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Staging The Illusion
Director as Magician

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Staging The Illusion
Director as Magician

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

by

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BFA, Teikyo Marycrest University, 1991

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INTRODUCTION

Magic. As a child I was fascinated with the fantastic effects magicians seemed to bring to life on the stage and screen. I spent hours at the magic shop watching as the magician behind the counter made silks fly and coins vanish. The magician succeeded in making me believe the magic was real so I eagerly plunked down cash and rushed home to discover the secret behind the trick and practice the illusions on a captivated audience which often consisted of my mother, grandmother, and sister.

As I grew older, the tricks were packed away in a chest, but my love of the magical has remained. Magic, they say, is a vanishing art. Yet, one place magic continues to thrive is in the theatre. Both magic and theatre are crafted to produce an illusion of truth and both have an emotional affect on the audience. Like the magic act; actors, designers, crew, and directing staff spend countless hours preparing stage effects which will bring a theatrical illusion to life before an audience. In the theatre, the director is the magician who gives life to illusions which make people suspend their disbelief.

Classical theatre has always fascinated me. I am drawn to the classical works of Carlo Gozzi, Robert Green, and William Shakespeare because the magical and mystical pervade their scripts. Coming from a contemporary theatre background throughout my undergraduate studies, I set a goal to train myself in the classics, beginning two years before I entered an M.F.A. program. As a director, I was always looking for ways to share classical works with contemporary audiences. One such vehicle which accomplished this task was Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet¹ which I directed for a local theatre company during a summer hiatus from graduate studies. Within the guise of a contemporary work, Goodnight Desdemona combined two of Shakespeare's tragedies to create an outrageous comedy. Little did I realize that a similar piece would be selected for my thesis production.

Another subject which has surfaced in my directing is father/son relationships. Upon completing my bachelor's degree, I spent the summer of 1991 directing Working. This musical has one particular song which continues to have a strong affect on me. It is called "Fathers and Sons." Again, the theme appeared in my comprehensive examination. I directed two pieces, one classical and one contemporary,

¹Ann-Marie MacDonald, Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet (Canada: Englewood Press, 1980.)

which focused on to the relationship between fathers and sons. A pattern of magic and paternal relationships was beginning to emerge in my work. I became convinced that my thesis should embody a further exploration of these two ideas.

The department suggested that I direct a specially commissioned children's show for my thesis project. The Land Without Liberty had magic and wonder but the script lacked continuity and cohesiveness. Due to a variety of circumstances, the project was abandoned. Only days before auditions, I was a director in search of a script.

A fellow student staged a selection from a play entitled The Illusion. He recommended that I consider it for my thesis project and gave me a brief introduction to Tony Kushner's work. I had read Kushner's Angels in America: Millennium Approaches and I was intrigued with the dreamlike quality of the play, but the political nature of the show did not interest me. However, I was immediately captivated by the magic, romance, layering, and ambiguity found in The Illusion. It maintained Kushner's emotional intensity without becoming overtly political.

The play fit the bill. Its story centers around a father/son relationship, it uses magic and the art of illusion as a vehicle, it is a contemporary adaptation of a classical piece, and it is a wonderful argument for the

power of theatrical imagination over reality. The play seemed perfectly suited to my interests.

My advisor agreed and the proposal was approved. Yet, my own difficulties with the play remained on the horizon. Because the play operates on a variety of layers and is filled with metaphors, I was afraid that the direction would overwhelm or undermine the script. How could I prepare the trick if I couldn't see beyond the illusions myself? I needed to discover how the effects within the play were to be created.

Operating on a limited budget, there were concerns about the financial feasibility of mounting The Illusion. The script called for period costumes and a variety of special effects. How would I create these effects with minimal resources while maintaining the integrity of the script?

I also found the ending of the work to be ambiguous and unsettling; raising questions and leaving them unanswered. In fact, much of the play was not clear to me, I only knew that I enjoyed it.

As I continued to read and re-read the script, contrasts became more apparent -- especially the contrast between light and darkness. As my understanding of the text began to deepen, I noticed that the shadows within the play became more strident. One illusion after another was being

shattered. That which I thought to be true became false. My expectations and perceptions did not equal reality. I became disillusioned. What began as romantic ended in nightmare. Suddenly, the play became filled with darkness. Instead of showing us what love is, it seemed that Kushner was showing us what love is not. What was Kushner saying about life in the twentieth century? Would this be communicated to the audience?

This thesis serves as an examination of the process I underwent to arrive at answers to those questions. Chapter I examines differences between Pierre Corneille's seventeenth century L'Illusion Comique and Kushner's modern-day adaptation. Chapter II takes a closer look at textual analysis specific to Kushner's adaptation. Chapter III documents pre-rehearsal and designer collaboration. Chapter IV follows the production process from casting to performances. This chapter also includes many of the problems encountered and solutions reached. Chapter V, the summary, includes an assessment of the entire process, including; rehearsals, production, and my role as director. A summary of audience evaluations also is included in this chapter. The appendixes follow with a transcription of the audience discussion, backward analysis, floor plan, photos, and the playbill.

CHAPTER 1

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

One of the first steps to preparing a magic act is to know your audience. Depending on the audience, the magician selects appropriate tricks. One of my first steps toward knowing which tricks to select was to research the life and times of both playwrights and to compare Kushner's adaptation with an English translation of Corneille's original L'Illusion Comique.¹

Pierre Corneille was born on June 6, 1606, in Rouen, Northern France. He was raised in a large, bourgeoisie family. His family was well known and respected. His father was an officer of the Water and Forest Commission. Pierre was the eldest of six children. In 1615, he entered the Jesuit School of Rouen which was considered one of the best schools in France. He went to a Jesuit college and was heavily influenced by the classical works of Cicero and Seneca.

Corneille began to study law in 1622. In 1624 he was admitted to the bar, but because of bad diction, he pleaded only one case. By 1629 Corneille occupied two positions

¹Pierre Corneille, The Cid, Cinna, The Theatrical Illusion, trans. John Cairncross (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1975).

that he would maintain for the next twenty years: attorney general in the Department of Water and Forest and attorney general in the Department of Harbors.

It was during Corneille's twenty-third year that he wrote his first comedy, Melite, which brought him recognition and success. During the next few years Corneille wrote a series of comedies which followed the intrigues of young lovers. "Free in form, with a mixture of realism and fantasy, they show a Baroque concern with illusion and the falsity of appearances."²

L' Illusion Comique, written in 1635, was a popular success. Corneille, unsure of what to call the play, deemed it a "strange monster"³ and an "extravagance."⁴ Its tragic play within a comedy defied standardized forms. Even today, scholars are intrigued with its structure, treatment of character, and the ending treatise on the nature of theatre. Corneille claims that "the success of the piece is in its tragedy," yet "the style of the characters are entirely from comedy."⁵

²George Saintsbury, ed. Corneille's Horace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 143.

³Cairncross, 200.

⁴Pierre Corneille, Illusion Comique from 1660 Discourses, trans. Stefan Sittig (Richmond, 1996).

⁵Ibid.

Echoing Horace, Corneille validates the usefulness of the theatre. With the illusion as his vehicle, he shows how theatre can instruct through delight. With the wave of his wand, Alcandre raises actors to the level of kings. He produces beautiful costumes saying, "...is a prince more splendidly attired? And can you still have doubts how great he is?"⁶ To be an actor in the seventeenth century was to be included in one of the noblest professions, a profession which was acknowledged and regularly attended by the King of France.⁷ Kushner, writing in the twentieth century, would have a difficult time convincing his audience that the theatre remains a noble profession.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1957, Anthony Kushner was raised in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in Medieval Studies from Columbia University, he spent most of his summers directing the works of Shakespeare and Bertolt Brecht. He attended New York University and received his Master of Fine Arts in Directing. After graduating from NYU in 1984, Kushner wrote his first nationally recognized play entitled A Bright Room Called Day. Employing many Brechtian conventions, the play portrays "the dissolution of a small circle of friends under

⁶Cairncross, 207.

⁷Cairncross, 280.

the pressure created by the Nazi's rise to power."⁸ The play opened and closed to mixed reviews.

Before writing his adaptation of The Illusion, Kushner began working on the first installment of his two-part epic Angels in America. Part I, Millennium Approaches, won Tony awards and the Pulitzer Prize. Part II, Perestroika, also was honored with the Tony. The play fuses a variety of forms (social satire, melodrama, farce, medieval mystery plays) and addresses, with great precision, the issues and concerns of life in America in the late twentieth century.

In 1988, Tony Kushner was approached by a colleague, Brian Kulick, to adapt Corneille's L'Illusion Comique. Many critics found the play inferior to the original, while a few critics found favor with the script calling it "...a jewel of a play -- fun, provocative...a trick ending worthy of Agatha Christie...This play has style, moral backbone and humor, and richly deserves its burgeoning popularity."⁹

Critics and scholars failed to realize that Kushner not only adapted Corneille's play, but also reinvented it.

⁸Tom Szentgyorgyi, "Look Back--and Forward--In Anger: Tony Kushner Portrays People Caught in Horrifying Moments in History" Theatre Week, January 1991, 14-20.

⁹David Patrick Stearns, review of The Illusion by Tony Kushner, USA Today, 26 June 1991, 4D.

A closer study of both plays reveals similarities and differences that make it viable for the times in which it was created. A comparison between the two works would influence my choices that would be made in production.

In both plays the story remains relatively similar. Pridamant is searching for information regarding his estranged son who was driven away by Pridamant's anger. The son, Clindor, appears as a servant to a boastful Matamore and falls in love with Isabelle. Clindor must face a rival,Adraste, whom he eventually kills. In both plays, Isabelle has a witty maid who rises to equal social status by the play's end. In both plays, infidelity leads to Clindor's demise. Alcandre resolves the action by revealing that the visions were theatrical scenes and that Pridamant's son is alive and successfully working as an actor in Paris. This is where the similarities between the two plays end. Kushner, in freely adapting the play, has taken many liberties with the text. Friend and collaborator Brian Kulick states, "One thing that makes Tony a great writer is that he could read this text, and it was as if he put it in a drawer for two days and then wrote it from his own sensibility."¹⁰

¹⁰Arthur Lubow, "Tony Kushner's Paradise Lost" The New Yorker, 30 November 1992, 64.

Kushner eliminates the role of Dorante, friend of Pridamant, and adds Amanuensis, a sometimes deaf and dumb mute who is servant to the sorcerer Alcandre. It is Amanuensis who crosses over into the realm of the conjured spirits and appears as Isabelle's father in the second illusion. Amanuensis provides an outlet for Kushner to explore sadomasochistic relationships. "I want to explore S & M more because I feel that it's an enormously pervasive dynamic, that it's inextricably wound up with issues of patriarchy, and that there are ways in which it plays through every aspect of life."¹¹

Kushner's maid sleeps with the jailer in order to manipulate him into giving her the key to Clindor's cell. Kushner also intensifies the relationship between the maid and the son by having Clindor seduce the maid. Corneille maintained the hero's sense of honor by refusing the advances of the maid. In Kushner's adaptation, the hero sexually uses the maid and continues on a selfish path toward destruction, causing the audience to question whether the young man is worthy of hero status.

Rather than staying with Corneille's play-within-a-play motif, Kushner divides the illusion into three parts. Character names and places change in each illusion but all

¹¹David Savran, "An interview: Tony Kushner considers the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness" American Theatre, October 1994, 21-27 & 100-104.

three illusions are inevitably connected. Kushner shows us the development of each character growing from youth to old age. Rather than a play-within-a play, Kushner weaves stories-within-stories to create a complex and multi-layered text.

In Corneille's play *Eraste*, a servant of Prince Florilame, is sent to murder Theogenes (Clindor). In Kushner's, Prince Florilame does the killing himself. It could be implied that, in our times, leaders of countries do their own killing rather than sending a henchman to do the job.

The method of exposition and point-of-attack has also changed. Rather than having Pridamant reveal his painful past to a confidant and friend, Kushner forces Pridamant to confess directly to the magician. This heightens the conflict and places Pridamant in a difficult and uneasy situation. Corneille's point-of-attack occurs when Alcandre conjures the "finest costumes of the actors."¹² This magical appearance of the costumes justifies the nobility of the actors at the end of the play. Kushner's Alcandre conjures the son and immediately the story begins. By bringing the father and son together, the point of attack hooks the audience (both Pridamant & our audience) and forces the action of the play to begin.

¹²Cairncross, 207.

The location or setting of the action also has changed. Corneille begins the play with Alcandre emerging from his cave, inviting the father into the cave, and finishing the action outside the cave. Kushner chooses to begin and end the play inside the cave. Corneille's play begins and ends in light, while Kushner's begins and ends in darkness.

The role of Isabelle's father also has changed. Corneille shows Isabelle pleading with the father before the murder of Adraste. Kushner's Alcandre denies showing Pridamant the appearance of the father saying that it is "irrelevant to the story"¹³ (23). Kushner kept the father/daughter scene following the murder of Adraste. Including this scene and eliminating the remaining father/daughter scenes heightens their relationship and emphasizes the parallel between Pridamant and his son.

The fundamental difference between the two scripts lies in the play's conclusion. Corneille's comic ending shows the actors counting out money and each taking his or her share. Pridamant acknowledges the uses and value of theatre and rushes off to be reunited with his son. Kushner's ending is ambiguous. At one moment the father is

¹³Pierre Corneille, The Illusion, freely adapted by Tony Kushner (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1990), 23. All parenthetical page references are to the same.

relieved and excited with the possibility of being reunited with his son; the next moment he denounces his son's profession, "an actor...I don't know that I like that" (81). The audience is left wondering whether Pridamant makes the trip or not. In Corneille's time to be an actor was to be ranked with kingship. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Kushner's era.

In summary, Corneille's L'Illusion Comique with its famous play-within-a-play seems fitting for the age of Baroque. In the twentieth century, The Illusion's hodge-podge of styles and forms complements a post-modern society. Having compared the similarities and differences between Corneille and Kushner's work, I began to understand how the play related to its audience. In order to develop specific strategies to arrive at desired effects, my next step was to begin a closer, textual examination of Kushner's play.

CHAPTER 2

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

After understanding the environment in which both authors wrote, the next step was to begin to define and understand the world of Kushner's play.

One of the first preparation activities I engaged in was a backward analysis of the play's action. Following the advice of David Ball¹, I traced the action of the play and found the cause and effect of each moment, starting with the final moment of the play. I used a large piece of paper and allowed the material to create its own pattern on the page.² When completed, the final product resembled an intricate maze. Moments looped and enclosed other moments while the entire piece is held together by a series of actions and reactions. The action of the play never stopped, flowing effortlessly from one layer to another. A playable structure emerged from this "seemingly" seamless work. The next step in my analysis was to take a closer look at the

¹David Ball, Backwards & Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983).

²included in the appendix.

structure, characters, and thought of the play. Using Part Two of Louis E. Catron's book The Director's Vision³, I arrived at a better understanding of Kushner's use of these three elements.

Structure

The structure of the play is deceptive. Its play(s) within a play is misleading. Pridamant is the protagonist of the piece, yet throughout most of the play he is a spectator watching the action happening in the illusions. In our production, we established an initial sense of equilibrium within the cave by using the sound of dripping water. This dripping established a regular beat, tempo, and sense of time. Into this environment came the father stumbling and lighting a match. The opening stasis established by the cave drips has been disturbed by the entrance of the father. Equilibrium has been destroyed as the play begins and will not be restored until its conclusion.

In his expository speech, Pridamant tells Alcandre that fifteen years prior there was a disagreement or fight which caused his son to take the household money and run away from home. This inciting incident defines the primary

³Louis E. Catron, The Director's Vision (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1989).

playing action. Pridamant states that he has sought information about his son to no avail. He wants to be reunited with his son because he needs resolution before he faces death. This establishes the protagonist's goal, and moments later Alcandre conjures an image from the son's life. Like the ghost appearing before Hamlet, the first appearance of the boy before his father constitutes the play's point of attack.

From this point the father watches a series of "scenes" from his son's life. In the first illusion his son (Calisto) wins Melibea's affections, defeats a rival, and flees as Melibea's father is about to appear. In the second illusion, complications accumulate and eventually lead his son (Clindor) to murder the rival for his love's affection. This action marks the turning point in the play and brings the first act to a close.

The second illusion continues in the second act. The maid, aided by Isabelle, arranges Clindor's escape from prison. The lovers are reunited and flee as the father and the maid are abandoned. The third illusion reveals that the son (Theogenes), excessive in his passions, has again been unfaithful to his wife. This action leads to his death at the climactic moment when the Prince draws a dagger and stabs Theogenes repeatedly. The boundaries between the cave reality and the illusions begin to collide. Pridamant

rushes the stage only to find that the illusions have vanished. It is during the moment of his son's murder and the act of crossing the boundary that Pridamant shows "true" concern (love) for his son. The moment he rushes the stage he is not thinking about the consequences but listening to the voice of his heart. This unselfish moment is the possibility of love, the bright spot in this dark tale. Alcandre has achieved his affect. This moment marks the climax of the play. Alcandre indicates the denouement of the play within when he says, "I have nothing more to show. It's over now" (79). However, we are deceived as the play, instead of ending, takes yet another turn. Alcandre announces that Pridamant's son is alive.

"Your son's not dead, sir. Not really dead. I merely showed him to you in his present occupation. These...scenes you watched are from a theatrical repertoire. Your son...is an actor" (80).

A possible reunion between father and son now exists, renewing our hope for a happy ending. Unfortunately, the father doubts the value of the theatre and the acting profession. The son did not live up to the father's expectations. The father and son theme ends on a note of frustration because Pridamant cannot see beyond his own illusions. This leaves the audience questioning whether Pridamant will visit his son in the spring. The play ends ambiguously. Nevertheless, it is Matamore's unexpected

entrance which closes the play. His search for the moon represents the hope and possibility that illusions provide in life.

Character

One of the first steps to understanding the characters involved in this play was to identify the givens for each of the characters in the script. I divided the characters into two groups; those involved in the "cave" reality and those seen in the illusions (the play(s) within the play). In both realities, I noted how each character was described through textual images, interaction between the characters, and their emotional state.

Cavemen

Pridamant, the protagonist of the play, is a lawyer. He is overly concerned with his own reputation and his finances. He is a man who has never cried but is emotionally engaged throughout the piece. He often complains of physical ailments when things are not going according to his liking. He sees Alcandre's use of pre-Christian magic as a last attempt at reconciliation and is embarrassed that he has fallen to such a level as to consider the use of magic. He also is skeptical of the wizard's servant.

Alcandre is the shaman who, at times, acts as Pridamant's antagonist. Like a theatre director, he conjures and constructs a make-believe reality in order to affect his audience, in this case Pridamant. Alcandre has a sense of humor and enjoys pain, pleasure, and his audience's discomfort. He is both ominous and accommodating.

Amanuensis, a name meaning secretary, is Alcandre's servant. Like a stage manager, he carries out Alcandre's (the director's) wishes and ensures the progression of illusions. An intriguing character, Amanuensis is the only individual to pass from the cave reality into the realm of the illusions. The consummate actor, Amanuensis swallows pills and embodies individuals whose lives are full of "pain, thwarted hope, rejected love, grief, disappointment, joy..." (50). Much like a stage manager filling in for an absent actor, Amanuensis incarnates the character of Geronte, the shadowy reflection of Pridamant. As Alcandre's servant he is submissive, as Isabelle's father he is authoritative.

"Clouds of colored vapor"

Although the names change each time the illusions change, the characters remain essentially the same.

Pridamant's son, Calisto/Clindor/Theogenes, often is associated with a hawk and a cat in each of the illusions.

He also is described as muscular, attractive, wild, and a hunter. Through his interactions with other characters on-stage we find that he uses illusion to deceive others. He first appears as the typical romantic hero and is later revealed to be an adulterer, not typically the action of a hero. He is emotional, passionate, and excessive. His heart burns with the fire of love. Through the progression of the play, this character becomes increasingly self-serving and deceptive. The actor playing him would need to grip the earth like an animal and mesmerize through the use of his voice.

Pleribo/Adraste/Prince Florilame is the rival and chief antagonist of Pridamant's son. He constantly is thwarted in his attempts to win his love's favor. In contrast with the Calisto character, the rival seems elevated. He begins as the well-bred, spoiled rich kid and becomes the powerful and dangerous Prince Florilame. This character evokes the law to justify his actions and achieve his desires. Within the first illusion, he is defeated; in the second, he is destroyed; and in the third, he becomes the victor and murders Theogenes. His wealth and nobility distinguish him from his opponent.

Melibea/Isabelle/Hippolyta is the female ingénue. She is described as wealthy and spoiled. She is easily manipulated into accepting illusion over reality. She

professes to be strong-willed but is reduced to a whimpering coward when placed in difficult situations. Like many young ladies of seventeenth century France, she seeks the idealized life embodied in romantic novels of the time. As her character progresses from illusion to illusion she becomes increasingly dependent and seeks to reaffirm herself when her realities fall short of her idealized illusions. She begins the play wealthy and ends the play poor -- even in love.

The maid, Elicia/Lyse/Clarina, acts as confidant to the ingénue. Motivated by many of the same needs as Pridamant's son, she becomes his lover as well as his rival. Revenge and intrigue serve as her driving forces throughout the play. She begins as the maid servant to Melibea/Isabelle and through her own conniving becomes her mistress' social equal. At the play's midpoint, the poor maid becomes rich and the rich maiden becomes poor. Once driven by her feelings of love and revenge, in the final illusion, she comes to acceptance and resolution.

Perhaps the play's most colorful character, Matamore makes his first appearance in the second illusion. This braggart soldier provides much of the comic relief which balances the dark presence of Geronte, who also is first seen in the second illusion. Matamore, who is "...so great, at times I want to flee myself" (31), seeks to win

Isabelle's affection. He often boasts of his own bravery but is the first to relent in moments of confrontation. Rejection and murder are too real for him. Matamore is the forefather to the characters of Cyrano de Bergerac and Don Quixote. Matamore begins the play knowing exactly where he's going and ends the play "lost and mapless, a wanderer through the world" (83).

Matamore constructs a reality in which he perceives himself as victor and hero. When faced with reality, he pursues further illusions to escape reality. This brave and heroic figure is reduced to a pathetic soul searching for release. He searches for validation and finds it in his servant Clindor. Lyse (the maid) constantly pulls the illusions from under his feet, but later both come to understand each other as they seek a release from life's pains and losses.

Thought

In order to determine the thought of the play, Catron suggests looking at the relationship between the play's point of attack and the protagonist's goal.⁴ In this case, the appearance of the son before the father corresponds to the inciting incident because Pridamant seeks resolution for

⁴Catron, 75.

an event which happened fifteen years before the play begins. Moreso, Pridamant desires resolution and wants Alcandre to "launder the fabric of my recollected life" (72). One by one, Pridamant's illusions are fed, then shattered.

The major dramatic question of the play is "Will Pridamant be reunited with his son?" The answer...maybe. Pridamant professes that he has changed and wants reconciliation with his son, however, throughout the play, he repeats the same destructive behavior. He fails to see that the stage is mirroring his own life.

The answer to the question is intentionally ambiguous. One moment Pridamant is excited at the prospect of a reunion with his son and in the next moment says "I may, if health permits, go to Paris in the spring, providing that they've put straw down on the muddy roads and made them passable" (82). The realization that his son is an actor fails to fulfill Pridamant's expectations. Life's answers are not black and white, but complex shades of gray.

The subject of the play is love. This is reiterated by the characters throughout the course of the play. Pridamant's son "eats and breathes love" (75), both Geronte and Pridamant ask "What does love mean?" (18 and 58). Few answers are given; rather, Kushner examines what love is

not. Characters often associate love with greed, co-dependence, and abuse.

The stage, like the cave in Plato's The Republic, is a metaphor for human existence. The father has lived his life seeing only illusions. These illusions are shadows of the real thing. Pridamant cannot see beyond the shadows. It is Alcandre, a man of the theatre, who attempts to show him the light of insight, but the father leaves the cave unable even to recall his son's name. This often is the case for a director -- he creates a new world for his audience to briefly visit, yet when they leave, the message often is lost. However, if one impression or memory remains, all is not lost and the possibility to effect change exists.

The title of the play indicates the vehicle through which Alcandre will arrive at his goal. In love, like in the theatre, we can be fooled. The Illusion challenges us to question what it is we see and believe. That which seems true may be false: "What in this world is not evanescent? What in this world is real and not seeming?" (81). The play challenges us to see beyond illusions.

CHAPTER 3

WORLDS OF ILLUSION

Performing a backward analysis and studying Kushner's use of plot, character, and thought, allowed me to clearly understand what effects to create. My next step in preparation for this magic act was to solidify the ideas into concrete, designable terms. Here we began to create the effects which would give substance to the illusion. This chapter contains documentation of the scenic elements used in The Illusion and an account of how research was incorporated into the design process. Ron Keller was the scenic designer with Elizabeth Weiss Hopper and Lou Szari as costume and light designers respectively. Lucas Indelicato, a senior BFA candidate, designed sound for the production. Ron, Liz and Lou are VCU faculty members.

General Notes

Into the first production meeting I brought the aforementioned thoughts about the play. I explained that I believed the play to be about the elusive nature of love. I explained how Kushner examines conventions of love and proceeds to shatter them one by one. Each type of love,

abusive love, co-dependent love, love and greed, love as a possession, and romantic love is examined. I continued by explaining that the play also is about magic. It is about the theatre's ability to move an individual, to make people feel. It is about how things are not always what they seem to be. This play points up the difference between illusion and reality, expectation and actuality, theatre and life. There is always more than meets the eye.

I began the production meeting by showing the designers and crew a drawing of a Norse god.¹ I asked them what they saw. Almost immediately they replied that they saw an old man. Many of them knew that I had something up my sleeve and were skeptical. I quickly pointed out that while it appears as an old man on the surface, when studied closely, the picture is comprised of two lovers kissing. A smile of delight and wonder came to their faces when they realized that what I said was true. I explained that in many ways the effect of the play was quite similar. The audience should enjoy discovering the "secret" as much as they did when they first saw the two lovers.

The second drawing I used to illustrate my response to the show was found in the book.² This collection of

¹The graphic, reproduced on the poster and playbill, is included in the appendix.

²Benteli Verlag, Sandro Del Prete Illusoria (Gestaltung: Benteliteam, Satz and Druck, 1987), 21.

drawings is reminiscent of M.C. Escher's work. One particular drawing showed a series of pages of a book that seemed to cause the viewer's eye to be pulled down into the drawing. I explained to the designers that in many ways the play had the same effect on me. Its many layers pull the audience into the world of the play. Through these layers we are brought to the center, core, or crux of the play.

My final reference was Rembrandt's The Night Watch.³ Using this painting as a model, I explained that The Illusion was a play about contrasts -- especially between light and darkness. The opening image of the play served as an example. Into a completely darkened cave enters Pridamant who strikes a match. This single point of light represents the possibility of love amidst the darkness. Light becomes precious. Like many of the paintings by Rubens and Rembrandt, objects are submerged in darkness and are only partially illuminated.

From this meeting the designers began to make choices relating to their own specialty.

Costume Elements

Liz Hopper immediately translated light and darkness into a distinguishing feature of the two realities. She

³Dr. Enzo Orlandi, ed. The Life and Times and Art of Rembrandt (New York: Crescent Books, 1987), 43.

placed the characters who appeared in the illusions in white and cream colors. To this she contrasted the clothing of the characters in the cave by placing these characters in dark tones (blacks and dark grays in a variety of textures). Budgetary and time restraints forced her to pull eighteenth century costumes from VCU stock. To these existing costumes she chose to add or modify the pieces for the various illusions. It was decided that the costuming would remain faithful to the period and would allow for authenticity in sword play and stage combat. Actresses began to work in rehearsal corsets as early as the third week of rehearsal.

Initial conversations with Liz Hopper sent me back to the script to define character givens. With these descriptive elements, most of them adjectives, she was able to develop a progression of the costumes that paralleled character development. Because of the burden of the previous plays in the season, designs came late in the process.

Scenic Elements

At the initial design meeting Ron Keller remarked about the similarities between a theatre and a cave. A literal cave would have limited the play's possibilities, so Ron designed Pridamant's expectation of what a magician's cave would look like.

Ron divided the cave space into two sections; the primary space at floor level in which Alcandre, Amanuensis, and Pridamant would watch, and a raised platform where the illusions would take place. This stage within a stage distinguished the separation and established a boundary between the two realities. A finalized floor plan arrived late in the process after initial blocking rehearsals had begun.⁴

The cave and its components were suggested rather than fully realized. In order to create the dreamlike fluidity of motion, Ron incorporated a revolving platform in the raised stage. The revolve allowed the actors to move on and off stage effortlessly -- appearing and disappearing as if by magic.

Scenic elements were sparse. The cave was furnished with chests, baskets, old books, and miscellaneous magical items. Only two set pieces were designed for the illusions; a garden wall with a door and a prison cell. As the illusions progressed, the physical properties of the illusions were eliminated. This placed emphasis on character relationships rather than the environment. As designed, the first illusion had a garden gate and bench. The second illusion had only a bench and the final illusion was free from extraneous scenic elements.

⁴included in the appendix.

It was decided that the play would be staged in proscenium formation. This accommodated magical effects and enhanced limited lighting possibilities. Choosing to eliminate side seating gave the theatre and the cave a sense of hollow emptiness.

Lighting

Lou Szari found the images of light and darkness compelling. Lou's lighting choices would provide most of the color and texture to the cave and the illusions. The lights further defined the playing space into three distinct sections: the cave space, primarily intense directional light, sharply defined through shutters and spotlights on individual actors and locations; the forestage of the raised platform, on which a series of gobos were projected; and the upstage space, shrouded in darkness throughout the play. By backlighting the action, Lou was able to keep visible movement during the set changes to a minimum. The unlit area upstage allowed characters to seemingly appear and disappear from darkness.

Lou used a variety of gobos to create patterns of light and vary texture from scene to scene. Lou requested that I search through VCU's existing gobo collection and allow myself to respond instinctually to the shapes and contours to match the scenes. As a result, the patterns and

lighting effects were very soft in the first illusion, becoming stark and strident by the third illusion.

Lou was intrigued by the illusions. Within these "soap bubbles" (81) he envisioned lighting which revealed only a hint of what was there. These splashes of light and color coupled with stage smoke would allow the actors to appear as "clouds of colored vapor" (7).

Sound and Music

The only sound effect specifically written in the script is the cry of a hawk. Rather than accepting this as a limitation, Lucas Indelicato and I opened the script to other possibilities. We decided to underscore the interior scenes of the illusions to heighten and control the emotions of the viewers (both Pridamant and the actual audience). We decided that a non-rhythmic underscoring would best accompany the action of the play. I cited the musical styles of Kitaro and Cirque du Soleil as examples that would create an atmosphere of mystery and magic. Using an elaborate system of computers and speakers, Lucas was able to send voices and sounds throughout the theatre.

Lucas had specific ideas for cave sounds. His selections included rats, bats, dripping water, and echo effects. The dripping water would run throughout the show and be included in pre-show and intermission. Amanuensis,

when turning off the lights at the end of the show, would raise a cloth which exposed a reel-to-reel from which the cave sounds seemed to originate.

The rhythmic sound of the water dripping established a sense of time and became the pulse of the play. Water, a close relative of the tear, is an important element in the show. The sounds of the rats and bats were used to accentuate the eeriness of the cave. Lucas hid microphones near the stage to create stage echo. This reinforced the hollowness of the cave and allowed Alcandre's voice to come from different places in the theatre.

Like the light, costume, and set designers, Lucas divided the underscoring of the interior illusions into three distinct sections. The first illusion would be accompanied by sounds of various woodwind instruments, the music in the second illusion would consist of stringed instrumentation, and the final illusion would have ethereal orchestration. A common melodic structure would be established and repeated in each of the illusions and would grow less defined as the illusions progressed. Lucas kept a contrast between the illusions and the cave by fading the underscored sound back and forth as the play passed from one reality to the other.

As Alcandre says, "Concentrate on the general outline. Leave the details to me" (10). Having defined the

parameters of the illusions, the designers and I began to physicalize many of the details and effects which would eventually create a make-believe reality. The next trick was to cast and rehearse the production.

CHAPTER 4

TOWARD REALIZATION

Casting

Using the character information I accumulated during the analysis phase, I was ready to cast the production. In the audition, I was looking for similar qualities or characteristics between the actor and the character. I was very interested in the actor's "line of business" and cast according to type.

I tried to remain as objective as possible going into the audition. I had several actors in mind for roles but I avoided precasting. I invited each actor to read for a variety of parts.

All of the graduate directors cast from the same pool of actors. Some of the directors shared their thoughts on casting throughout the audition, others chose to keep their thoughts to themselves. As the auditions continued, patterns began to develop and we could see which play each actor would serve best.

From the general auditions each director conducted individual callbacks. The Illusion callback consisted of a brief improvisation and cold readings from the script. I

began the callback with a simple exercise in which actors were paired off and asked to select one of two objects I brought with me to the audition, either a large handkerchief or a wooden dowel. I asked the actors to transform the object into a different object. Used as a warm-up to the callbacks, this exercise provided insight to the playfulness and creativity of each actor.

During cold readings I allowed the actors the freedom to experiment with the script. Given time to prepare the scene, I asked that they develop an activity to accompany the dialogue. Again, this allowed me to evaluate their creativity and understanding of the text. Many of the actors found the audition to be freeing while others grew frustrated by the lack of adjustments and direction. For me, this exercise quickly defined the actors with whom I would prefer to work.

From these exercises and readings two actors fell into place. Janine Russo had the qualities of the ingénue. Greg DeLeonardis also had many of the characteristics I was looking for in Pridamant's son. Fortunately, I had worked with both actors in previous productions and knew that their stage chemistry was irresistible and they became irreplaceable to me as the young lovers.

For Matamore, I was looking for an actor who could capture the spirit of the character, his wit and

vulnerability. Jason Linkins provided an almost ideal match. Jason's comic timing and playful spirit rivaled Matamore's. The other graduate directors did not have a part appropriate for Jason and I was delighted with the possibility of working with him.

The maid and the rival were more difficult to cast. There were a large number of young females to choose from but I was looking for a mature and dangerous quality for the maid. Christine Torchia fit the bill. As an actress, she seemed mysterious and intriguing. In casting the rival, I was searching for an actor who seemed to walk above the ground and would contrast with the young lover. The actor I originally cast could not continue with the show so I read Steve Ferguson who I originally considered for the young lover. As the son, Steve didn't seem to grip the earth as I thought the character should. However, as the prince/rival, Steve clicked perfectly into place.

I knew it would be difficult to cast the remaining characters. Alcandre, Amanuensis, and Pridamant were all pivotal characters. I needed to find actors with the age and maturity to command these demanding roles. Eventually, I found Tom Nelson, Mike Todaro, and Bruce Hermann to play the respective parts. I had worked with Tom on previous projects and because he missed the initial auditions he was not under consideration for the other productions. I found

Tom's voice and look intriguing, a perfect complement to the role of Alcandre. Mike Todaro has a dangerous quality which made him an ideal choice for Geronte and his ability to play a wide range of characters suited Amanuensis.

The final role to cast was Pridamant. This task was difficult due to the limited number of older actors in the department. Bruce Hermann entered the department in the spring and had an impressive resumé. There were two primary advantages to casting Bruce as Pridamant. First, he was older and could believably pass for Greg's father and second, he had professional experience and a work ethic that would benefit the production. Unfortunately, Bruce was employed outside the university and wanted to focus on developing a solid academic start in the graduate program. After much cajoling Bruce read and accepted the part.

A complication arose when Greg DeLeonardis, my primary choice for the son, also was chosen for a second thesis production which ran one month preceding The Illusion. I read several other actors for the part but none seemed to possess the animalistic qualities that Greg possessed. The other director and I found ourselves in a stalemate. Through the guidance of the faculty, the issue was resolved by talking to the actor. He assured all parties that he could accommodate both directors while

maintaining his graduate course work. With the cast in place, rehearsals began.

Pre-blocking

I allotted the first two cast meetings for read-throughs. The first was conducted in my apartment with chairs placed in a circle. I attempted to break the discomfort of a first reading and encouraged the actors to interact as a team. I felt this informal atmosphere was a good beginning to the process. Unfortunately, one cast member was in rehearsal for another production and could not attend. Much to my disappointment, a second cast member did not attend because he was stuck in New York waiting for his ride back to Richmond. Our stage manager assumed the roles and we worked through the script. I instructed the cast not to rush the reading. However, when the cast began emoting with every line, I encouraged them to pick up the pace. The goal of the reading was to hear the voices of the other actors who would eventually inhabit the characters. After the reading, I asked the actors what questions they had regarding the script. A few of these questions were:

Are these different characters in different plays or one continuous story with changing names?

In what time period would the play be set?

Will the father be reunited with the son?

This last question provoked a heated debate. I encouraged the cast to go back to the script for answers. I offered my opinion that many of us desire happy endings but many times life's answers are complex and ambiguous. Bruce acknowledged my opinion but disagreed saying that playing an ambiguous ending would make the show bitter. Jason intervened saying that it is his character, Matamore, and the servant, Amanuensis who hold the key to the ending of the play.

We concluded that the situations put on stage are similar to situations in daily life and only the names have been changed. The names change, but the situations and the characters essentially remain the same. The characters, although growing older, continue in the same destructive patterns. In a way, the characters in the illusions have been typecast throughout their careers.

I shared with the cast the decision to place the show in the eighteenth century. I acknowledged we were moving the play forward a century to accommodate the costumes. This was to be a period piece with a contemporary feel. I cited Dangerous Liaisons as an example of how the piece would be stylized. Placing the piece in a period allows a separation from the audience. In a way, it alienates the audience so the parallels can be seen.

The cast discussed Kushner's examination of love. I purposefully offered few answers and encouraged the cast to question the play and their characters. At this point, I acted as an observer, noting their questions. These questions and comments could be similar to the ones the audience might ask. At the end of the reading Jason noted that "Love is work." Everyone agreed and we began the task of creating The Illusion.

The second reading was conducted in the rehearsal space. With all of the actors present, we began the second reading of the text. At the conclusion of the previous rehearsal I encouraged the actors to look up any unfamiliar words. I could tell that their understanding of their characters and the piece had grown from the first reading. Throughout the reading I discussed with the actors the subtle shifts in their characters from the play's beginning to the play's end. Bruce came to the conclusion that everything in the play is a reflection of his character. The theatre is mirroring Pridamant's life. One downfall of working in the rehearsal space was that the actors seemed to shift into a mock performance mode. I encouraged them to keep listening and reacting to their scene partners. It was also at this reading that I laid down basic ground rules for the production. With this common ground established we could now begin blocking rehearsals.

Shortly before these rehearsals began, I contacted Mr. Jeff Matthews at Washington University in Webster Groves, Missouri. Jeff is an alumnus of the VCU theatre department and staged WU's production of The Illusion in 1995. Jeff had the good fortune of working with Kushner on the WU production. We compared notes and shared stories. I expressed my confusion with the final line of the show: "Not in this life, but in the next" (82). Jeff reassured me by saying "Don't be afraid of the ambiguity. Play into it." We talked at length about the moment when Pridamant rushes the stage and crosses the imaginary boundary. We both agreed that the moment should be filled with blinding light. I asked many questions and was relieved that many of Jeff's answers confirmed my suspicions. Other answers provoked further thought and discussion. His insight was invaluable.

Blocking

Having divided the play into 39 French scenes, I worked each scene in a similar way. The actors read through a scene and then I asked them to paraphrase the scene using their own words. This immediately pointed up places where the actors were confused or unclear. I then created a space for the actors to play. Because the floor plan had not yet been developed, we experimented with different ways of setting each scene. Within this space the actors were able

to play freely and clarify their intentions. By the end of rehearsals the actors had a foundation on which they could work.

It was also during the early stages of blocking rehearsals that fight choreographer Kyle Zimmerman began to develop the sword play that would be incorporated into the production. I worked with Kyle on previous projects and knew he was quite versed with the stylistic conventions of the period, as well as actor safety. Kyle started by showing me a rough draft of what the fights would look like in performance. After making comments and suggestions, Kyle worked with the actors on an individual basis and periodically showed me their progression. Several of the actors had little fight experience, but by performance Kyle had erased their insecurities. The result was very convincing sword play.

The next step in the blocking rehearsals was to question all the choices the characters were making. This came in the form of blocking and vocal adjustments. If the choices were not clear we would go back to the text and question line by line what they were saying and why.

A recurring problem surfaced early in rehearsals involving Christine's delivery of lines. Many times they lacked variety and seemed slow. It wasn't until after many rehearsals that we realized that her commanding image for

her character was a snake. This devious creature slipped and slithered but also caused her to slow down her speech. I asked Christine to start breaking up her lines rather than running them together and to choose more aggressive tactics. Her body language also reflected passive characterization. She became conscious of her choices and we attempted to make her character more dangerous and driven.

Christine and I constantly struggled to find a common vocabulary. Many of my observations were externally based, "Your inflection is falling...Why don't you face him in this scene?" For every question she seemed to have an appropriate answer but her objective was not being conveyed clearly. To me it seemed that she was not owning the lines. In a later rehearsal we discovered that when heightening the intention behind the line, extreme passions burst to the surface and created a dynamic performance.

A second problem that I faced was finding time to rehearse the characters in the illusion versus the characters in the cave. I found myself spending a majority of my time with the illusion sequences while the other sections, including the monologues at the top and bottom of the show, were suffering. I attempted to rectify the situation by asking Rick St. Peter, the assistant director, to work with one of the groups while I worked with the other. Prior to rehearsals, Rick and I would briefly

discuss what needed to be accomplished in the given scene. He would take the actors into an adjoining space and work to develop the piece. At the end of the rehearsal I would look at the scene and make comments and adjustments.

By the third week of rehearsal, a floor plan was finalized. The playing space was defined and I began to adjust the blocking to accommodate the plan.

Sequences were small enough that the actors would have the scene memorized by the end of rehearsal. Following the advice of William Ball¹, I ran each scene three times. The first was a warm-up, in the second we questioned choices, and in the final we solidified choices. Each sequence had at least two rehearsal periods committed to it.

During a rehearsal which Dr. Campbell attended, I found myself completely immobilized. He commented that the delivery of the lines seemed too formal, appearing empty, phony, and "significant." The characters did not possess an inner life beyond the text and believability was questionable. I found myself so overwhelmed with the lack of plausibility that I didn't know where to begin. I found myself unable to rectify the situation. I urged the actors to listen to each other, specifically for the trigger word that trips the next line, forcing the play to move forward.

¹William Ball, A Sense of Direction: Some Observations on the Art of Directing (New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1984).

This rectified the pacing of the scenes, but the "formality" remained.

After several rehearsals, we discovered that the actors were too concerned with the period's stylistic requirements. Their diction, movements, and gestures were too precise, thus causing them to appear formal. They were not embodying their characters; they were trapped in technique. We attempted to resolve this by adhering less to the stylistic concerns of the period and giving more attention to the character's objectives and motivations.

After working individual sections during the first four weeks of rehearsal, I began to combine several sections during the fifth and sixth weeks. Running multiple sections in the same rehearsal allowed the actors to understand the action of the scenes and how they related to those that followed. Running Act 1 and 2 on separate days allowed me to determine what needed to be worked during future rehearsals. The actors were impatient with this method, but I believe it allowed me to focus on specific problem spots.

Several times I used improvisations to capture the reality of a moment. Because the actors were becoming formalized in their depiction of the characters, I used a contemporary situation equivalent to their stage situation. For example, I asked Steve and Greg to play the second rival sequence in a bar. The situation was the same but they were

allowed to create their own dialogue as long as it resembled what their character would say. We continued the exercise, placing their characters in the situation and finally using Kushner's text in the situation. The use of improvisation seemed to free the actors, especially Christine and Steve, from postures which seemed forced on their characters.

Magical effects

During the course of the play, several magical effects were employed, the first effect being Alcandre's appearance at the beginning of the show. In initial production meetings, I discussed with the set and costume designers that Alcandre should blend in with the set. Disguising Alcandre in the setting would make him seem invisible to both Pridamant and the audience. At the appropriate moment Alcandre would move from his position and seem to appear. Unfortunately, the idea was never fully realized and we settled with placing Alcandre on a platform behind the audience. The effect, while not as magical, still caught the audience (and Pridamant) by surprise.

The son's first appearance before Pridamant also was garnished with effects. The appearance marked the play's point of attack and needed proper attention and emphasis. We accomplished this by having the actor hidden behind the garden wall as it was set into position on the revolve. By

adding smoke and lights and revolving the garden wall into the downstage position, the son seemed to magically appear.

A disappearance was called for after Alcandre incants over Amanuensis at the end of Act 1 (50). The designer had no practical solutions for the effect so I worked with the actor to create a magical transformation. We developed a sequence in which Amanuensis would step onto a moving revolve. Staying near the periphery of the revolve, Amanuensis went through a series of postures conveying pleasure, pain, trust, denial, and finally, while reaching for the father, a non-voiced scream. Coupled with stage smoke and flashing gobos, the character seemed to pass through a variety of stages and disappeared into a void. A flash pot was incorporated into the final effect to pull the audience's attention away from the actor's exit. The transformation sequence became highly stylized and was an exciting moment in the production.

A similar effect was called for when Pridamant rushes the stage in the climactic moment following his son's death. The script called for a great red curtain to fall, Pridamant rushing toward it, tearing it down only to find that the illusions have vanished (78). The scenic designer planned an elaborate cornice which would be suspended over the raised platform. Within this cornice a curtain would be rigged to fall at the appropriate time as indicated in the

script. By technical runs, the cornice and accompanying curtain had not been realized. Eventually, the curtain effect was eliminated.

I still wanted the moment to be a high contrast between light and darkness. Our solution was to use flash pots during the crossover. By using flash pots we were able to transform the moment when Pridamant crosses the imaginary barrier into a moment of blinding light. This effect was quite unexpected and spectacular. Unfortunately, because of their lightly colored costumes, the audience and Pridamant could see the actors rise from their tableau and exit off the stage.

The final magical effect occurred during Alcandre's closing speech to Pridamant. The first effect was to levitate a small rock from the ground to his hand and then allow the rock to seem suspended between his hands. The method of accomplishing this trick was simple. We tied a black thread, which was connected to a small rock made of Sculpy, to Alcandre's chair. The actor would allow the thread to pass over the back of his hand and between his middle fingers. As he stood and walked toward the rock, it seemed to rise to his hand. Once in his hand, the actor would maneuver his other hand into position allowing the string and rock to be suspended from the other hand. This gave the illusion that no strings were attached. By

coordinating the actor's body posture and lighting, shadows disguised the string attached to the chair. When Alcandre says, "I am...a tired old fake" (82), the string and effect were revealed to the audience.

The final magic trick incorporated into the show was a rose which vanished in a spectacular burst of flame. This effect was accomplished with flash paper and a rigged match. A rose bud was made from flash paper and colored accordingly. As the magician showed the rose to Pridamant, Alcandre reached inside his cloak and withdrew a lit match. The match was wrapped in sandpaper and held in place with a binder clip. The force of removing the match from the clip lit the match. The match was touched to the paper flower and tossed in the air where the paper and flame disappeared. The effect was stunning.

Full Runs

Two weeks prior to opening we began full runs. Each run was structured similarly. The cast began at 7:00 p.m. with a group warm-up consisting of vocal and physical stretches. I occasionally would interject a specific warm-up activity that I wanted the actors to concentrate on during the rehearsal. Then, on a slip of paper, the actors would write a goal for the rehearsal. I kept these goals

with me and discussed them with the actors following the run that evening.

I typed specific notes and gave them to the actors the following day. This allowed the actors to leave rehearsal at a reasonable hour and allowed me to give them very specific notes.

During the final week of full runs, I invited several colleagues to be our test audience. Acting as a moderator, I encouraged the actors to ask the audience questions about how their characters were perceived. Much to our delight, many of the impressions we developed played convincingly to the audience.

Technical Rehearsals

To complete set construction by opening, the week that had been allotted for technical rehearsals was reduced to three evenings. Act 1 was run on Sunday with lights, sound, and music. Act 2 was run on Monday with the same. Both evenings took four hours to fully tech each act. These evenings were difficult for the actors and for me because they did not allow for acting developments. Monday's run began later than scheduled due to technicians attempting to pull together last-minute set details.

We were having trouble with the garden wall and prison cell. The garden wall would not stand unsupported

and created sightline and lighting difficulties. Several options were outlined and eventually the problems were rectified by eliminating all but the garden door. It was during the same rehearsal that the prison cell also was eliminated. The entrance of the prison from the fly loft was intrusive and distracted from the action of the play. Eliminating the cell allowed for a smoother transition into the escape sequence. In production, the prison was conveyed through lighting effects.

Tuesday and Wednesday were full runs with all technical elements. There were the expected technical mistakes throughout these runs but overall I was quite pleased to see the show's final shape. A preview audience on Wednesday night allowed us to test the success or failure of our effects. Many positive and constructive comments following the preview allowed us to make final adjustments to the show.

Performances

The Illusion, fully realized, opened on Thursday, April 18, 1996, in the Raymond Hodges Theatre at the Virginia Commonwealth University Performing Arts Center. The opening and closing nights were sold out. I was impressed with the performances of the actors and technicians. The costumes looked magnificent. I was quite

pleased that the action of the play never held for costume or set changes. The entire show ran two hours, twenty minutes including a fifteen-minute intermission.

A sigh of relief came with the first communal response from the audience. I was concerned that the play and its sense of mystery and darkness might discourage an audience from actively participating. I feared the production had lost its sense of humor. The first laughter reassured me that the effects we planned were working.

The biggest response from the audience came when Alcandre reveals that Pridamant's son is not dead, but an actor working in Paris. "You didn't think this was real?" (80) brought peels of laughter from the audience. The effects had worked and the audience had been fooled!

I attended all five performances of The Illusion. I kept encouraging and challenging the actors and crew throughout the run. I was very pleased with the end product. The show's success is due to the hard work, loyalty, and dedication of the cast and crew. The production closed Monday, April 22, 1996.

CHAPTER 5
CLOSING ACT

"We try to please our patrons, don't we my friend?" (82)

After all the magic and illusions have vanished, Alcandre watches Pridamant leave the cave. Alcandre has succeeded because he has evoked a tear of remorse and found the possibility of love within Pridamant's heart. Alcandre also has failed because he could not change Pridamant's mind and actions. With a heavy sigh, Alcandre states "I am...a tired old fake" (82). Saying goodnight to colleague Dogsbody, formerly Amanuensis, he shuffles off.

The magician, like a director, is only as good as the illusion he conjures. Only if the magician/director creates an environment in which his audience can believe in magic is he successful. If the effects fail, so does the magic and so does the magician.

I created several means of testing the effects we created in production; first, a personal observation and documentation of the performances; second, a post-show discussion with the audience, actors, and director; and third, individual written critiques.

I will not apologize for choices made in production. I believe that we make the best choices possible under the given circumstances and requirements. I will, however, acknowledge my own successes and failures about my work as director and, ultimately, as magician.

One of the most successful choices I made as director was my casting of the production. I assembled some of the most talented and capable individuals in the department for this production. Each of the actors was completely committed to the task. Audience members made specific mention of the ensemble acting in which there was a "high and consistent level of acting."¹ The honesty of the acting also was mentioned in the critiques. I was fortunate enough to assemble a group of actors who listened to and reacted off one another.

Many of the critiques mentioned a cohesiveness of all the elements (costumes, actors, sound, set). By allowing these elements to complement and serve the action of the play, we created a world into which the audience could freely enter. Like Pridamant, the audience entered the cave and became an active participant in the action. Pridamant's journey mirrored that of the audience.

Another success was the ability to play the action moment by moment. By doing so, the actors didn't give away

¹Anonymous audience member.

the ending of the show. I believe this was in part because of the work I had done with David Ball's backward analysis.

As Pridamant notes on his exit, "All these memories, and I've forgotten his name" (82). Good directing leads to powerful images which appeal to audience emotions and lives in their memories. Several memorable images were mentioned in the evaluations and discussion especially: Alcandre's first appearance, Geronte towering over his desk peering down at Isabelle, Geronte brutally dragging Isabelle by the hair across the floor, Alcandre levitating a gray rock, Amanuensis disappearing in the mist during the transformation, Matamore's comic bits, specific Amanuensis facial expressions, Theogenes and Hippolyta, the final tableau following the stab in the third illusion, the appearance of the moon, and both of the deaths. These moments, convincingly staged, promote a sense of awe and belief in the play's reality. It is these moments that testify to the magic of theatre.

My strongest asset as a director is the working relationship I establish with the actors. I couple a sense of humor with tremendous patience to arrive at a process which is focused, energized, and playful. Depending on the goal of the rehearsal, my behavior changes from task master to team player. I believe in positive affirmation and honesty to foster the actor's, as well as the character's,

development. Overall, it is the ability to eliminate distractions and tell a story that determines my success as a director.

Another quality of a successful director is to acknowledge short comings. Becoming a good director or magician takes patience and perseverance. There are successes and failures. Only by addressing these shortcomings can a director improve his craft.

Even during performances the production suffered, at times, from a lack of believability. Most audience members cannot articulate or pin-point a believable actor but they can sense when something is untrue. If the acting is convincing the performances will be compelling. One of the faults of the rehearsal process was moving too quickly from read-throughs into blocking rehearsals. Actors were asked to define the scenes based on their instincts of where, how, and when the characters would move. A false attempt at organic blocking, I realized too late in the process that the relationships between the characters must be clearly and specifically defined. For example, the term father/daughter relationship is not specific enough. Indistinct relationships caused the actors, even in performance, to continually define and redefine the terms of their relationships. Patterns were laid down too early. The actors and director should have probed, questioned, and

defined character before blocking rehearsals. The relationships should provide an outline from which the blocking can be derived.

Many of the critiques commented on the production concept or lack of one. The classical costumes clashed with contemporary inserts. In places, the concept was "lumpy" and undefined. I had trouble developing a guiding image or production concept. I saw no justification for keeping the production strictly period or reason to limit contemporary references. I knew there was a problem when suggesting the addition of the stereo console beneath Alcandre's table. The scenic designer remarked "You need to carefully consider that choice because it changes what the show is saying." I decided to keep the effect because I believed it was consistent with the show's surprises and disillusiones.

By the fourth week of rehearsal, the show was becoming intellectual and methodical. Patterns and grooves had been established and it was difficult to reinvigorate the play with humor and playfulness. The extremes in the text were leveling out and I was unable, in many instances, to help the actors play extremes. I believe the root of the problem lay in their ill-defined relationships and diminished stakes.

However, I believe that the process toward production was a positive experience. The play's magic and tribute to

the theatre remained compelling and appealing. The production played effectively to the audience. A question in the written critique asked what the play was about. Answers were similar. "Life is not always what you want it to be." It's about "the illusions we create in our lives...when the 'truth' is revealed it is not as pretty as the illusion." "Things aren't always what they seem." One individual related the play to his own life, "I often reflected on my own choices when encountered with a romantic relationship and my own doubts and inability to trust...Life is really a series of illusions." These testimonials verify that the production clearly and successfully resonated with the audience.

"An illusion, though ingeniously thought out and cleverly built up, demands intelligent presentation, else it is still a lifeless machine."² Successful illusions depend on cooperation between the conjurer and one or more assistants. Likewise, the magic of theatre could not be possible without the contributions of a talented team working toward a common goal. It takes an abundance of ingenuity, thought, and technical skill to bring illusions to life. Thanks to a talented team, The Illusion reaffirmed the reason that we love the theatre. It was magic.

²Ottokar Fischer, Illustrated Magic (New York: Macmillan Press, 1931), 147.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

TRANSCRIPTION

The Illusion

Excerpts from the Post-Show Discussion
Friday, April 19, 1996

Transcription prepared by
Elizabeth Vandekerckhove and Steven Harders

Director: It's not very often that we get a chance to talk to the audience and we just wanted to get some of your thoughts and reactions to the play. Maybe if it made you think about something in your own life or maybe not. So I just want to open it up and start it off with asking you all if there were certain places in the play or certain moments that you remember from the play now that it's all over? Certain images or moments that you remember specifically - that's what I'm really interested in. Is there anything that comes out - jumps to mind?

Man #1: When Jason (Matamore) had that speech about the moon.

Director: About the what?

Man #1: The moon.

Director: The moon.

Man #1: The speech downstage.

Director: And was it the speech itself that you liked or

Man #1: Yes.

Director: Okay.

Man #1: And Jason -- I noticed -- That was a wonderful moment.

Director: Okay good. What else?

Woman #1: I was really struck by the ending when it was all revealed. It just made me think of, you know, the story of when you would have to tell your parents you're gay and you sit them down and you say "I have a brain tumor" and your parents get really sad and then you say "No, I'm just gay." [laughter]

Director: Just a joke! [laughter]

Woman #1: It just struck me as, you know, this really, you know, his way of making a statement through that tongue-clicking thing because you kept thinking about his tongue being gone and that's, as I was hearing that sound (makes sound), I thought "How do you make that sound?" and the only way you can make that sound is with your tongue. So for some reason that was another thing that really struck me. It was interesting.

Director: Okay, good. What other things?

Woman #2: I liked how the father was portrayed on the other world.

Director: In the other world? Okay.

Woman #3: The handkerchief -- the handing of the handkerchief back to the father was particularly in that

Mike: See Steve, I told you people would catch that [laughter]

Woman #3: That was one thing that -- the way that Bruce (Pridamant) just went -- Oh my God -- That brief glimpse of self.

Director: Glimpse of self. Yes, right, okay.

Woman #3: It was good.

Director: Good, yes.

Man #2: The scene in the second act between Janine and Greg, (Hippolyta and Theogenes) the very last scene was just like really long, they were like so connected to each other that they just seemed so, so immediate to me -- they were really working off each other so much in that. I was really focused in on that moment. It's the longest I've ever been focused, usually I'll be focused for like two minutes and the I'll be like (acts out distraction), and then I'll go back, but it was like boom (makes focusing gesture) and all it was just two actors on stage. It was really intense.

Director: Alright, okay, good. Any others? Okay, let me ask you this. When do you think you were hooked into the world of the play? When did this play hook you? Not necessarily when the way that I did it hooked you, but when did all of a sudden you say 'Hey, this play has got me and I'm going with it'? Do you have a specific moment? Or something?

Woman #4: When Greg (Calisto) smelled the bench. [laughter]

Director: Okay. That was the hook for you. Okay.

Man #1: Right before intermission when Michael (Amanuensis) crossed into that world.

Director: Okay. That was the hook for you.

Man #1: Yes.

Director: The transformation. Okay. Going over. Yes. And that's it, huh? The rest of you I didn't get? [laughter]

Woman #3: That's not true!

Director: Okay.

Woman #3: There's so many things. (an actor makes gesture)
Well there were.

Director: Well, name one.

Woman #3: Why do I have to do all the talking? [laughter]
No, I thought that what was so interesting is that you think, well having already visited the play before, it was like "Oh, Pridamant's really dumb for not knowing that these are actors," but that's after seeing, you know, reading it myself. But what's so interesting is how everybody fits into their little stock molds, but you can watch them grow up at the same time. The first scene, you know they're the real, like I forget the correct Italian world for it, but they, they're the young lovers and then they, you watch them grow up together in these roles at the same time. It's like, you know, very much like how they would have grown up if they really were actors in you know, the period.

Director: Okay.

Woman #3: So, I liked that. I liked the way Steve (rival/prince) was always this charming villain. He was never [laughter] a mean, awful villain. He was always a villain that you were like "Oh you know that kind of sucks that he's a bad guy." [laughter]

Director: What about the, what about the young lover, the lover boy, how did you feel about that guy? Did you like him? Do you know who I'm talking about -- this guy right here (points to Greg/son). His character. How would you say you felt about him? I mean did you like him or didn't you? Was it sad that he died or were you glad that he died or what was your response to him?

Man #3: It was kind of inevitable.

Director: Inevitable. Okay. So he was kind of fated to...

Man #3: I mean. You didn't want it to happen, but you knew it would. I mean, not the way the play was set up, just the way, if you relate it to real life. To me it was kind of self-destructing type of thing to be so passionate about everything. It seemed it would be an ongoing love, I mean it would have to end sooner or later.

Director: Um huh. Well then what do you think, I mean, Do you think that moment that big scene he was taking about at the very end he says 'forever faithful' -- so you don't think that was real?

Man #3: I don't know. I just kept relating it to my life [laughter]

Director: That's okay.

Man #3: I mean in the past, before I met Kari, this is going to sound really rehearsed, but before I actually met Kari, I was like that. I kept, I kept finding just the challenge of --

Director: Yep. [laughter]

Man #3: I mean just the challenge of meeting somebody just to meet them and once you meet them you kind of go 'Well I wonder if I could meet them (pointing another direction).'

Director: Uh huh.

Man #3: You know, it's somewhat like, I guess the not being able to have. You know and at times you can do that. You can be with somebody and just feel comfortable with them, but then in the back of your mind you're gonna go, 'I wonder if...' You know, if you can just carry that out but still be, you know, 'I'm with you forever, but tonight --'

Director: Over here. Right. Okay.

Man #2: I found myself changing every like scene whether I liked him or not. I liked him in one scene and then it seemed like 'Oh, he's such an asshole' and then 'Oh no, I like him.' 'No, I don't.' That was, that to me made the character because I think he's the kind of character that you're not, I don't know, for me you're not supposed to like him or not. I think it's like the fact that he's mutable like that is what's so attractive about him. That one moment you're like 'Wow, this guy's great!' and the next you're like 'Oh, God. What a loser!' 'He's great.' 'Oh, but he's not faithful.' Oh, you know all these things and the moment when he says he'll be faithful -- I don't believe him for a second. I don't think anyone could and that's part of the attraction of it. That you know he's not going to be.

Director: Okay. So, yes.

Woman #1: I was going to say that I thought the betrayal was excellent in that I felt he was always very likable and attractive although you didn't trust him. But then you'd like him again because he did something that was just endearing or just sucked you in just -- I think a lot of that was the actor in just really creative choices.

Director: Yes.

Woman #1: And really interesting to watch and stuff.

Director: He's like that in real life. [laughter]

Woman #1: But you would like him because he would do something so interesting that would pull you in again

Man #4: Yes!

Woman #1: That was the acting.

Director: Good.

Man #4: I think you've got to see the parallel between the father and the son in that, because the father does the exact same thing at the beginning of the play. But once again we believe 'Oh, I'll do anything. I'm going to go to my son. I'm going to embrace him -- What? He's an actor?' [laughter]

Woman #1: Right.

Man #4: We would have to see that parallel which I think you did very well.

Director: Yes. I mean so here's this guy who is so anti-emotional and the whole play he's over here going (body contortions & vocalizations) Right? He's getting so involved, right?

Woman #1: Yes, that's it!

Director: All the way through. [laughter] So does he (Pridamant) go see his son or not?
[long pause]

Woman #3: No. I don't think he does.

Director: You don't think so?

Woman #4: Oh, I disagree.

Man #1: Well, he's got 12 more emotions to go before he even gets there.

Director: You think he does go?

Woman #4: Yes.

Man #3: I think he does, but not right away and not so soon. I think he might get around to it if he's in the neighborhood. [laughter]

Director: Okay. Other opinions?

Woman #2: I think he might die before he gets there

Director: The father might die? Yes, he's got a problem and he needs his valerian drops. Yes. Okay, anybody else? Opinions on that?
[pause]

Director: Actually, you know, at the first read through of the play we all fought over that. We were fighting whether the father actually goes to see the son or not. And so I think in the end, the way it's written, it kind of plays that he says 'Okay, I'm gonna go see my son, he's alive, he's alive' and then it's the whole actor bit.

Director (cont): "Well, if the roads are not too muddy" so I think it's supposed to be that kind of -- 'I'm not sure if he will or not.' But us Romantics at heart say 'Hey, he's going.' [laughter]

Jason: Precisely. [laughter]

Director: Do you know why this, my father asked me this, so I want to see if you have an answer. Do you know why this guy (gestures to Jason/Matamore) comes on at the end? [laughter]

Woman #3: Well...

Jason: I know. [laughter]

Woman #1: I didn't know.

Woman #3: It's sort of like it's a play but it is real. There are really people like these people who are onstage. It's not just an illusion or just a play. It's, you know, what could really be happening. It sort of ties the whole thing together as a, you know, Pridamant wants to believe that his son is wasting his life as an actor. He wants to, but he does want to believe that he is a pummeler of aristocrats at the same time so it could happen and I think that's what it makes you believe -- and there's hope at the end.

Director: Okay. Any other opinions on that?

Woman #4: It keeps the illusion alive.

Director: It keeps the illusion alive.

Woman #4: It teases us

Director: Okay.

Janine: Part 2.

Bruce: Yes.

Director: What, how did you feel about his character? (gestures to Jason/Matamore) I mean how did he make you feel? Did you like him? [laughter] Did you think he was cute or did you think he was nice or did you think he thought he was really funny but wasn't? Or did he make you happy?

Woman #4: Yes.

Man #2: He was comic relief in a lot of ways.

Director: Okay

Man #2: For some of the other stuff that was heavier.

Director: Did you feel any different toward him at the end?

Woman #2: At first I kind of felt sorry for him because he seemed just like, kind of a nerd, then [laughter] I realized that he was really mentally ill. [laughter]

Director: That's much better than being a nerd. [laughter]

Director: So that's the end of that one right? Anybody else want to respond? How you felt about him? Okay, time's up. [laughter] What would you say, how would you describe the relationship between the magician and his little buddy (Amanuensis)? [laughter] How would you describe that relationship? Do you know what I mean by that? Is that too vague?

Woman #2: It's almost kind of like a father/son thing.

Director: A father/son relationship. Okay.

Man #4: Part of me was expecting a switch at the end which almost happened but didn't quite. I don't know if this is Kushner in there or not, but something to the effect of the maid and the mistress switching places-

Man #4 (cont): -I was wondering if there was going to be a switch between who really was the magician at the end and who wasn't.

Janine: Aah, which is the magician,

Tom: And which is the mouthpiece.

Man #4: Yes, exactly.

Director: They act like they planned it that way.

Jason: Wait a minute. I wonder?

Man #2: Did you pay him to say that?

Director: Okay, so would you say, that they were, that it was like a husband/wife thing? [laughter]

Director: Would you say that it was like a pet and an owner of a pet?

Man #3: (nods)

Director: You would say that? Would you say that it was a loving relationship? Or abusive relationship? Or neither?

Man #5: It's a working relationship. [laughter]

Director: They work together?

Man #2: It's sort of like Clove and Ham in Endgame.

Director: Okay.

Woman #3: It makes you ask a lot of questions like how did he (Alcandre) find him (Amanuensis)? How did the magician find him and how did he convince him that piercing his eardrums and taking out his tongue was a good idea? [laughter] How do you actually become a magician?

Director: I'll be friends with you? [laughter]

Woman #3: It just makes you, it makes you think about all the possibilities of how they got together and then again it makes you also think maybe they just sort of appeared like that. They are magic.

Director: Okay. Did you have a favorite magical effect in the show? [laughter] An effect that you thought really worked?

Man #2: The very beginning of the play when he (Pridamant) just lights a match in the middle of the dark stage. To me that was the most amazingly visual effect of the evening.

Woman #1: I think it was the end of the first act, I just liked when he (Amanuensis) went into the world and the revolve was turning and the lighting effects -- it was beautiful. And he was moving through it and I thought that was beautiful

Director: Okay. So that transformation when he was crossing over.

Woman #1: Yes.

Director: So nobody liked the rock? [laughter]

Technician #1: I liked it when Tom almost set the set on fire. [laughter]

Mike: I was going to get the fire extinguisher.

Director: Good. We'll try to do that again. [laughter]

Woman #2: I liked it when he (Calisto) first came out, when Greg first appeared.

Director: Uh huh.

Woman #2: That was a good effect I thought, with the smoke.

Director: Okay.

Woman #1: I liked the effect up there too. I was sitting right up there (points to her seat) and it, I was very surprised, you know, when the light was --

Director: When Alcandre appeared there?

Woman #1: In the beginning. Yes.

Director: Is there anything you wanted to ask the actors?

Man #3: How hard was it to keep changing the names from the other worlds? To remember which name every time they came out?

Steve: It wasn't hard at all.

Christine: We'd get used to it.

Greg: I never had a problem.

Jason: He trained us like dogs. [laughter]

Director: Sorry it's nothing like 'I had it written in my coat.' [laughter] What else?

Man #5: I have a comment and a question. I had the good fortune to sit in on one of the rehearsals and two things struck me tonight. Really I was quite taken with the ensembleness of the cast. It seemed an easy trap to have two separate plays -- the play that we're watching and the play downstage -- but I always sensed that it was all one.

Man #5 (cont): And the other thing that struck me was the designers -- they did a great job with the lights, the set, and having the raised stage makes so much more sense than in the rehearsal hall, it would be

Director: On the same level.

Man #5: A play within a play. But I'm curious as to if you were to say 'The moral of the story is...'

Director: The moral of the story is...

Man #5: I have my own ideas.

Director: Well, what's your idea? I mean, that's more important to me than mine.

Man #5: I'm not so much sure if it's involving illusions so much as it is 'You get what you pay for' is the moral that struck me. When you go into a relationship you get what you put in to it or what you don't put into it. When you go to the fiddler you have to pay the fiddler if you want to hear the music. That's like the magician. What struck me was talking about Greg's character -- Yes, I was pretty sure he was going to die because that's where his character wanted to go.

Director: Okay.

Man #5: But I'm curious as to what you think the theme of the play was.

Director: Well, I thought that the play was a lot about -- You know the first time that I read the play I got a real romantic sense and so that's what captured my attention was that it was such a happy fairy-tale to me, full of magic. Then as I read it over and over it became very dark and it seemed to me like the playwright, the play itself, was kind of disillusioned, right? It keeps setting up all of these illusions -- 'This is what you think love is?' 'It's not this at all.' 'You think that this is love?' He talked about fire and ice, right? So they're a co-dependent relationship and that's really not what love is, right? And so throughout the whole play we're looking 'What is love? What is love?' But to me, I guess, the play itself is about...[laughter] Well, I guess it's about a lot of things. I don't know, it's really hard to put it in to real specific words, but the moment that I was hoping for, the moment that I cared and cherished the most, was the moments where I thought true love was, or where I thought throughout the play that those were the moments of most brilliant light. Because to me I tried to bring that out in the contrast between light and darkness so I guess it's, 'Things are not always what they seem and not always what we want to see.'

Director (cont): Pridamant wants to see this certain vision and he doesn't see what it is that's presented, right? He's shown too much reality and not enough illusion, but I don't think that Tony Kushner would have written a negative play about illusions, right? Because he's a man of the theatre, so I think that there's also an element of hope -- there's possibility in illusions also to illuminate reality. [laughter] Sorry, David, that's as good as I can do.

Woman #3: How much does Tony Kushner's adaptation, how different is that from the original Corneille?

Director: Yes, you know it is pretty different!

Woman #3: Is it just, I mean, I guess what my question is, is it more like in the vernacular, I mean is it just because he's updated the language so its not so, like, hard to --

Director: It's still elevated. It's quite elevated but the most significant thing is that at the end when we find out that it's all a play, "These are scenes from plays," and that his son is an actor, he's like 'an actor -- cool.' [laughter] Because back in the 17th century to be an actor is to be ranked with kings, right?

Woman #3: Right.

Director: And you get to wear all this fine attire. So the father's like 'Hip, Hip' and he's out -- he's going to go see his son for sure, right? But in our day and age to say 'Hey he's an actor.' [laughter] It just doesn't quite work, right? So that's why Tony Kushner has kind of put this different ending on there because really to Tony, and maybe to a lot of you, kind of like you mentioned before, that truth is somewhere, it lies in ambiguity and no clear cut answers, right? In life we search for clear cut answers and they're not always there. That's why the ending to me, the ending of this play, is so ambiguous, right? "Not in this life but in the next!" And I sat there day after day going 'What does that mean?' and I think there comes a time when you just say 'It means -- whatever.' [laughter] 'It's ambiguous so just leave it alone.'

Woman #4: I just wanted to say that I thought that that was really one of the most powerful parts of the play is that I absolutely believed that they always loved each other. That if that's the spark you were going for in the end when he was trying to maintain the illusion of not loving her, it was still very clear that he did and that...

Man #5: As was with the father too.

Woman #4: Yes.

Man #5: In terms of the love for his son.

Woman #4: For me those were really the most powerful parts of the play, was that they were really able to carry that moment through the end and I don't lose that. In fact, if anything, I had a hard time believing that he would ever be a schmuck but that's because I'm a romantic so I didn't want him to ever be a schmuck.

Director: Right.

Woman #4: You know

Man #2: He's an animal. [laughter]

Man #5: I think that's true that he follows a lot of instincts that are stupid ones but it's because he's a guy. [laughter]

Woman #4: He said it. I didn't say it.

Director: Well, he's just connected someplace else, right? He's centered a little lower. [laughter]

Man #5: Well, he's not necessarily sexually, but he's like he says he's in love with this idea of being in love.

Director: Passionate.

Man #5: Until he finds that what he's searching for all along it's, like Dorothy, in his own backyard.

Director: Right.

Woman #4: Exactly.

Greg: I think of it as a -- I think at that moment at that ending moment, at least in my mind, I think that he really does believe that he does love her. This is it, you know. But I think that later on, if he wasn't killed, he would fall into the same traps and be unfaithful to her but at that moment, he believes, he believes that it's right. It's going to be fine. But later on it would fall apart.

Woman #3: But at least you were truthful. You were faithful for the rest of your life. [laughter]

Greg: Yep.

Director: Okay, any other questions for the actors or comments in general?

Woman #1: I was wondering when this was, when he worked on this? Was it after Angels?

Director: Actually it was right before.

Woman #1: Before?

Director: Right before that he wrote that other one, A Bright Room Called Day, and then he wrote this for his friend, pretty quickly and then he started working on Angels in America, the first one. So there's a lot of parallels in the plays.

Woman #5: I think that it has a lot to do with the power of man. The real illusion came from human beings not from any kind of light or smoke or - those are just the trappings of illusions. And I love the fact and I don't know if this was written in the script or not, that Michael stomps out that flame. He gets up there and stomps out the flame.

Mike: It's a fire safety thing. [laughter]

Woman #5: I don't know if that was intended or not but it leads you into the whole light in the darkness. There really was an illusion but it was created by human beings not by the fire and smoke and not by a greater force. It comes down to there are illusions but they're created by man.

Director: Okay, other comments? [pause] Thank you very much. I appreciate your comments.

APPENDIX B

BACKWARD ANALYSIS

APPENDIX B

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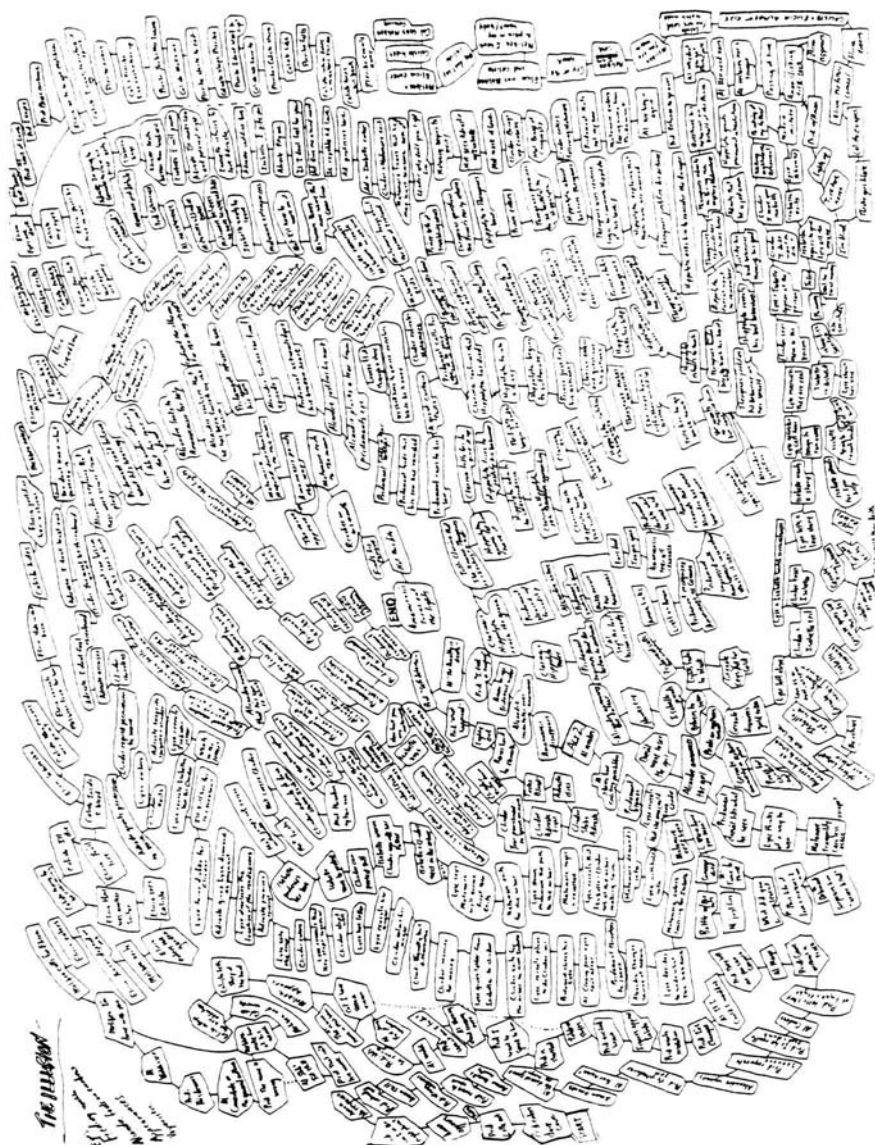


Figure 1

APPENDIX C

FLOOR PLAN

APPENDIX C

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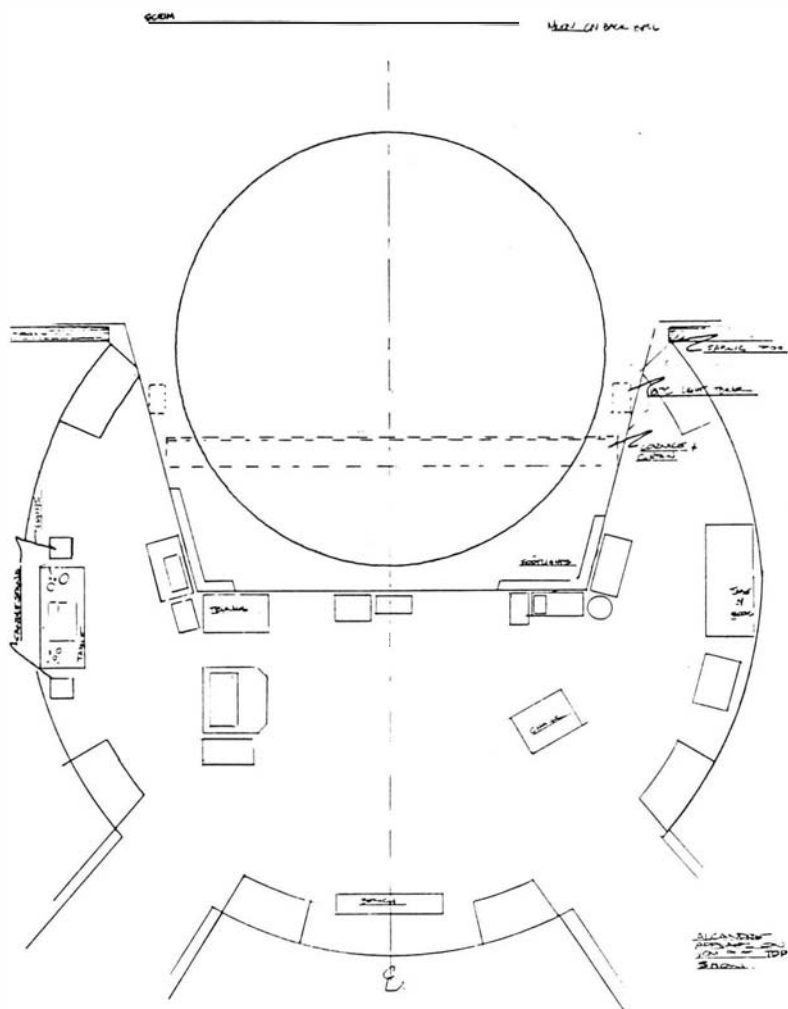


Figure 1

APPENDIX D

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

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Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



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APPENDIX E

PLAYBILL
APPENDIX E

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Theatre VCU Presents

The Illusion

by

Pierre Corneille

freely adapted by

Tony Kushner

directed by

Steven Harders*

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Fine Arts degree

April 18-22, 1996
Raymond Hodges Theatre
Richmond, Virginia

Figure 1

Ron Keller
Scene Design

Elizabeth Weiss Hopper
Costume Design

L. J. Szari
Lighting Design

Lucas Indelicato
Sound Design

Cast

Pridamant of Avignon, a lawyer *Bruce Hermann*
Amanuensis, servant to Alcandre/Geronte, father *Michael J. Todaro*
Alcandre, a magician *Thomas R. Nelson*
Calisto/Clindor/
Theogenes, son of Pridamant *Gregory Guy DeLeonardis*
Melibea/Isabelle/Hippolyta, beloved/wife *Janine Russo*
Elicia/Lyse/Clarina, maid/Friend *Christine R. Torchia*
Pleribo/Adraste/Prince Florilame, rival *Steve Ferguson*
Matamore, a lunatic *Jason Basinger Linkins*

A magician's cave

There will be a ten minute intermission

When we first began talking about a program note, the question we kept coming back to was, "What is it about *The Illusion* that attracts us to it?" The answer is neither new nor original. It is the theatre's ability to move people, both practitioners and audience members, that makes the struggle and joy of theatre so enduring. Too often we get caught up in the business of making a "show" and we forget the profound impact and attraction that draws us all to this magical world.

Tonight, as you follow Pridamant of Avignon on his journey, remember that you are on a journey as well. If our story can move even one member of the audience then our labors will have been successful. It is exciting plays, like *The Illusion*, that keep us involved in the world of theatre. I hope we strike a profound chord with you.

Steven Harders
Richard St. Peter

By special arrangement with Broadway Play Publishing, Inc.

Figure 2

Production Staff

Technical Supervisor	L.J. Szari
Stage Manager	Jane Geer
Assistant Stage Managers	Mary Herron, Heather Slonneger
Assistant to Director/Dramaturg	Richard St. Peter
Director Faculty Supervisor	Kenneth Campbell
Vocal Coach	Lara Brier
Production Technical Director	Anne "Zoo" Slabinski
Assistant to Scene Designer	Ryan Iminie
Scene Shop Supervisors	Scott Burrell, Brian Francoise, Steven Riedel
Scene Shop Assistants	Adam Bair, Lucas Indelicato, J. Mark Pitzer
Set Construction Crew	Stagecraft Class (THE 103)
Property Master	Barbara Lason
Special Effects Technician	Jaime Turko
Scene Painting	Scene Painting Class (THE 508)
Scenic Artist	Heather Lewis
Special Projects	Todd Evans
Running Crew	Jason Carden, Kelly Casper, Ashley Ertel, Jenny McConnell
Costume Shop Supervisors	Annette Conner, Kimberly Guthrie, Eric Ingle
Assistant Costume Designer	Becky White
Cutter/Draper	Kimberly Guthrie
Assistant Cutter	Jennifer "Tree" Triebley
Accessories	Cari Keller
Milliner	Holly Price
Wardrobe Master	Jennifer Gendron
Dressers	Ciara Kaul, Shirin Sadjadi
Costume Construction Crew	Costume Construction Class (THE 104)
Assistant Lighting Designer	Adam Bair
Lighting Technical Support	Peyton "Pete" Neal
Master Electrician	Barnaby Felton
Electricians	David Gueriera, Mary Anne Klutz, Jaime Turko, Basic Lighting Design (THE 229)
Follow Spot Operators	Niabi Caldwell, Gina Schottleutner
Light Board Operators	Thea Kaul
Sound Design Faculty Supervisor	L.J. Szari
Assistant Sound Designer	Damon Orr
Sound Technicians	Adam Bair, Rashad Brown, Barnaby Felton, Susan M. Gardner, Nathaniel Hughes, Sarah Karpicus, Sonny LaRose, Damon Orr, Christina Paczkowski, Anne "Zoo" Slabinski, Jeff Wills
Sound Operators	Susan M. Gardner, Rachana Singh
House Manager	Therese Ducey
Program/Poster Design Layout	Kaaren Osby

Figure 3

The Department of Theatre
 thanks all those
 alumni and special friends
 who have
 contributed so generously
 to the
Theatre VCU Scholarship Fund.
 Students of *Theatre VCU*
 are grateful for your
 support.

THEATRE VCU FACULTY

<i>Richard Newdick</i>	Chair
<i>James W. Parker</i>	Graduate Studies Advisor
<i>George Black</i>	<i>Kenneth Campbell</i> <i>Maurice Erickson</i>
<i>Paul T.M. Hemenway</i>	<i>Elizabeth Weiss Hopper</i> <i>Gary C. Hopper</i>
<i>Ron Keller</i>	<i>Janet B. Rodgers</i> <i>Louis J. Szari</i>

STAFF

Secretaries	<i>Nancy Orr, Kaaren Osby</i>
Business Manager	<i>Edward A. Dierkes, Jr.</i>
Lead Costume Shop Supervisor	<i>Kimberly Guthrie</i>

Figure 4