Peter Trudgill and Arthur Hughes.)

I listened to these materials, and decided not to post them to the Google Drive. Maggie Smith's cadence is not reflective so much of classic RP, but rather of her age and particular vocal quality. The excerpts from *English Accents & Dialects* were not the best of pure stage RP, especially compared to the native speaker samples I had already posted. I had doubts about how much the cast would make use of the Google Drive resources, and so I decided not to overwhelm the page with links (figuring that even the laziest actor might make the time to listen to a couple of 3-minute sound bites). Susan sent me a wonderful documentary video about early 20th-century British debutantes, which I did post because of the wonderful oral postures and physical deportment on display.

1/9/2015

To further accommodate dance rehearsals, the vocal work was pretty much completely eliminated. We were allotted 10 minutes for a "personal physical and vocal warm-up". I took it upon myself to suggest to the cast ways of blending vocal and physical concepts (the physical taken from the pre-dance warm-ups created by movement coach Rebecca Frost Mayer). These blends included: warming up the nasal

resonators when doing stretches with the head looking towards the floor, whisper counting to build breath capacity while doing hip isolations, and combining articulation with Regency-period dance steps (“ooo..waaay” while doing a plié sequence). Not every cast member joined in, but many took note and followed my example.

We began blocking, and for the first time, I had trouble deciding where to put my focus. I wanted to correct pronunciation via asides to the other actors, but I needed to focus on my blocking and my acting. I also didn’t want to overwhelm the actors, who also had these new things on which to focus. I wondered: because I’ve been able to do all this group work early on, is it alright to let the dialect lessons germinate as the focus of rehearsals becomes lines and blocking and all the other business of the story? Most everyone was trying RP at every run of a scene, with no comment from Dorothy. James Russell, who plays Sir William Lucas and Mr. Gardiner, told me that “I’m at the point where it takes cognitive effort to stop [doing RP]”. That was very encouraging! However, Kaitlin Clabbers (Miss Bingley) was not speaking in RP, I think because of a lack of ability or nervousness about the dialect. Should I encourage her to join in and try her best at it? My instinct is to correct as much as possible now, at the start, in the hope that the dialect will stick, with less pronunciation corrections needed later (when, I imagine, it will be even harder to split my focus).

Many of the actors are clamoring for more dialect work (and asking for a more immersive experience at rehearsal), but I know Dorothy is not supportive of that, and doesn’t want the focus on the dialect. I need to be careful to keep her support, or my acting and my coaching will suffer. Maybe I will ask about some more immersive ideas

again soon? Hannah (assistant director) suggests that I could tell inquiring actors that they can speak in RP anytime they want; they don't need my permission.

An example of how being in an ensemble that is acting as a community, learning a new skill together, works: Kaitlin (Miss Bingley), who was not using RP for the last couple of days, in a second reading of a scene about to be blocked, seemed to notice that she was the only actor present not speaking RP. She tentatively tried it during that reading, and bolstered by the encouraging smiles of the actor playing her brother, kept it up for the rest of rehearsal.

Dorothy said this to Jess Rawls (Elizabeth Bennet): "You've got to find a way to make the dialect yours. It makes you arch and distant. You need to stay warm and direct." I can hear that Jess's version of RP right now relies mostly on nasal resonance, and I think a private coaching focusing on using chest resonance will help solve this. But I don't know when or how to approach Dorothy with this suggestion.

While a scene not featuring Mrs. Bennet was being blocked, Tricia Wiles (Jane Bennet) approached me: "Can I ask you a dialect question?" I knew this was her trying to abide by Dorothy's speech from yesterday, and I rather liked the compromise of it. Other actors have also started doing that, asking for permission before asking their question. I always grant it, thrilled that they are using their free time in rehearsal to think about their voice work. I am not yet bringing any notes to them, because I have been too busy writing my blocking and Dorothy's character notes and questions to answer (for instance, I am supposed to create identities for the 24 families that the Bennets socialize with in Hertfordshire, and imagine my feelings about all of them).

Tricia asked how to have Jane sound sick while still being audible. I suggested starting her phrases with a breathier quality, and using less pitch inflection to imply her character's lower energy. But I implored her to keep up articulation at all times!

Dialect work was allotted 45 minutes! However, it came at the very end of rehearsal (per usual), and at least a third of the cast had been excused for several hours and had to come back to the theatre just for this session. I could sense their indignation, and it affected my comfort level in leading the session. I did a "listen-and-repeat" with Paul Meier's "Signature Sounds in Sentence Context" and "Coordination Exercises", with me speaking them instead of Paul. This was partly so that I didn't need all the technology required to play media in the rehearsal room, and also so that the cast could hear a more nuance model in myself. Julie Little (dramaturg) had delighted us with a description of Jane Austen's "The History of England", which the author wrote at age fifteen. So I printed a copy for each member of the cast, and had them "popcorn" read it in RP, passing the reading responsibility at random times. When energy was getting a little low, I asked everyone to read it "Collins-style" (as Dorothy has given Patrick Bello, who plays Mr. Collins, free reign to make his RP as pompous and exaggerated as he likes), and with a particular emotion in mind. This created boundless more energy. I then facilitated a discussion about what the actors discovered. Their observations included: the dialect was easier to produce with an emotion attached, the dialect was easier to produce when one had to just read spontaneously (as opposed to having time to prepare text), and that keeping the focus

on the front of the mouth is really key to successfully speaking RP. All wonderful lessons!

Hannah (assistant director) tells me after rehearsal that Dorothy likes having dialect work at the very end of rehearsal because “they go away thinking about it [the dialect]. If they do it before scene work, they’ll incorporate it.” I am flummoxed by this. Why would incorporating the dialect into scene work be bad? Most of the actors are already doing that, and it’s making them stronger and more comfortable with it (and Dorothy hasn’t said anything to the contrary during scene work).

1/10/2015

Vocal work was once again truncated into a 10-minute personal warm-up. Those actors who do not dance in the show were not even allowed to warm up; they were pulled downstairs for character work. Some actors followed my lead, but most did their own thing. The upperclassmen were incorporating more vocal work, while younger actors did more physical stretching. With Dorothy observing the proceedings, I felt as if I should not call on the cast to do more vocal exercises. As it was a combined warm-up, Rebecca (movement coach) would have had just as much of a right to address the cast about what they were choosing to do with this time, and she was silent. So I simply tried to stay in a central location and lead by example.

During blocking, I noticed that many actors are already self-correcting their RP pronunciation (especially on the second or third run of a scene). This was very heartening, and when I caught the eye of an actor doing this, I smiled or gave a “thumbs up” so that they knew that I was noticing and appreciating these efforts.

Overall, the “ask list” needs the most attention; many actors are not making this sound changes. Conversely, the words “face” and “day” are sounding more Cockney in many of the actors’ dialects. This is a case of over-correction; those words don’t sound especially different in RP, compared with American English. I suspect that more forward chewing of the text and more jaw height would help these issues. I made sure to visibly massage my jaw between scenes and keep up chewy articulation during each run. If this was noted by the other actors, I couldn’t say; but it was the easiest and least obtrusive way for me to address dialect during times when I needed to have my actor “hat” on and when it would not have been appropriate for me to pull focus away from blocking.

The dialect session began with “listen-and-repeat” of the people and place names in the script, which need consistent practice for many of the actors. I then had them do popular tongue twisters, so that they were practicing RP on text they knew off by heart already (“Peter Piper”, “What a to-do to die today”, etc.). I then had each actor write a “key sentence”, which would help them personally jump into RP. We went around in a circle and shared them, to the amusement of all. Many of the actors used phrases from the Meier exercises, which was wise of them. I pointed out that Patrick Bello (Mr. Collins) had developed a very tight-lipped, stereotypically uptight RP, whereas Liz Peterson (Charlotte Lucas) had a more relaxed, but equally consistent, RP. The cast acknowledged these “equally British-y” ends of the RP spectrum, and I encouraged everyone to practice different places on the spectrum to find what feels best for their character.

1/11/2015

This was our first day off, and the end of the intense rehearsal week before the beginning of the semester. James Stover (Mr. Bennet) called me to inform me that Dorothy had told him to be careful not to model my tone/cadence when learning RP from me. I asked him if this is a concern he shares, and he said, "Not at all. I want to get help from you, and I know that that help will be more about pronunciation, not line readings." I am disheartened that Dorothy is sharing these concerns with actors and not with me. Luckily, James is an experienced adult actor and my colleague. But if she had said this to a young undergraduate actor, I can imagine that they would no longer trust in my assistance and not want to let me coach them. I am worried about how easily Dorothy could undermine my efforts.

James also told me that his throat hurts, and that he thinks that all the tight inflection and pitch jumps in the RP dialect are to blame. I told him to hydrate, go on vocal rest for the day, and that when he comes back to rehearsal, to think about yawning into the dialect, which will give him great jaw height and not put his throat and jaw in a tense place.

1/12/2015

We are now in the basement rehearsal room of the Singleton Performing Arts Center at VCU, with no more access to the Hodges Theater until technical rehearsals begin (a week before the show opens). There was still a personal warm-up scheduled at the start of rehearsal, which consisted of most of the actors stretching while running their lines (mostly in RP, much to my delight). I wanted to correct errors that I hear,

but I also wanted to warm myself up. And Dorothy had made it clear that she doesn't want dialect intrusions on other parts of rehearsal. My week of special dialect time is over, and I need to figure out how to navigate dialect work's place in the process from here on out.

Dorothy announced to the cast that actors who are not in the scene she's working on can run lines/do dialect work in the hallway. I jumped up to offer my services, but then realized that I am in every scene being blocked today. I am in many, many scenes, actually. I do not know if anyone took advantage of this "hallway" time, as I had to focus on blocking.

After my exit during one scene, I listened to the conclusion of it and noted some mispronunciations. I wonder when best to offer corrections. I am supposed to let the actors explore and not get them "into their heads" about dialect right now, but I know that these mispronunciations are sticking out like sore thumbs. I don't feel right about emailing out notes without permission from Dorothy, and I feel afraid to ask. Perhaps, with time, the actors will hear it and self-correct?

James Stover (Mr. Bennet) and I ran lines in the hallway with our understudies during a break. We had a light-hearted debate about the pronunciation of "advantage" in RP (/væn/ or /van/). Hayden Atkins, my understudy, thought that the more American choice makes the character sound excited (and therefore would work in the context of this scene), while the other actors thought the dropped vowel sounded more British. They all had intelligent thoughts on the dialect in context.

1/13/2015

I suspected the day would come, and it has: no more warm-up time allotted. Rehearsal began straightaway with blocking review. Though Dorothy heard it from me and a few other sources that the transition into the basement often gives the actors vocal amnesia if they aren't reminded to keep up Hodges-level vocal energy and articulation, there was no addressing of this to the cast. I could not warm up by example in the space, as the production team was setting up furniture and prepping the room for rehearsal. I did some yawns and lip trills on the sidelines, but no one seemed to take notice and follow suit.

During stops in the blocking action, I was able to correct some mispronunciations of the actors in my vicinity. During the review of a dance scene, I was able to speak with James Russell (Sir William), whose blocking brought him next to me. He said Dorothy had directed him to play the character drunk, and he wondered how that might affect his dialect. I suggested making his RP more "liquid" (as a way to slur his speech and get his sound more forward). He applies it during the next scene to some success.

I noticed Kaitlin (Miss Bingley) self-correcting some "ask list" words in her lines. She is the first actor to do so.

I figure that the only way I will be able to work on the dialect with the actors' actual text is individual coachings (which I want to do with the actors who are particularly struggling anyway). But when should those begin? I am booked solid most rehearsal nights with blocking, and Dorothy still wants no mention of it, as far as I can tell. Perhaps after the off-book date (Sunday the 18th).

1/14/2015

No time for a warm-up at all.

I'm finding it fairly easy to mark my script with pronunciation notes for the other actors, during pauses for technical and blocking business. During breaks or waiting in the wings for entrances, I gave notes to actors as unobtrusively as possible. But I really need some time with them to nail down most of the notes (especially if it's an actor with no voice and speech training). I can hear the bad habits that are sticking, and I want to correct them now. I can also tell that most voices are starting to seriously recede in energy, and that the power and concentration we had in Hodges is being lost. Is now the time to ask for more attention to come back to the voice? There is so much other stage business to attend to, for them and for myself.

1/15/2015

I did not attend the first hour of rehearsal, because I wasn't called. I'm racked with guilt. Should I have gone? I only missed rough blocking of a scene. As solely a vocal/dialect coach of a production, I've sat through many rehearsals where I knew I would get no interaction with the actors, but I took notes that I either emailed to them or stored for later use. But I used the time off tonight to memorize lines and relax by myself for a few minutes. Should I have allowed myself that break, or gone to the full rehearsal?

There are many repeated mispronunciations that aren't being corrected by Dorothy or me (due to no convenient opportunity and respecting her wish to not call the cast's attention to dialect). Julie (dramaturg) and Hannah (assistant director) told

me that they are both taking notes of these mispronunciations, as well. But they aren't passing them along to anyone but me. I really don't want the actors memorizing the words this way!

The silver lining is that every actor is always doing RP while acting, and the ensemble's dialect is fairly consistent overall. I wonder if it is strong so early in the process because they aren't being corrected, and therefore feel safe to try it freely for awhile? Are they not stumbling over the dialect because they aren't being corrected?

1/16/2015

I did not go to rehearsal, as I wasn't called. I struggle with the same guilty feeling, but it is easily overcome by using the time to catch up on sleep. Hannah (assistant director) texted me that Dorothy has noticed that DJ Powell (Colonel Fitzwilliam) and Liz Peterson (Charlotte) have the least consistent RP, with many American sounds present.

1/17/2015

Rebecca (movement coach) was beginning rehearsal with a dance review, and so asked for the cast to warm up. I took the opportunity to remind them that they can't let rehearsing in a smaller space drop their energy. I led by example with doing vocal work along with my physical warm-up, and though most followed my lead, many of the actors were doing loud and unhealthy "pushing" vocal sounds. I told them that it is not beneficial to phonate too early in a warm-up, and they chose more healthy, less effortful sounds.

Hannah (assistant director) told me that Dorothy did a dialect drill during yesterday's rehearsal (she couldn't remember specifics—something about moving resonance forward in the mouth while counting). I asked Dorothy about it at a break, and she responded, "had you been here, I would have shared it." I guess I can't take a night off, and that despite her edict not to address dialect right now, that rule only applies to me and my work.

I told her that I would like to start working with individuals who need extra attention, if she agrees. She told me to send the stage manager a list of who I think needs work, and that she'll make a list as well. I'm grateful that she wants the sessions to be scheduled during night rehearsals, and not take up the cast's valuable daytime hours. She told me a few things she's noticed, such as: Liz, DJ, and Ciara McMillian (Lady Catherine) not bringing their resonance forward enough, and Anne Forbes (Kitty) doing "something weird- it's like a Disney character." She then made some general statements about working on the dialect. "Give them problems to solve." "Dropping the jaw—for those who it's not natural—will be artificial. It's all about resonance." When I asked about bringing back a bit of group work, or at least a warm-up, she responded, "No. Voice work is character work; it must be done alone."

These are some new and confusing ideas from her, and I totally disagree about the jaw height/resonance hierarchy. Perhaps she saw something of this in my face, because she added: "You broke the ice and got rid of the fear. That's crucial. The foundation you gave them was wonderful." I appreciate that, but I don't want the foundation to go to waste. Mrs. Bennet doesn't appear as much in Act II, so I will be

able to work with others more once blocking on that begins. And Liz and DJ are in my dialects class, where I am teaching RP, so they will get extra work there. I must stay positive.

At the end of rehearsal, Dorothy gave every actor an envelope with a flash drive and a packet. She made no mention of these materials to me earlier in the rehearsal. The first sheet was presumably written by her, and is titled "Dialect Daily Drill Process." It states: "Building upon the foundational dialect work of our first week, you need to continue with daily practice. Use the enclosed daily practice drills to truly make the RP dialect work *your own*." It then instructs how to use the rest of the packet, and insists that the Resonance Drill should be the "basic warm-up and preparation for your other RP dialect work." No surprise there, as she had just told me how she feels resonance is the key to RP. It ends with: "Dialect work needs *daily* practice." I certainly agree, but I am embarrassed and confused. She has been telling me not to address dialect for fear of it stealing the actors' focus, and yet is now telling the actors to be thinking about it constantly. And I fear she has undermined my authority, by giving all this to the actors herself with no vetting (or at least warning) to me. Will the cast read this as a sign that she has no faith in my coaching, and so took the job upon herself?

I then looked at the packet, and my heart fell into my stomach. It is the Standard British chapter of *Acting with an Accent* by David Alan Stern, written in 1987 (the flash drive is the sound sample tracks that accompany the book). His work was considered thorough and innovative in its time, but I've been told by many of my teachers and colleagues that Stern is no longer considered a very credible resource,

mostly because instead of using native speakers as examples of the dialects, he only includes recordings of himself speaking them (often very poorly). This seems contrary to what Dorothy said she wanted me to provide to the cast. But I can now see where her focus on resonance comes from; Stern stresses it as well.

Dorothy approached me and said, "What's great about Stern is that he's not very good, so they'll [the cast] be encouraged that they can do better." Or they'll imitate his poor RP and lose all that foundation I gave them that you said you liked! I don't understand this logic at all.

1/18/2015

While not being used for rough blocking, I assembled a list of actors who I want to work with (which I sent to the stage manager, Lydia) and a list of what needs to be addressed with each of them (which I kept for myself). Lydia replied that she will schedule actors during night rehearsals before or after they are needed for blocking.

I then examined the Stern packet more thoroughly. I can see how it appeals to Dorothy and her concerns with dialect work being "inorganic", as Stern begins with small physical shifts in order to move the resonance before moving into lilt, rhythm, and pronunciation. But his wording is very academic, and often perplexing. I worry that the actors who do attempt to practice with it will be confused, and possibly misled (especially because they did not have anyone address the packet with them or guide them through it). I would have certainly done this, had I been given notice. But it's not my place to try to do so now. I am actually hoping that the actors don't listen to this material. While there are some useful drills in it, there is more harm than good to be

done listening to Stern's technique (for example, he claims that a key part of speaking in RP is to "dilate the nostrils").

1/20/2015

I listened to Stern's RP speech, and he comes off as cartoony and fake (exactly what Dorothy said she didn't want!). He often says, "And I'm going to exaggerate this sound..." Exaggeration is hardly "organic", and only Patrick (Mr. Collins) has permission to use an exaggerated sound.

I am more and more concerned that not going through it with the cast could be detrimental. Our dialect work together was ensemble-building, and working on this packet alone could weaken both the dialect technique and the communal nature of the show's speech.

I had my first private coaching. Liz (Charlotte) began by doing her lines in slow motion, to give her jaw time to drop more, and to fix each mispronunciation. As she has learned the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet), I helped her transcribe some words directly into her script. She expressed a lack of connection to her character, and so I asked her to describe what she thinks of Charlotte so far. She threw out words like "earnest" and "sensible", and I pointed out how she can use her voice and dialect to show off those qualities, with energy and articulation.

I also had DJ (Fitzwilliam) begin by speaking his lines very slowly, and then added in the idea of holding back laughter to give him more space in the back of his mouth. Then I had him nasalize the first few words of each phrase, to bring his resonance forward. I advised him to practice his lines as if everything he says is the

most important line in the show (to help with slowing down, pronunciation precision, and articulation).

Back in the rehearsal room, I took pronunciation notes during blocking, and gave them out during the dance blocking review (to those who weren't being used, of course).

Dorothy told me at the end of rehearsal that Ciara's Housekeeper character is now West Indian/Jamaican, and so she'll need a dialect from that region. Until now, the character had a light Cockney flavor. Dorothy said she wants the contrast between Ciara's two characters to be more extreme (as she wants Lady Catherine to be "totally aristocratic", à la Maggie Smith), and that she has historical proof for the choice. I conferred with Julie (dramaturg) and we both agreed that our research contradicts this choice, but the director's vision makes the decisions, of course.

1/21/2015

I met with Susan to discuss the show's progress. She offered to come in and listen to the tech and dress rehearsals and give me her vocal notes. This is a great comfort, as I won't be able to do that (I'll need to have transitioned completely into actor mode by then). It's an essential part of the vocal coaching job, and one that I admittedly hadn't put much thought into getting coverage for until now. I told Susan that I want to send the cast a questionnaire to gather their thoughts on the dialect work in the show, but that I fear Dorothy would disapprove and that it would further damage our working relationship. She advised me to go for it and embrace my fear!

Susan later sent me sound samples for the West Indies dialect, which I have no experience with and which therefore fills me with trepidation and dread. The material is actually from Stern's *Acting with an Accent*, but it's a good starting place (although his modeling of it is shameful). I looked for my own samples from Paul Meier's IDEA site as well, because I don't feel comfortable modeling it for Ciara (and because I want to provide her with as many resources as possible).

I had a coaching with Ciara (Lady Catherine/Housekeeper), in which we focused only on her RP, so that she could take more time to study the West Indies. She began by saying that she fears she can't give Dorothy what she wants for Lady Catherine. When I asked her to elaborate, she said that Dorothy sent her the same Maggie Smith sound samples that she sent to me, and told her to model her speech on them. Of course this is a struggle! No twenty-year-old woman can imitate Maggie Smith! And how does that serve her making the RP her own? I tried to diplomatically steer her into a different way of "modeling" her dialect after Maggie: aim for how she makes points, and stresses things. She never tries to sound powerful, she just is. Ciara liked this idea: "You don't try that hard. You just state the facts." She also noted that Maggie Smith has excellent articulation, and I said that that is something that would be great to model, as it gives great authority (and intelligibility). We worked on a few tricks for sound placement: slow-motion speaking, hiding a yawn while speaking, and physically acting as if you smell something bad (this gave Ciara particularly great tone and placement for her RP).

Kaitlin (Miss Bingley) also started her session with concerns on how to fulfill Dorothy's wishes. "When I flatline [use a very low, deadpan voice], Dorothy tells me she likes it." We worked on how to achieve that sensibility without giving up vocal energy, first with using more pitches in the voice (while the body remained closely controlled). I advised that pitch range and articulation are where the character can show how she really feels about things, without seeming overly passionate or out of line with Regency behavior. She also took to the "smelling something foul" physical trick, which tapped into a condescension very appropriate for her character. We ended with drilling some words with difficult sound changes ("chance" and "go" being particularly tricky).

1/22/2015

I begin to fear that I am neglecting my development of Mrs. Bennet in my attempts to be aware of everyone else's voices and dialect progression. I do not feel like I've made concrete vocal or acting choices, although reading the novel and doing historical research have brought many useful ideas to light. But I am so aware of wanting to model RP during rehearsals that I do not have a consistent (or a confident) tone/placement for my dialect. I can hear myself jumping into a Maggie Smith or Joan Plowright-style high-pitched stereotype more than I want. That nasal resonance is good, but staying too high-pitched will not be intelligible or pleasant for the audience, and it is not a choice that I am actively making, but rather one that instinctually happens when I am not making a conscious effort. I must make more time for myself to vocally experiment. But will the younger or less confident actors then lose an anchor

in me? Without time or authority to specifically address dialect in rehearsal, I feel my only option is to always seem prepared and confident in my RP and lead by example. If my tone falters or changes too much, will I be less of a leader (especially if Dorothy makes note of it publicly)?

I know I need to be my own anchor, with a healthy, consistent, regionally appropriate, character-driven, emotionally active, not overly practiced dialect with an audible and intelligible pitch range and resonance. NO BIG DEAL.

1/23/2015

I sent out an email survey to the cast. I asked Dorothy for her permission, and she had no problem with it. I thought about having paper copies to be filled out at rehearsal, but this way it's less intrusive. I think I may send out another one at the end of the run.

I was eager for my coaching session with Anne Forbes (Kitty). She has a naturally high-pitched, nasal tone, which gets intensified when she acts (with or without a dialect). I was glad that Dorothy is also concerned about her vocal work, and that I had permission to guide her in some changes. I don't know if her "Minnie Mouse" voice (a term used by Dorothy and Lydia) is an RP issue (she's using that pitch in an attempt to capture the dialect) or if it's her instinct of how to portray a young, exuberant girl. There was a scheduling mishap; I only had 15 minutes with her before I had to go be blocked in a scene. But Anne was a no-show, so I had to have the whole thing rescheduled anyway. I felt a bit like her mother, having to tell stage management about

the no-show and then accepting Anne's apology when she did arrive. Maybe it'll help our family dynamic onstage?

I gave Ciara (Lady Catherine/Housekeeper) some RP notes before our Act II stumble-through. Her RP still needs work, but she's made huge progress with many sound changes, particularly the /ɪ/ → /ɛ/ shift in words like "friend". (This has been the hardest sound for Ciara's Mississippi idiolect.) She is not attempting the West Indies dialect yet.

I have lots of pronunciation notes for Jess (Elizabeth), James (Mr. Bennet), and even one for Zechariah (Mr. Darcy, who has the most RP skill in the cast, next to myself). I want to share them, and hopefully can begin to email them out, now that blocking is done and detail work on the show is really about to begin.

During notes at the end of rehearsal, Dorothy said, "A few people need to practice the accent daily. I'll send you an email. It's keeping you from planting on top of the character." Will she include me in these emails, or tell me who she's addressing? I can guess, but this is the first time she's addressed dialect since we talked about private coachings.

1/24/2015

Rehearsals began with dance and transition reviews, so I was able to give a few pronunciation notes (and take down even more). I spoke with Dorothy about scheduling private coachings during the day, as we'll now be doing mostly runs during night rehearsal, which will tie up most of the actors I need to work with, as well as myself. She said, "I'll talk to Lydia." I know I could schedule these sessions on my own,

especially with the more mature actors. But I feel it would be inappropriate to bypass stage management. But what if Dorothy doesn't speak to Lydia? I'll have to wait and see.

Ciara (Lady Catherine/Housekeeper) approached me and said, "The Jamaican is scaring the hell out of me. If it were West African, I have friends I could listen to." In my research, I had discovered that there are many similarities between the two dialects, and so I told her that that is a fine template with which to start trying the dialect. Her RP continues to get stronger. She even told me that she can hear when she slips out of it. I told her that this is a good sign; she's only able to hear errors because she has more knowledge of the dialect and her personal use of it.

We had our first full stumble-through. I didn't want to keep my script with me, as it would be hard to keep track of (I have several entrance points), and I wanted to test my knowledge of my lines and my transitions. This means I missed out on taking dialect notes; perhaps I should keep a small notepad with me? But it was nice (and possibly essential) to just be an actor and focus on practicing the flow of the production.

1/25/2015

I did some more West Indies/Jamaican research for Ciara (Lady Catherine/Housekeeper). I found some West Indian and Montserrat "accent tags" on YouTube, where native speakers read a list of words and then answer questions, as well as a great linguistic/dialect breakdown from the BBC. I also used the Meier IDEA site and the George Mason University Speech Accent Archive to mine some native speaker audio samples. I also listened more closely to the Stern material, and between

his work and the BBC article, I feel confident that Ciara can use her West African friends for practice with no detriment to the authenticity of the dialect; West Indies and West African are very closely related. This is a huge relief to me, knowing that she has personal models with whom she can practice.

Stern prescribes the point of focus for the dialect as forward in the mouth, encircled by the lips, which may be slightly pushed out in a gliding feeling/motion. This is hard to decipher just listening to it (I have to repeat it several times to comprehend his meaning), and his modeling of it is rather embarrassing. But once I understood his basic concepts, I could hear them in the native speaker samples I've found. So I notated his basic ideas (the point of focus, resonance, and sound changes) and sent that information, along with the links to the sound samples and BBC article, to Ciara.

1/26/2015

I finally had my session with Anne (Kitty). She had a notion of overusing higher pitches, and associated it with trying to show Kitty's youth and energy. I suggested that her physicality and energy (physical and vocal) will make that clear, but that her pitch range will tire the audience's ear and risks making her unintelligible. If she starts with lower pitches at the start of phrases, her inflection will have somewhere to go. I showed her a notation technique of drawing rising and falling arrows on top of one's lines to mark inflection, and she started marking her script right away. In playing with rise and fall, it became clear that she hadn't given much thought to the operative words in her lines. I told her that when you know the operative word in a phrase, choosing

pitch and stress becomes much easier. "Oh yeah! The people in your sound samples do that!" she replied. She listened to the Google Drive! Huzzah!

We then worked on pronunciation, paying particular attention to overcorrections (words that are pronounced practically identically in RP and American that she had been changing). When I began to write things in IPA (which Anne, as a junior, has had exposure to), she stopped me: "IPA doesn't help me. Can you describe the sound, and I'll write it how it works for me?" Ideas such as "a skinny `aw'" seemed to make more sense, and she now had lots of notations in her script.

Ciara (Lady Catherine) began our session by telling me that "the yawning and `smelling shit' tricks are the best ever! When I'm losing it [the RP], I yawn to get back into it." I told her that I could hear those improvements. She asked to run over a scene that she feels is still weak in the dialect, and was surprised when I told her that it is actually right on point. She asked for a West Indies session later in the week, and said that the combination of the materials I sent her and listening to her West African friends is making her feel much more prepared.

Zechariah (Mr. Darcy), who never has any questions about vocal work, asked about how to successfully say the phrase "half an hour after" intelligibly in RP, as it is a bit of a tongue twister in the dialect. I suggested that he links the /ɹ/ between "hour" and "after", and he tried it with success.

During rehearsal, I noticed that my vocal delivery seems to change every time we run a scene. I could also feel myself getting a bit sick. My throat aches (no wonder, between teaching, being a student, coaching, and acting). My body is beginning to

show me that this show may be a potentially huge strain on my resources, especially vocally. Was it the first full run this past weekend that put me over the edge? That was when I realized for the first time how much Mrs. Bennet requires of me as a performer. I felt too burnt out to take vocal notes tonight, and I have little hope of being able to give them (still having no directive from Dorothy or Lydia on future vocal work or if I may distribute my notes).

1/27/2015

My session with James Russell (Sir William/Mr. Gardiner) began with him telling me, "I have been so focused on the dialect and not fucking it up that I haven't done any character work." I appreciate that he's been thinking about RP, but told him that the two things aren't separate; in fact, they feed each other and will make both tasks easier. Just as with Anne, going through his lines and working dialect (especially pitch, tone, and inflection) once he had identified his operative words was very beneficial. He kept asking for ratings of his dialect: "Out of 10, what would you give it?" I rated him honestly, and then suggested what he can do for a higher "score". It seemed to motivate him. We then talked about the vocal differences between his two characters, focusing on their laughs and "thinking" sounds ("eh?"), and switching back and forth to make sure that he has two distinctive choices for them. All of a sudden, in the middle of a line, he exclaimed, "Why don't they say the 'r's'?! Entitled white people." He went on to tell me that he's having trouble identifying with his characters and the world of the play as a whole, and that that makes it difficult to get excited about putting any work into it. I think I'll tell Dorothy about this, so that she can motivate him however she

sees fit. I replied with the idea that working on this dialect is essential to his acting career, as well as to this production. He seemed pleased to hear that he has a stronger foundation than he thinks.

During rehearsal, we slowly ran scenes to clean them up. I noticed that with each run, the other actors were using quiet, intimate voices. This will kill the play when it moves upstairs.

Kaitlin (Miss Bingley) had requested another session, and I appreciate that she is willing to put in extra work. She worries that her RP is sounding “wonky”, although it has been steadily becoming more consistent. I suggested that she could incorporate more high pitches (she’s practically the only female actor not using them), which will amplify her vocal energy and provide the audience with evidence as to how she feels about the subject of her line. She identified where this might be appropriate (when talking about Miss Darcy, the few times she says “my dear”) and practiced with more confidence.

1/28/2015

Rehearsal began with dancing, so I approached Liz and Patrick with some pronunciation notes. At this point, I don’t want to waste time. In fact, maybe I should get bolder on giving notes.

Zechariah has been inconsistent in his pronunciation of “substantial”, sometimes using /a/, other times /æ/. I spoke to him about it, as both are workable options. He told me he wants to emphasize the word, and we concluded that it would be more stressed with /a/. So, it’s now on our production “ask list”.

I got permission from Lydia (stage manager) to schedule day appointments on my own with the other leads, and I emailed Jess (Elizabeth Bennet) to start this process. I talked to her about the word "dance" on a break. She was using the correct vowel /a/, but dropping her jaw unnecessarily wide and giving the word undue stress. She seemed relieved to hear that she can use less effort and still speak correct RP.

I also speak to Ari (Lydia Bennet) about the term "Danse Espagnole" in one of her lines. She was unaware that it's a French term, and I did a "listen-and-repeat" to help her capture the pronunciation. She told me that she feels herself lisping in certain scenes. I hadn't noticed this affection, but told her that I will ask Lydia (stage manager) to schedule a coaching for her. (I hadn't put her on my initial private coaching list, as her RP is quite good.)

James Russell (Sir William/Mr. Gardiner) tells me that Dorothy spoke to him about the differences between his two characters, and that it dovetailed nicely with our work yesterday (although he didn't provide more detail as to how). But she told him that Sir William would have a less strong RP because of his mercantile background (dramaturg Julie disagrees, as do I). I told him that I'll ask Lydia to schedule another coaching. I wish Dorothy would discuss these things with me. Not that I would necessarily try to change her mind, much as I would want to; I suspect that the best that James will likely be able to accomplish with his RP in this timeframe will naturally sound not as polished. But I worry that this directive will only encourage him not to practice, when he's already having trouble getting motivated on that account.

Dorothy directed Ari (Lydia) to “bubble over” during most of her scenes, and this caused her to speak so fast as to be totally unintelligible. I will need to diplomatically balance that somehow, or she’ll never be understood.

1/29/2015

I spoke to Dorothy before the start of rehearsal about James Russell’s (Sir William/Mr. Gardiner) feelings about his characters and the play; she replied that she will talk to him about it. I then asked about her wishes for his dialect(s), and she said that she wants Mr. Gardiner to have strong RP, which needs to be drilled. Sir William’s doesn’t need to be as good, and Dorothy believes he’s “trying too hard here” (or not enough, as Sir William is his hated aristocratic character). We agreed that leaving Sir William alone might be the best option, and to let James’ best efforts (which are a bit rough) take care of the characterization.

Ciara premiered her West Indies accent, and it is in great shape! It is light and melodic, and Dorothy loved it. Ciara told me that listening to her friends and marking the sound changes in her script was her foundation. My worry now is that the audience will be taken aback by her efforts; it is such a jarringly different sound in the world of the play. But I know that’s not my responsibility.

Hayden Atkins (Ciara’s understudy), asked me if she should prepare the same dialect. As Hayden is Caucasian, I suspected that Dorothy would not want that. This turned out to be the case when I took the question to Dorothy, who asked that Hayden just use her RP (which is a bit rough). “If we weren’t taking advantage of Ciara’s beautiful brown skin and the Jamaican connection, the housekeeper would be RP.”

I corrected Jess (Elizabeth Bennet) on “pitable” and “amiable”. It wasn’t that the words weren’t being spoken in RP; they were missing entire syllables.

1/30/2015

Dorothy emailed me a Noel Coward sound sample that she had given to James Russell (Sir William/Mr. Gardiner), with this note: “He may have been using it (*a wee bit*) for Sir Wm Lucas, but it would be totally appropriate for Mr. Gardiner. It’s proper, older, with authority and a spirited, can do feel.” Coward’s tone is a bit far from James’ natural resonance, but I hope it spurs him to practice.

My session with Ari (Lydia Bennet) began with addressing her feared lisp. I suggested that it may be her speed, and that the lack of crisp articulation makes it feel like her “s” sounds are spilling over. I had her speak in slow-motion while keeping her eyes very wide (for the excited tone that Dorothy wants), and this cleared up the slight sibilance. I told her what I discovered during this exercise: she has mastered opening her jaw up just enough to sound British, but not enough to be understood on stage. She said that her jaw is very tense, which makes opening it wider difficult. I had her massage it while speaking at different speeds, and she noted that this needs to become part of her daily practice. Like Jess, she had been pronouncing “ask list” words over-dramatically, to the point where “I feel like I sound like I’m faking it.” As with Ciara (Lady Catherine), I had her yawn, and then chew up her words to relax her habits (the over-doing, as well as speed and breathiness). She noted that “articulation actually helps things glide together, not chop them apart.” She left feeling much better.

My session with Jess (Elizabeth Bennet) also focused on the “ask list” quite a bit. She expressed the same feeling: “In my head, it’s so extreme.” I had her actually overdo the sounds, with extreme jaw height, and I repeated her efforts back to her. We then lessened the jaw height and physical effort gradually until she arrived at a relaxed, but appropriate, RP. She now knows that her efforts were not actually “extreme” at all. She asked if RP is actually close to General American (which, as a senior, she has learned here at VCU), and I said yes, with some different oral posture. This seemed to give her confidence. We practiced her tongue twister line in the script, which has the words “lodge” and “large” back-to-back. Now that she was more aware of jaw height, it became easier to distinguish between them. The last challenge was pitch. I knew Dorothy wanted her to use fewer high pitches, so that her voice sounded more like Jess’ natural idiolect and not a “haughty” RP stereotype. We created a 1-5 scale of pitch (5 being high). If a moment in the script has truly high emotional volatility, maybe it earns a 5, but those should be sparing. We went to those moments in the script and explored speaking her lines at different places on this scale. She found some great options for these moments and seemed much more comfortable. I think this also provided me a great shorthand for giving her notes. We managed to do this exercise in the rehearsal space itself, so that she could do her blocking as well. This was tremendously effective, and moments where she had been stiffly speaking in her higher register relaxed down. I then shared with her the idea that articulation can be an acting choice; your character always needs it, and the reason will change from scene to scene. “This makes so much sense! I could score my whole script that way!” she replied. I

finished with pronunciation (not dialect) corrections, like “amiable, “prodigious”, and “censure”. She was aghast at the last one (“I’ve been doing it wrong for a long time!”). This made me wish I had found a better system of delivering notes, even if I did have to defy Dorothy.

The challenge continues of how to remember vocal and pronunciation notes while acting during the run-throughs. I have no place in my rehearsal costume to keep notes, and the effort of remembering takes my attention from my acting work. For instance, I chose to give some notes before the act run instead of reviewing my script, and I completely forgot some new blocking as a result. But the effort to give notes is appreciated: Dorothy commented to me that when she heard DJ pronounce “pianoforte” correctly for the first time tonight, “I smiled and thought, ‘Erica’s been there.’”

1/31/2015

Rehearsal began with Dorothy and Rebecca (movement coach) giving notes from the night before. I was not given the opportunity to give any of my notes. I tried to catch other actors in the five minutes between notes and the start of a run, and they were appreciative (and most of these notes were immediately incorporated), but it was not nearly enough time! I wanted to give Jess (Elizabeth Bennet) some notes, but I could see that she was engrossed in running lines. I only interrupted to ask if she’d like notes, and she declined, requesting that I give them to her later. This was a compromise I’d also made with James Stover, who rarely likes to hear vocal notes at rehearsal, and so I accommodated Jess’ wishes as well, giving her notes during a break.

I had no time to speak to anyone else. I thought of trying to give notes during the longer lunch break, but the whole cast scattered, per usual. They need the mental break, and I know I do, too.

I ran to my notebook to take notes immediately after all of my exits, but I still have no time or forum in which to give them. I am still debating about emailing them out myself, and if I should risk asking for permission first?

2/1/2015

Jess was unsure about the pronunciation of “endured”, so I looked up a British English pronunciation, listed as /ɪndjʊəd/. She had some trouble with the sounds during the 30 seconds remaining before rehearsal began, so I will have to check in on her again later and run it some more.

During the run, I kept a pencil and paper in my bra so that I could take notes anytime I was offstage. However, my focus was still too split; once offstage, I wasn’t able to remember everything that had just happened onstage that I wanted to notate. I’m certain I missed some mispronunciations. And I know I wasn’t giving my scene partners my full attention, because once I heard something that I wanted to correct, my mind was only partly still in the scene, and the rest of my mental energy went to trying to retain what I’d heard. But Ari (Lydia Bennet) remarked on my new system, “Now that I know you’re taking notes, I’m listening to myself.” Perhaps I should have done this earlier? But it was quite chaotic.

I discovered, at this advanced stage, the answer to a question one of the actors asked me awhile ago: “our” is typically one syllable and “hour” is two syllables (in RP).

Should I confess this to the cast, or just adjust individuals who speak these words? And was this oversight because I was doing character research at the start of rehearsals instead of more dialect research?

I decided that the time has come, and asked Dorothy if she would like for me to email pronunciation notes, as there isn't time for them in rehearsal. She asked me who I mean to send them to, and this surprised me. I've never had a director ask this before; usually, they are just grateful that there were notes taken. I began to list: Ciara, DJ, Jess, Anne...and she cut me off. Ciara and DJ may receive notes, as "we need to keep them in the world." Jess may receive "key words only", and before I could ask what that means, she ended with, "leave Kitty alone!" Anne, I'm sad to say, has not made too many improvements in her vocal quality (the quality that Dorothy expressly told me to fix), and now I can't give her any notes? I am aghast. She went back to Jess: "Her problem was sounding haughty and fake. I don't want her thinking about the dialect again and falling back into that. She had to go on the journey." I went on that journey with her! The reason she no longer sounds haughty is because she is thinking about the dialect, and has had some guidance and can now make more natural choices with it. But that journey will be for naught if she continues to jump out of RP on key words; the audience won't be fooled. Usually this is when the vocal coach is asked, even begged, to work with the actors as much as possible to nail down sounds and achieve maximum consistency and accuracy. But, instead, I am supposed to leave it alone.

I then asked if I may address the cast once we move up into Hodges next week, reminding them of the vocal demands of the space and the work we did during the first rehearsals. "Maybe once we get into the space, but not right now." Perhaps she didn't understand my question? I said that it's been useful for mainstage shows here in the past to take the time to remind the actors to use articulation to save their voices during technical rehearsals (as well as other vocal power and health tips). She replied, "Maybe, if we need it." I know we will! I've known for months.

Should I have checked in earlier about how Dorothy thought vocal developments were going? Most other directors I've worked with have been much more forthcoming with their thoughts and concerns. I know Dorothy's relative silence on the subject (after so many strong opinions early on) make me reticent to approach her. I don't know what she wants or how to help.

I'm considering being sneaky, emailing individual actors with notes, and telling myself that everything I include will fall under the "key word" exception. I hate this feeling.

During notes, Dorothy said that James Russell (Sir William/Mr. Gardiner) needs more dialect attention for "character clarity." Great! I'm allowed to talk to someone about their voice.

2/2/2015

Day off. I elected not to email notes due to a fear of behaving unprofessionally and due to my confusion about Dorothy's wishes.

2/3/2015

My session with James Russell (Sir William/Mr. Gardiner) was spent switching back and forth between his two characters. I made him jog around while speaking, to make sure that he doesn't just have the dialect down while standing stiffly still (I also began chasing him to amp up his energy). I had him speak with a finger on either side of his lips, to keep them from spreading and to keep the jaw more open. This helped with his consistent mispronunciations: "after", "decease", and "your".

We have moved into Hodges and begun spacing. Spacing involves a lot of down-time, where the actors must stay frozen onstage. I took these frozen opportunities to give pronunciation notes to the actors that were near me. I also nailed down perhaps the most noticeable vocal issue of the show: the three actors saying the most famous line in show ("it is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife") were pronouncing "fortune" differently. Dorothy wanted the "less snobby" /fɔːtʃən/, and I was able to reach all three actors during a spacing hold.

Dorothy told the cast that "vowels express feelings; consonants, thoughts." Hopefully this will make the actors take articulation more seriously.

2/4/2015

Spacing continued. Susan dropped by to listen from the top of the theater, and told me that she can't hear anyone except for James Stover (Mr. Bennet), Zechariah (Mr. Darcy), and myself. She suggested that the three of us speak at full performance level to set the example for the rest of the cast, and to perhaps catch Dorothy's

attention. She also suggested that maybe, if these rehearsals continue to go well, I could ask Dorothy again for the opportunity to address voice with the cast.

I continued to give notes during pauses. Jess actually asked me if I had anything for her, and her incorporations of my notes improved the performance quality of the subsequent run quite a bit (she was much more emotionally alive during a scene where she previously had been struggling through some pronunciations). During a break, I gurned onstage for my vocal benefit. Others noticed and laughed at the funny shapes of my face, but at least they noticed! All I can do is exemplify good habits.

2/5/2015

For our first technical rehearsal, we were given a block of time to get into rehearsal shoes and skirts and warm up. I asked James Stover (Mr. Bennet) to warm up with me, so that hopefully others would follow suit. Many did.

I told Lydia (stage manager) that Dorothy wouldn't give me time to address the cast, and asked if I could give each actor some vocal health advice ("articulation, not projection", so as to preserve the voice during these long days) individually. She said yes, and expressed surprise at Dorothy's reticence. I began to do this, and James Stover helped me spread the word. I know tech is where the most vocal strain can happen, and I need to give this cast (which includes many first and second years, who have limited vocal training and exposure to this grueling space) some tools to keep themselves in functioning shape.

I ran some lines with Liz (Charlotte) during a break, and a production assistant nearby commented, "They sound so much more authentic than they did at the start."

During holds, I hummed, gurned, and overarticulated some of my lines in as public a way as possible.

James Russell (Sir William/Mr. Gardiner) and I were blocked together during a dance scene, during which we must improvise small talk for several minutes. I made sure to use all of the words that have been giving him trouble with his RP, and I pretended not to hear him unless he spoke in RP to me. He acted annoyed, but I reminded him that we'll be stuck in this formation for awhile, and we might as well pass the time usefully. His RP was much more consistent when the day was over.

2/6/2015

Tech continues, but no mention was made of warm-ups. I did a brief one onstage, but no one joined in.

2/7/2015

Lydia (stage manager) ended her top-of-rehearsal address to the cast by encouraging us to warm up. Only James Stover (Mr. Bennet), DJ (Fitzwilliam), Daniel (Mr. Bingley), and I did so. Bonnie Brady, head of stage management, commented that we were "gold star actors". I told the other actors and Hannah (assistant director) that I would be using a more nasal tone today to help preserve my voice (partly because my throat was a bit tired, but also because I wanted others to know about this strategy).

I gave notes to Jess (Elizabeth Bennet), Ari's (Lydia's) understudy Aiden (who asked me for corrections even though she was just standing in!), Liz (Charlotte), and DJ (Fitzwilliam). Liz wanted to know if she sounds "actor-y", and I assured her that her sound is what a powerful, projecting actor speaking RP sounds like. It's interesting that

what I know to be great progress in the right direction makes her feel inauthentic. DJ was tripping over the word “generally”; I reminded him that RP speakers often shorten words like that to three syllables, and he made the adjustment. He also asked for general exercises to help him stay in RP and vocally energetic. I recommended yawning (an open jaw will make more sound!), holding his mouth into a tall column with his fingers on the sides of his lips, and using articulation as an acting choice. He yawned and smiled into his lines, chewed up his dialogue more, and expressed more comfort with his character.

James Stover (Mr. Bennet), who normally resists vocal notes, asked me to drill “laugh” and “after” (which he normally leaves off the “ask list”), and other actors noticed our fun rapport.

Jess (Elizabeth Bennet) asked if she could leave out the “liquid u” in “endured”, as it is still giving her trouble. I said to run it past Dorothy, but that I thought it would still sound British and not stick out. Dorothy apparently gave it the ok, and the line flows much more easily now.

I gave James Russell (Sir William/Mr. Gardiner) some of the same exercises that I gave DJ. I had him incorporate them while sitting offstage, as I continually paced onstage to help set a lighting cue. He thanked me by saying, “Once I know you’ve heard me fuck up, I know I have to think about it and fix it.”

While I am happy about not having microphones for the show (and that that decision was made early and hasn’t wavered), there is a lot more underscoring being

added in that obscures the dialogue, especially in the ball scenes. No one else seems to notice this (or, if they do, the vocal coach is not being informed).

2/8/2015

Perhaps because I told her about Dorothy's resistance to vocal work, Lydia ended her address today by saying that we need to rehearse today at "show volume", as the technicians cannot hear cue lines at the top of the theater in the booth. "If you need advice on how to do that, please ask Erica." I offered to do a group warm up 10 minutes before the start of the tech run, and most of the actors participated. I covered resonance, intention and energy drive, and articulation. I ended by imploring the cast to stay hydrated (with water above all else) and to start taking individual responsibility for their performance by warming themselves up. "You've worked so hard. You deserve to be heard and understood."

I gave pronunciation and articulation notes during holds, and Hannah (assistant director), who was sitting on the side of the house, gave audibility notes to actors as well. At the end of a break, when the whole cast was in the theater, I told them that if it feels like they are overarticulating (that they look silly), they are probably doing barely enough. I pointed to Zechariah (Mr. Darcy), who has years of training and professional experience, as an example of excellent articulation without looking effortful.

Dorothy didn't think that Aaron Mauck (Wickham) needed private dialect work, and though I tried to get him to meet with me, he never would make time in his schedule. He can barely be heard or understood. I told him this during a hold, and

suggested some strategies (resonance forward, letting the words fall out of the front of your mouth as if you're seducing the audience). There was a noticeable improvement.

I gave actors who are having trouble projecting (Anna Grey, DJ) the exercise of saying their lines facing the floor, so as to warm up their nasal resonators, and then slowly bringing their heads up while speaking to blend with their mouth resonators. Many others would benefit from this, but I don't have an opportunity to reach them.

Many actors were self-correcting pronunciations onstage! Jess asked me to email her corrections, and I sent them that night. "Key words" only, of course.

2/9/2015

Day off. Susan emailed me: "David [Leong, department chair] sent me an email that he can't hear most of the play. I have asked him to let Dorothy know that you (and I) can help the actors if we can have time onstage with them on Tues and Weds. He is aware that she has been reluctant to you helping them in tech week. Sigh. Wish she would have listened to you 'bout the nightmare Hodges sound acoustics!" I know that David saw us at the end of a long week, but he is the only unbiased (as in, totally new to the production) person to have given feedback and the feedback is bad! I am very disheartened. And I hope if anything is said to Dorothy that it does not negatively affect our working relationship.

2/10/2015

The first dress rehearsal, understandably, didn't have warm-up time built in. But many of the actors did their own (lots of sirens and nasal resonance warming) in the communal basement rehearsal space after getting into costume. My costume is very

cumbersome, and so I was not able to join them until the end. I gave some physical adjustments (belly jutting and nasal head blending) to Ari (Lydia Bennet) and Anna Grey (Mary Bennet).

Dorothy told the cast that if a hold is called, we should stay in the world of the play. After she left, I added that avoiding extraneous chatter is better for the voice, which should be saved for the show.

Kaitlin (Miss Bingley) continues to be the biggest volume issue. This is due to several factors: she is a first-year with no vocal training, much of her dialogue is during dances, and she feels most connected to her character when speaking “from her chest”. I suggested that she start there/hold her energy there but still let her sound travel up and out through the nose and mouth. She asked me if we can do a group warm-up before the shows. I told her that it would have to be before call time and self-organized, but that I will organize it. I was thrilled that she asked.

As we milled around backstage, I was able to give pronunciation and articulation notes to actors running lines. There were marked improvements when people then went onstage.

After Mrs. Bennet exited Act I, I went to the dressing room and listened through the monitor. This way, I could take pronunciation and general vocal energy notes while also hydrating, resting up, and fixing my costume. I considered running to the top of the theater to listen for audibility in the space, but I wouldn't be able to be up there for more than ten minutes or so. Susan was listening from up there and will be sending me her thoughts.

I could send out these notes, but I worry about Dorothy's approval and how close we are to opening. Things are pretty much set. Is it time to let go?

2/11/2015

Susan emailed me her thoughts, the first of which was: "They really are audible and intelligible the majority of the time which is a HUGE accomplishment in this space and with their training." She also had some individual actor notes, which I passed along in person when I arrived at rehearsal. She mentioned that Zechariah (Mr. Darcy), James Stover (Mr. Bennet) and I were filling the space the most, which, considering our advanced ages, experience, and training, is not surprising.

Kaitlin (Miss Bingley) and I did a warm-up together after getting dressed, focusing on getting the sound from her chest/"sass center" out through her top resonators. I had her picture a "sass column" from her belly out through the top of her head, as she was starting to feel some tension in her throat.

Jess (Elizabeth Bennet) didn't sound as if she'd taken any of my notes; in fact, she's reverted back to some American pronunciations. But I chose not to say anything unless she directly asked me; she is stressed enough and I know that she has heard all of the corrections before. Some of the other actors, like Ari (Lydia Bennet) and Tricia (Jane Bennet), after mispronouncing something onstage, walked up to me in the wings and apologized, telling me that they knew their mistake as soon as they uttered it and would correct it next time. It is wonderful both that they were able to hear and evaluate their dialect performances and that they wanted to talk about it with me. It also made me feel a bit like their actual mother.

I checked with Lydia (stage manager) about a group warm-up, and she said as long as it is not so far in advance of call time that no production staff would be in the theater, she was fine with it.

Kaitlin found me after rehearsal and told me that she's worried about not being the right amount of "loud". I told her not to worry about "loud"; if she's resonant, direct, articulate, and character-driven, she'll be heard.

Susan emailed me her notes, which were all for individual actors. As tomorrow is opening night, I decided not to send them out, but to incorporate the general ideas into my email to the whole cast.

Performances

2/12/2015

I sent this email to the cast: "First thing: all of your hard work has really paid off. The world of the play comes through in your dialect, and the audience can hear and follow the story. Just a few things to keep in mind as the run begins:

- Articulation! Keep it up through the ends of lines. Remember, if it feels like you're chewing it up too much, you're on the right level.
- Anyone who speaks in a ball scene or facing upstage needs more volume. Remember the head/cricoid tilt ("Hey Francesca!"), breathing low into your belly and into your ribcage. and sending sound forward through your nasal resonator.
- Even if you drop your pitch at the end of a line, don't let your vocal energy and articulation drop with it! Articulation is a character choice; use it to communicate your character's wants/needs/objectives/feelings.

I'll be doing a warm-up in B72 at 6 before each show. All are welcome!"

I decided to give James Stover (Mr. Bennet) his individual note from Susan, as he is a professional and should be able to handle a note this late in the process. He replied that he didn't care to change anything.

Kaitlin (Miss Bingley), Ari (Lydia Bennet), Jess (Elizabeth Bennet), Tricia (Jane Bennet), and James Russell (Sir William/Mr. Gardiner) came to the warm-up, which I planned to last 15-20 minutes. We did rib stretching, humming, intoning, spine rolls with vocal sirens, and nasal blending. An assistant stage manager called the whole cast upstairs to show us that new masking will require everyone in the wings to stand even further offstage. I then told the assembled cast that this will require people onstage to be louder so that those in the wings can hear cue lines. I ended with: "If you didn't warm up with me, I suggest you make time for it."

Backstage just before the show, I did the tongue stretch to *The Addams Family* theme song, and Aaron (Wickham) and Daniel (Mr. Bingley) joined me.

I caught myself taking pronunciation notes while in the dressing room between acts and then remembered—the show has opened. That part of my job is done.

2/13/2015

Kaitlin (Miss Bingley) was the only one who came to the warm-up. We did some Rodenburg wall-pushing work (since we had the whole basement to ourselves). I felt great after this, as I was able to give myself some attention, as well. Backstage, just before the show, Aaron (Wickham) mentioned that he was congested, and I did some

nasal release work with him. Ari (Lydia Bennet) told me that her throat is tight, and I worked with her to take pressure off the sore area.

During intermission, one of the understudies stopped me to say that patrons (mostly elderly, she admitted) were complaining that they couldn't hear the actors.

2/14/2015

Only Ari (Lydia Bennet) came to the warm-up. We did Rodenburg wall work, Linklater spine rolls with lip trills, and nasal head blending. Her throat was still very sore and she was continuously clearing it. I suggested lots of humming and "creaky" voice when she's offstage, so as to rest her throat.

I bought a big bag of Vitamin C lozenges, and the cast has begun asking for them often. I started keeping some on my person as much as possible to hand out, but only do so after they show me a water bottle and we hum and do "creaky" voice together, so that I know that they know other ways of soothing their voices. I also, in true mother form, chastise actors who I know are feeling sick for going out partying after shows instead of getting sleep.

2/15/2015

No one showed up for the warm-up, so I got to luxuriate in the basement room all by myself. But should I have sent out another reminder email?

2/19/2015

Kaitlin (Miss Bingley) came for the warm-up, and we did floor work on the mats in the basement. I still placed a lot of focus on her nasal resonance and bringing her

sound forward, as she still has serious audibility issues. There is a silver lining about the low attendance at the warm-up: she can get all my attention.

I realized when I returned to the dressing room after I finish Act I that even though I stopped taking notes opening night, I have still been sitting and listening to it as if I was notating. I let that go as well, and go talk to the cast as colleagues, not clients.

2/20/2015

My warm-up was solo, and I took advantage of it to do lots of my own floorwork. Jess (Elizabeth Bennet) saw me, and took the time to do her own warm-up.

Lydia (stage manager) told the cast that the monitor in her booth was out, and therefore, she would need extra projection to hear cue lines. I wish I could have given suggestions for this, but there was no time. Pre-show preparations were well underway, and the actors are their own responsibility now. I can't make them come to warm-ups; all I can do is be there for myself and for those who ask for help.

2/21/2015

My warm-up was solo, and for the first time, I felt no annoyance or disappointment about it. I felt grateful to have the time to myself, to be able to focus on my own physical and vocal needs. I realized that leading a warm-up (even when it is only for one or two people) does not fully warm me up, as I have to put my focus and energy outwards towards others, and do the exercises that they need, instead of the exercises that I might need, or want.

2/22/2015

The closing performance. The final warm-up was solo, which was probably for the best, as I couldn't stop crying. I'm not sure that I would have been an effective leader for anyone else.

I watched, not just listened, to the rest of Act I from the wings, as well as the few scenes of Act II that don't feature Mrs. Bennet. Of course I still heard some pronunciation errors, but overall, what I heard was a consistent, strong RP flavor. I feel proud, accomplished, and tired.

Chapter 4

Just How Lost was I? A Conclusion

We all need an outside ear to critique us. I also hope there is a mutual trust between cast and coach, and that you have the assurance that the critique is coming from someone who respects you and cares about your feelings. Most dialect coaches have a strong acting background and fully understand what you're going through in creating your role.

- Ginny Kopf

I achieved many of my production goals for *Pride & Prejudice*. The RP was consistent, the actors retained their individual vocal qualities, and we were a strong ensemble who told a story together. I felt I was a fully realized and effective Mrs. Bennet (and my mother, who first inspired my taking on the show, saw me perform the role). I could hear that many of the actors made strides in their vocal energy and projection skills, though audience members had mixed opinions about the audibility of the show. I didn't get to do everything I wanted, but it was still an incredibly valuable experience.

It would be easy to blame Dorothy's reticence to go along with my model, or to allow me more rehearsal time for voice work (especially once we moved to Hodges), for the weak points in the show's vocal landscape. But as Susan pointed out to me at the start of tech week, I needed to "trust Dorothy. She's done many shows. She seems to be happy with where it is." Even if I had been able to work on voice as much as I wanted, there would always be things that I wanted to fix. Susan also told me that "the

more we become experts, the more we have to let go." I had been able to help the cast become "experts" (at least, compared to where they started) in RP, and I needed to follow their lead of letting go of thinking of technique and just share with the audience. The dialect coach always has to let go at the final dress rehearsal, and I not only had to let go, but also transition fully into my actor role.

Dorothy knew this; she mentioned the difficulty of the duality of my thesis in our first meeting. This proved very prescient, as there was also a duality to our working relationship. As an actor, I enjoyed working with her immensely. She was encouraging, open, honest, and supportive. As a dialect coach, our collaboration was difficult and not, it seemed to me, rooted in trust. I know that I let my discouragement dampen my efforts, unsure when to fight for my coaching principles or make extra efforts outside of rehearsals; though certain plans, like doing independent immersive activities with the cast, were abandoned due to the unanticipated exhaustion of the rehearsal process and to the difficult logistics involved. That doubt was partly a product of the unusual power dynamic: graduate student vs. guest director, actor who doesn't want the other aspect of the working relationship affected by the tension, and relatively green coach vs. stage veteran. I know I will become more assertive with time, able to professionally navigate a director's fears of relinquishing control and trust. Though my dual role was a detriment to my self-confidence as a coach, it was a powerful tool in overcoming Dorothy's impediments to my coaching. When in the guise of an actor onstage, I could coach the actors around me, and remind every member of the cast that I was at their service.

Michael Bruckmueller also acted in and coached a mainstage during his time at VCU, and wrote that “having an assistant in this process was essential, not only to help monitor the actors but also to serve as *my* coach” (Bruckmueller). Due to the small size of the voice and speech department, it was not possible for me to have an assistant; in truth, I’m not sure that I would have been able to make time to consult with an assistant or implement their notes. I do wish that I had been able to have other ears listening in Hodges when we began technical and dress rehearsals. Susan’s notes were very helpful, but I know that was one duty of the dialect coach that was neglected because of my acting obligations. I was not able to get daily feedback on how the cast was projecting and articulating in the theater, and even though Dorothy prevented me from preparing the cast for those tasks closer to performances, I wish I had been able to hear it for myself (even through the ears of colleagues). Extra assistance also might have granted me (especially my coach’s ears) a beneficial break. “The vocal director may find it helpful to get away from the production for a day so that he can come back refreshed and able to hear the production with greater objectivity” (Withers-Wilson 72). I know it would have been good to stop listening to the show for day or two and return with a fresh perspective; my principal acting role made this practically impossible.

The survey that I sent to the cast was illuminating, reinforcing my belief in an immersion model. Almost every responder felt that the style of dialect coaching made the ensemble stronger, and helped them not only learn RP, but also learn about the world of the play and their character in a very impactful way. Actors who had some experience with RP wrote about the level of detail helping them feel more comfortable,

and dialect novices were delighted with how their fear and trepidation disappeared so soon in the rehearsal process. Even understudies (who I included in every dialect exercise) felt the positive effects. Tyler Fauntleroy, understudying Mr. Bingley, wrote: “It is so much fun to practice with a team, and fail and celebrate when we get something right.” The dialect work even made an impact outside of the show. James Stover (Mr. Bennet) talked about how he had his singing voice students sing in RP in order to achieve more open vowel height to great success, an idea he would not have had without my RP training.

I still believe that immersion coaching would be incredibly useful, especially in academic institutions like VCU. But once Dorothy decided to allow for some dialect class differences, and to make the Housekeeper West Indian, it meant that a pure immersion process (where everyone is working to master the exact same thing) was no longer going to be possible, or the most productive, for the actors. But I believe that my near-constant presence helped fill in the gaps created by the lack of immersion. The coaching was not my ideal model, but by speaking in RP during every working moment of rehearsal, I set a more dialect-focused example that was followed by every other actor only a few days into rehearsal. By conspicuously warming up whenever opportunity allowed (and offering to warm others up for performances), I highlighted and modeled healthy vocal practices that were followed by many. This made my acting performance much stronger; by offering to take care of others’ voices, I was setting aside time to take care of my own. I wasn’t able to get the whole cast “lost in Austen” through the dialect and voice work, but I realize that one cast member was pretty

wholly immersed: myself. By taking on both roles, keeping a dual focus, and becoming a mother figure to the actors on and offstage, I achieved a type of immersion that I do believe made *Pride & Prejudice* a stronger show.

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Appendix A

***Pride & Prejudice* Received Pronunciation Dialect Packet**

Initial Notes:

"A Thing of Beauty" by John Keats (1795-1821)

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkn'd ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
'Gainst the hot season; the mid-forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms:
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
An endless fountain of immortal drink,
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.

Pride & Prejudice **Received Pronunciation/Standard British Dialect Basics**

Standard British English, also known as Received Pronunciation (RP) or Standard English, has had a long history as the “prestige dialect” of Great Britain. It does not have a defined geographical territory; rather, “educated” speakers all over the United Kingdom and throughout the former British Empire use it. For most of the 20th century, this dialect dominated British culture and, to a great extent, influenced the way actors spoke Shakespeare and other period English drama throughout the English-speaking world. That influence and prestige still lingers. Though there are sociolinguists still investigating precisely what dialect members of British high society would have used in Jane Austen’s time (the Regency era), it is commonly accepted that performances of Austen’s work are done in RP, because that is the closest dialect approximation to what was spoken at that time.

Of course, every character has their own vocal idiosyncrasies (inflection, pitch variety, manner of stress, etc.) that will reflect you, the actor, and the discoveries you make about your role in this story. The goal is not for everyone to sound the same, but rather to sound as if we all live in the same Regency world, and therefore we need to acquire the shape of the RP dialect.

General Dialect Features

1. RP speakers often use higher pitches for stress/emphasis, whereas Americans tend to use volume.
2. Americans often give equal weight to most words in a phrase; RP speakers tend to choose a few words to stress (which will often be heard on a higher pitch).
3. RP phrases tend to gradually become more intense/stressed, whereas American phrases tend to start off more vigorously.

Sound Changes

For every sound change, I have English alphabet spellings (like /aw/), example words, and phonetic symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet (like [a]). Please feel free to ask questions about your particular lines!

1. /t/

Most Americans turn many /t/ sounds in the middle and ends of words into /d/, but for British every /t/ is aspirated and crisp. This sound also helps with articulation on stage.

Examples: better, lot of, sit down, writer

2. /a/

Known as the "ask list", many words that Americans use [æ] for (as in "clasp") are pronounced with the more open vowel [a] (as in "margarine") in British. Test before using: if the open vowel sounds odd, don't do it (such as with "drat").

Examples: pass, past, chance, half, answer, can't (but "can" stays the same as American)

3. /aw/

This sound is more open than in American English. Your jaw should be pretty open and your lips rounded to make a [ɔ] sound.

Examples: thought, awful, daughter, awkward, call, water

4. /r/

Standard British is "non-rhotic", which means that very few /r/ sounds are pronounced. Open your jaw and do not round your lips too much. This applies to words with vowels [ɜ] as in "nurse", [ɔ] as in "north", and [ɑ] as in "start". It also applies to unstressed endings with an [ə] or "uh" sound, as in "letter", and in words with multiple vowels gliding together like "bear" and "hour".

Examples: bird, worm, journey, warm, sport, quarter, morning, harm, far, heart, pester, perhaps, rare, power, fire

5. /ou/

For words like "goat", two vowels glide together. Start with the jaw dropped and lips neutral in an "uh" [ə] sound, and then round the lips into "euh" as in "would" [ʊ].

This is especially important where the vowels are followed by a /l/.

Examples: bolt, bold, comb, old, own, though, lonely, slow, ago

6. /ahw/

For words like "cloth", the jaw should be very open and lips are rounded. This is similar to sound #3 with "awful", but here the jaw is dropped even more. This vowel is a pure [ɒ] and doesn't glide into any other vowel.

Examples: dog, obvious, knowledge, want, along, cough

7. /uh/ and [æ] followed by /r/

For multi-syllable words that have an /r/ in the middle following an /uh/ [ʌ] sound, such as "burrow", or an [æ] sound, such as "arrow", drop the jaw to make the vowel by itself, and then pronounce the /r/. These words need to have two distinct syllables.

Examples: hurry, worry, courage, marry, carriage, parapet

8. Linking /r/

When /r/ is at the end of one word and the next word begins with a vowel, pronounce the /r/ with the second word.

Examples: here is, her eyes, there are, fear of

9. /ee/ endings

For words that end in an /ee/ sound, like "party", that end sound gets shortened from [i] to [ɪ], or /ih/.

Examples: lovely, crazy, pretty, silly

10. /ile/ endings

Words ending in "ile" like "fertile" are pronounced with two full syllables, as in /fer-teye-uhl/ or [fɜː taɪl].

Examples: mobile, futile, tactile

11. /tory/, /tary/, /bury/ endings

These endings are contracted into one syllable. For instance, "dictionary" is pronounced /dik-shin-rih/ or [dɪkʃənɪ].

Examples: secretary, laboratory, raspberry

12. /yuh/

Known as the "liquid u", RP speakers may pronounce a "yuh" [j] sound following the consonants /t/, /d/, /n/, and /l/ and before the vowel "oo" [u]. This occurs only in words spelled with /u/, /ui/, or /ew/.

Examples: duel, during, news, assume, tune, student, suit

Appendix B

Pride & Prejudice Rehearsal Vocal Warm-Ups

Focus: Filling Hodges

Sources: Linklater, Rodenburg, Estill

Maximizing Breath

- Yawn, stretch
- Hum while rolling neck, rolling spine up and down
- Lip trill while rolling neck, rolling spine up and down
- Touch of sound: “huh” while hands on belly
 - WHY belly/diaphragm breath? Breath just into shoulders, short pants and “hey”
Breathe/Pant/“Hey” into belly for demonstration of difference
- Breathe into both sides of ribs while stretching (one arm stretched over, other hand on ribcage)
- Bend over at waist, place hands on lower back and breathe into them
 - Squat, hug self, and breathe
- Forced capacity: /s/, /z/, /v/

Resonators

- Chest resonator: Stand with feet comfortably under hips, knees soft and unlocked. Lean neck back so that eyes are looking towards the ceiling (but not all the way back, with the neck crunched on top of the shoulders). Breathe deeply into the belly and release sound on an open “haah”. Rub upper chest/sternum area (or pound lightly with fists) to feel buzzing there.
- Mouth resonator: Bring neck upright, with the head placed lightly at the top of your spine. Breathe deeply into the belly (you can always place a hand on your lower abdomen to help check if you’re breathing that deeply) and release sound on “hey”. You can also yawn right before the “hey” to make sure that your mouth is very open and your tongue isn’t getting in the way of the sound.
- Nasal resonator: Bend your neck forward, so that your head is facing the ground. Build up the vibrations in your mouth with humming, feeling the buzzing on your teeth and lips. Then release sound on “hee”.
- Go back and forth between all 3 to blend your resonating power!
- Add acting intention: speak the “haah”, “hey”, and “hee” towards an “other” to give your sound more purposeful direction and energy.

Intention, Focus, Sending Energy

- Speak the 3 resonators at different places in theatre: front, middle, back of house
- “Ey!” Cricoid tilt (“Hey Francesca”)
- Da Vinci with “ah”
 - Watch pushing, tensing throat or jaw
- Counting with capacity: “1”, “1,2”, “1,2,3”
 - Send it to the house
- Intone numbers for resonant energy and focus
 - Send it to back of the house
- Split group, have half go to top of house
 - Picture sound as an arc going to partner. Breathe and think the arc of sound.
 - Vocalize an “oo” to partner. Use lips to focus sound forward.
 - Once sound is forward, open to “ah”
 - Da Vinci arms as sound goes to partner

Articulation

- Chew up your face: Make ridiculous faces, move top and bottom lip separately, eyebrows, and all other muscles that you can on your face. (Check that you are not tensing your neck while you do this.)
- Stick tip of tongue out: bunch and flatten it. Make tiny circles with just the tip of the tongue.
- Stick whole tongue out. make big circles with it. Hum *The Addams Family* theme song as you move it in a circle around the outside of your mouth.
- Say “duh duh duh duh” and “tuh tuh tuh tuh”, making sure to touch the tip of your tongue to your upper gum ridge (right behind your top teeth). Move throughout your range as you do this.
- Loosen your tongue inside your mouth on a “hi-ya-ya.” Hold your chin to not let your jaw take over.
- Round the lips and spread them out on “yo-ya.” Move throughout your range as you do this.
- Open your mouth 2 fingers tall and lift the soft palate on “guh guh gah, kuh, kuh kah.”
- Siren on “kah” (you can yawn into this, if you like)
- “Kiggily koo, kiggily koo, kiggily kiggily kiggily koo”
- Run through these on various parts of your range, and with different emotions:
 - puh puh PAH, buh buh BAH
 - tuh tuh TAH, duh duh DAH
 - kuh kuh KAH, guh guh GAH
 - mah may me MY moh moo
 - nah nay nee NAI noh noo
 - lah lay lee LYE loh loo (add other consonants if you’re feeling crazy)
- Underarticulate “my name is...” (barely exerting effort). Overarticulate it, face muscles spasming and completely exaggerating every sound.
 - Then, find the medium: consonants (particularly final consonants) crisp, face muscles warm and active

Appendix C

***Pride & Prejudice* Cast Survey**

To the cast, 1.23.2015 (week 3 of rehearsal)

Hello, lovely cast!

I have a favor to ask of all of you. As you know, my dual role in this show is my thesis project for my MFA here at VCU. I have a few questions below about your experiences so far with learning and incorporating RP into our production. If you could take a few minutes to answer them and send it to me, I would appreciate it so much.

1. Have you ever acted with a dialect before this production?
2. Have you ever played a role with an RP dialect before?
3. Have you had any dialect training before this production (class, private coaching, etc.)?
4. Have you had any training in an RP dialect before this production?
5. Have you ever worked on a production that did dialect work as this one has (starting on it the first week of rehearsal, group dialect work, actors using it from the first blocking rehearsal, etc.)?
6. Have you found this approach to the dialect helpful in learning (or, if you had knowledge of it before, reinforcing) the dialect?
7. Have you found this approach to the dialect helpful in getting to know the world of the play?
8. Have you found this approach to the dialect helpful in developing your character?
9. Have you found this approach to the dialect helpful in working as an ensemble?

Vita

Erica Hughes was born on August 7, 1987 in Dallas, Texas. During her undergraduate years, she studied at Brandeis University, the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (earning a *certificat d'immersion*), and the Gaiety School of Acting in Dublin Ireland, before ultimately graduating from Denison University in Granville, Ohio, in 2010 with a B.A. in Theatre and a minor in French. She then worked in the education department of the Pittsburgh Opera while coaching the speech competitors of the North Allegheny High School Forensics team, guiding students to state and national championships. She also worked as a dialect coach at several Pittsburgh theaters, as well as a teaching assistant for speech and accent courses at Carnegie Mellon University. In May 2015, Erica will graduate with her M.F.A. in Theatre Performance Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. In the past two years, Erica has taught multiple classes at VCU, including Voice and Speech for the Actor I and II, Shakespeare, Accents & Dialects, and Effective Speech for Business and the Professions. She has also coached numerous productions for Theatre VCU and professional theaters in Richmond.