The Grapes of Wrath; A Costume Design Thesis

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THE GRAPES OF WRATH: A COSTUME DESIGN THESIS

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

By

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Bachelor of Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003

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Abstract

THE GRAPES OF WRATH: A COSTUME DESIGN THESIS

By Kenann M. Quander M.F.A.
A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010

Major Director: Toni-Leslie James
Head of Costume Design, Department of Theatre

In this thesis, I intend to present an original costume design for John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. This production is the first full collaboration of its kind between Virginia Commonwealth University’s Theatre Department and Barksdale Theatre. This thesis will be a complete account of my entire design process from the design concept to the finished, realized production. I will be examining my design choices and finished production photos, including color photographs of my original renderings, fabric swatches and research. Throughout my thesis, I will be researching ways to accurately represent the millions of exploited itinerant farm laborers who survived the severe drought and economic depression of the early 1930s.
Introduction

John Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*, which was published in 1939. Steinbeck won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940 and the Noble Prize for Literature in 1962. The novel was adapted into a play in the late 1980s by Frank Galati for Steppenwolf Theatre’s production and moved to Broadway in 1990. The play remains true to the original award-winning novel whereas the movie adaptation by Darryl F. Zanuck and John Ford buckled under the controversies surrounding the novel and dramatically changed the ending. Steinbeck’s novel is set during the Great Depression and focuses on a family of sharecroppers, the Joads. Driven from their home in Oklahoma by drought, the Joads become seduced by the promise of work in California. So, they pack up their belongings and head west, seeking peace of mind and a promising future. While traveling to California, they encounter hundreds of families, also influenced by the same hope of work and a better life.

*The Grapes of Wrath Synopsis*

Galati’s adaptation starts with Tom Joad, the eldest son returning from prison. On his journey home, he meets Jim Casy, a former preacher, and finds his family has been forced off their land. When Tom finally finds his family at his Uncle John’s farm, he is confused, yet happy to be home. The family tells Tom what happened and they quickly decide to move west to find the opportunities for work promised in the flyers being handed out. They pack their Hudson Super Six and start driving, stopping along the way at places where they are charged just to stop and rest in their own car, by the side of the road. They go from the disparity of Hooverville, which is full of starving people living on the dream of work in California, to the Weedpatch Camp, a self-governing agricultural haven still lacking in available resources. They move on to yet another farm promising work and, unknowingly, become strikebreakers. Tom once again meets up with Casy on the other side of the strike and realizes what the family has stepped into. Tom witnesses the killing of Casy, then turns around and kills the man who murdered his friend. Tom leaves the family, promising to always fight for the underdog. The family moves into a train car, in which Rose of Sharon, the eldest
daughter, delivers a stillborn baby. When the train car floods, the family presses on and finds a barn to take refuge for the night. In the barn, they find a father and son who are barely surviving. The father is starving, and cannot hold down food, so Rose of Sharon decides to breastfeed the starving man.

The Dust Bowl was an event, which occurred in 1933 and continued into the 1940’s. It was due to a combination of severe drought and economic depression creating destitution among farmers. For eight years crops failed and sandy soil blew through Southern and Central Great Plains. Farmers were forced to leave their land to head west and became exploited itinerant farm laborers.

The production team for *The Grapes of Wrath* – Tawnya Pettiford-Wates, Director; Dennis Williams, Scenic Designer; Lynne Hartman, Lighting Designer; and me, Costume Designer – planned to create a universal and stylized version of the play. The epic nature and universal aspect of this play makes it a great thesis, as it speaks to the heart of middle class people struggling during an economic crisis much like the one that we are facing today. While tackling the stylized concept of the show, we wanted to explore the mental, physical and emotional journeys of these people. My hope for this production is to capture the dynamics of the economic depression of the 1930s and to capture the interplay and the transformation of Steinbeck’s characters throughout my thesis.

**Script Analysis**

While reading the script, I identified with the Joads and, amazingly enough, their speech pattern, which I found similar to that of the southern African American dialect, peppered with religious under-tones. The manner in which the Joads express themselves is far bolder and richer than in other plays written and produced with a Caucasian audience in mind. “*Ma. Let ’em come. We got a’ plenty. Tell ’em they got to wash their han’s. I’m jus’ takin’up the sidemeat now. I made plenty a bread this Aft... Thank God. Oh! Thank God! Tommy, you ain’t wanted? You didn’t bust loose?*” (Galati 17). From a modern perspective, this statement could have been made by a mother of
any race, and this universality is what I admire best about this play. While researching, I found a wealth of images showing African Americans as well as Caucasians traveling and farming during this era all of them trying to find work and to survive during an economic depression. Because of its universality and epic nature, the Dust Bowl affected the course of so many lives, for whites and blacks alike. Figure 1. Lange’s image of African Americans during the depression

I had many conversations with Dr. Pettiford-Wates, the director of this production, about the possibility of casting black actors to play the Joads instead of the traditional white cast. The director felt that, after reading the script, the message would be the same with a predominantly black cast or a diverse cast at the very least. However, the director felt the audience would identify better with the precedent of white actors that had been set by previous productions.

The biblical references were another aspect of the play that jumped out at me. Even the title, which was a suggestion made by Steinbeck’s wife, comes from a biblical passage from Revelation: “And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.” (14:19-20). The name Rose of Sharon is a reference to the Song of Solomon 2:1. The character Jim Casy, a lost soul who meets up with the Joad family after knowing them when he was a preacher, is a symbol of religion and the shaky ground of religion on which a family, like the Joads, may have stood in this era of hardship.

Steinbeck uses Casy as a narrative tool to make a statement about religion in America, while the Joads embody religious teachings. The Joads constantly remind Casy that he is a man of the cloth by asking him to pray for them. In this quote Tom is asking Casy why he stopped preaching. “Casy.
I love people so much I’m fit to bust, sometimes.” An’ I says, “No, I don’t know nobody name Jesus” (Galati 11). Casy and Ma Joad have some of the most moving speeches, as they direct the religious compass for this show. The family’s faith in religion provides the Joads with the strength to keep moving. Steinbeck presents a moving portrayal of a family unit – the breakdown of that unit, the corroding of old traditions, and their strength in numbers and family ties. In this play, we see the older generation die; and while the parents and their siblings stay and try to keep their families together, the kids eventually pull away to find their own way in the world. Some are looking for a different kind of life and some are looking to assert their independence. In this quote, Casy is talking about the end of the family unit working together, he refers to that unit as holy. “Casy. An’ it on’y got unholy when one mis’able little fella got the bit in his teeth an’ run off his own way, kickin’ and draggin’ an fightin’. Fella like that bust the holiness. But when they’re all workin’ together- kind of harnessed to the whole shebang- that’s right, that’s holy” (Galati 21). You get a strong sense of Steinbeck speaking through his characters to say that the family nucleus is changing and people are opting to find their own way in the world even during this dark, dramatic time period.

Lastly, but not least, the religious sentiment of “help thy neighbor,” which is a message of renewal, is portrayed by the Joads’ oldest daughter, Rose of Sharon. This idea grabs the audience and takes hold at the very end of the show when Rose of Sharon feeds the starving man with her breast milk that was intended to feed her stillborn baby. After doing research on the name Rose of Sharon, and discovering that Christ refers to himself as the rose, I am lead to believe that Steinbeck wanted Rose of Sharon to embody the same message as Christ, the Savior of mankind. When Jesus said, “I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley,” (Song of Solomon 2:1) This message is a strong way to end the play. Although the Figure 2. Lange’s Photograph of a woman and child.
magnanimous and selfless act of Rose of Sharon, sends home the fervent message of the play, that of making selfless acts to help one's fellow man. I felt this scene was Steinbeck’s way of saying that we all need to help and to acknowledge the suffering of other people. It is our responsibility to become the living embodiment of Christ’s message and his sacrifice for mankind.

The Grapes of Wrath: Research

The research for this show was extensive, but the costumes needed to be simple, as the content is the meat of the show. For a play with such a powerful, thought provoking message, I began my research by looking at the original movie posters – I even looked at pieces of the screen adaptation movie. I watched the beginning and the end before I read the adaptation of the novel. After reading the script, I started to look for photographs that would give me an accurate portrayal of Depression-era America in the 1930s. The photographs taken by Dorothea Lange and Mike Disfarmer have served as an account of the makeshift towns, the dilapidated clothing and pain-filled faces of the migrant people in Steinbeck’s drama.

_A life Beyond Limits_ by Linda Gordon, is a book of photographs taken by Dorothea Lange I found while researching. She is one of the most acclaimed photographers of her day. Lange went from make-shift camp to make-shift camp, taking photographs that accurately captured the disparities between camps during the Depression era and inadvertently in Steinbeck’s novel. Disfarmer is the other photographer who captured the people and gave me the detail needed for designing my costumes. Originally, Disfarmer was named Mike Meyers, a man from a German immigrant family with Arkansas roots, who rejected his own rural upbringing and renamed himself Dis-farmer. In the late thirties, he opened his own studio and took pictures of simple farmers in their “Sunday Best.”
His website, The Disfarmer Gallery, was a wonderful source for me to see the details of clothing that, often, are lost to shadows or glares on images taken outside.

**Tom Joad Research**

I found images that would give me a direction of the costume choices for each character and would evoke the feeling of the period that I wanted each character to embody. The photograph below was a point of reference for the character Tom Joad. I loved the shirt and the fedora. What I took away from the photograph was a relaxed, comfortable, in one’s own skin, feeling I wanted Tom to possess.

![Figure 3. Disfarmer photograph of a young man in the late 1930’s](image-url)
I used this photograph to decide what each man would wear and how each character would have common elements in his costume, while still looking distinct. The costume for Jim Casy’s character came directly from this photograph. The second man from the left, the man with a coat over his overalls, inspired the look of Jim Casy. I even like the way his coat does not fit properly. For me, this look suggested that he may have had a distinctive past at one point, and now seems to be a man just trying to survive. The suit coat over the overalls gave me the idea about how to distinguish Casy from the rest of the cast. The man in this photograph looks like a person who may not have always worked with his hands, while the rest of the men look like laborers.
Ma Joad Research

Figure 5. Lange’s photograph of a woman and man in a field

Ma is the backbone of this show. Again, I looked for costume elements that I felt would give Ma an air of, being the matriarch, she holds the family together and does whatever needs to be done, whether she is healing the sick or protecting the living. When I found this image of a woman wearing a man’s suit coat, I knew this was the element which would bring Ma Joad home for the audience and for me. The details of Ma’s dress came from the photograph below. The woman getting out of the car has this wonderful flap detail on the shoulders of her dress. I needed Ma to have some visual interest and this was perfect because of its structure.

Figure 6. Lange’s photograph of two women and a dog.
Figure 7. Lange’s photograph of a couple in the field
Figure 8. Disfarmers portrait of three men in his studio.

Pa Joad Research

I found a lot of photographs by Lange that looked just like this one of the farmer wearing a buttoned-up dress shirt tucked into overalls. I wanted something slightly different for Pa, so I started looking for other images to inspire his costume and found this image of three men dressed in their “Sunday Best.” I focused on the idea of them all wearing coats over their overalls, but to change it up so that they would not look too similar to Casy, I decided to make them each wear a shirt or flannel coat. So, that would still seem like a look that a farmer would wear.
Granpa and Granma Joad Research

Figure 9. Disfarmer portrait of an older couple

This is one of many Disfarmer photographs that I used to imagine the appearances of Granma and Granpa Joad in the play. I love the way the older gentleman is standing as if to say, “Take me, or leave me.” The woman strikes me as the simple yet God-fearing grandmother who I had in mind while reading the script. I also took into account the details that inspired my drawings and final costume choice, such as the Bakelite belt buckle at the older woman’s waist, the old fashioned suspenders on the grandfather, the level of his pants on his waist and the calf length, hem of her dress.

Figure 10. Lange’s photograph of an old man with a suit on.
Al and Winfield Joad Research

Al is a wild child and this image taken by Lange is such a departure from Lange’s normal format.

This picture is in a section of Gordon’s book featuring boys (mostly headshots) like this one photographed from the waist-up. I was struck by the similarity of the boys in these photographs and, especially, by the look in their eyes, which speak to the fact that they all seem to have a story to tell.

The next image is another photograph that Lange had in his montage, which I used to design the look of the youngest Joad son, earthy and gutsey.

Figure 11. Lange’s photograph of a boy

Figure 12. Lange’s photograph of a boy
Connie Rivers Research

Connie is another young man in the play who is married to Rose of Sharon. I needed his character to look somewhat out of place. I saw this photograph by Disfarmer and the young man looked alone and set apart. It made sense that Connie Rivers would not be wearing overalls because he was not planning on being a farmer and wanted a different life. According to the director, he was also a lady’s man who was bound to run off. So, I looked for an image that was far removed from the sharecropper’s overalls that I was leaning toward as the basis of the costumes characterizing the rest of the cast. Connie Rivers needed to look like he cares a about his personal appearance in order to attract the ladies.

Figure 13. Disfarmers portrait of a young man in defiant pose.
Rose of Sharon Research

I looked at so many images of young women, the details of Rose of Sharon’s costume were inspired by a composite of many photographs. I cannot say her look came from any one source. This particular photograph from Lange gave me the right feelings to dress Rose of Sharon. I imagined this photograph representing her after Connie leaves and she is forced to face a future that seems bleak. Looking closely, it becomes apparent that the woman is wearing shoes without stockings. Images like this one made me feel okay about having a stage filled with women wearing their shoes without stockings.
Ruthie Joad Research

Ruthie is the Joads’ youngest daughter. After looking at these photographs, I had two things to consider when designing her costume. The first consideration was the hand-me-down concept. None of these little girls in the Lange photograph is wearing a dress that fits her, so I wanted that element of poverty incorporated into the costume. The Peter Pan collar was another detail that I wanted in my costume. The next image by Lange features a girl whose dress has a gathering at the sleeves. I looked at this detail when designing Ruthie’s dress, as it adds a little feminine flair.

Figure 15. Lange’s image of little girls by a car

Figure 16. Lange’s image of a young woman alone
Uncle John and Noah Joad Research

Uncle John and Noah are the brothers who I saw connecting because of their awkwardness. I looked at many photos like this image of men lined-up. Seeing what connects them and separates them is a concept that keeps coming up because it is an idea that I had to explore in order to separate the brothers – the young from the old and the children from the parents.

**Figure 17. Lange’s photograph of men in open wagon.**

Ensemble Research

Lastly, but not least, the ensemble was a large part of the design concept. The images that I found in Lange’s photographs were of families and large groups of men in transition. I looked at many of these images to find a cross section of people who could help me cement this cast in the world of the 1930s.
Figure 18. Lange’s image of a poor family

Figure 19. Lange’s portrait of a large family gathered together
Design Concept for *The Grapes of Wrath*

The design concept always starts with the text and the research and, for a costumer, it ends with the fabric and finalized renderings. The first thing I start with is the color palette because that leads to the fabrics. I started selecting fabrics and thinking about the color renderings before I met with the director because I knew a large portion of this show would be pulled from costume stock or bought directly. The director and I agreed that a natural color palette was a tremendous source of our inspiration and would set the right tone for a play about a family constantly traveling. I originally envisioned shades of brown, tan and orange presenting the sky at sunset or a barn made of wood, as all of this would serve to decorate the Joads’ world. I focused on fabrics the Joads could have made or bought easily – fabrics that looked homespun. Along with cloth that could be dyed and distressed with little effort, like loose woven cottons, flannel and linens, I bought a lot of fabric samples with flowers on them because I came across one photograph of a little girl in the forefront [dress portrays a wonderful play on flowers] and a woman (probably her mother) in the background--. The woman had on a torn apron, much like those described in the play when Ma tears a piece of cloth off her apron. These images are a huge part of how my design concept was born, for *The Grapes of Wrath*.

![Figure 20. Lange’s photograph of a little girl during the Depression](image)
While thinking about the concept, I also reflected on the literal journey that Steinbeck’s characters take. Their clothes need to be an accurate account of the stress and toll that this journey exacts on the characters during the course of the play. For example, their clothes should capture the Joads’ transition from suffering to hope as they move from Hooverville to the Weedpatch Camp.

Hooverville is a shantytown that serves as an example of the ecological desperation found during the Depression, while the Weedpatch Camp offers the Joads hope and order in a carefully constructed, self-sufficient community of self-governing agriculturalists. Establishing the transition between these locations is achieved through the careful balance found in my costume design concept.

The Joads in Design Meetings

At the first design meeting, Dr. Pettiford-Wates and I talked about the family members. The Joads needed to be a strong focus of color and the director wanted bold, eye-catching colors that would keep them the central focus in the play. We agreed that the family would stay in the same base costume for the entire show, but the older characters and children, like Granma, Pa, Noah and Connie, who would take on ensemble roles after they left the family they needed versatile costumes. Rose of Sharon was brought up in the meeting because of her pregnancy pad.

I wanted to know how pregnant a girl who has been eating regularly should be. The director did not envision Rose of Sharon becoming too big in the process of the show, especially because she loses the baby at the end. The other topic up for discussion was Tom Joads’s return from jail because in the script, he wears clothes that have been issued to him, before Rose of Sharon gives him the shirt that he always worn. This made a nice transition for a costume change, but I needed to know how significant a change the director wanted. She felt that Tom should change out of his coat and first shirt, but that his pants would stay the same.
The next few pages are images of my preliminary fabrics and thumbnails that I took to the first design meeting with the director.

Figure 21. Preliminary costume thumbnails
Figure 22. Thumbnails for the women in “Grapes.”
Figure 23. Preliminary fabric samples
Preliminary Sketches for The Grapes of Wrath

My final rendering pose is the point where I start to define the individual persona of a character. How characters relate to the group is a huge part of what they think of themselves [in character], thus informing the audience how to perceive them. The process of finding the right pose often takes me longer than drawing the first rendering of a character. Men outnumber women in this show, so I had to address the issue of what each man would wear to give him his own identity, yet keep him in the realm of a 1930s migrant worker. I needed to show the characters’ similarities in age and purpose in the play through my costume combinations, which made my preliminary sketches very important.
Figure 25. Preliminary sketch for Tom Joad
Figure 26. Preliminary sketch for Jim Casy
Figure 27. Preliminary sketch for Ma Joad
Figure 28. Preliminary sketch for Pa Joad
Figure 29. Preliminary sketch for Granma Joad
Figure 30. Preliminary sketch for Granpa Joad
Figure 31. Preliminary sketch for Al Joad
Figure 32. Preliminary sketch for Connie Rivers
Figures 33. Preliminary sketch for Rose of Sharon
Figure 34. Preliminary sketch for Uncle John
Figure 35. Preliminary sketch for Noah Joad
Figure 36. Preliminary sketch for Ruthie Joad
Figure 37. Preliminary sketch for Winfield Joad
In the first design meeting, the director and I discussed having the ensemble in a monochromatic color palette. Upon entering into the world of the Joads, an ensemble member would solidify himself or herself into the world of the family by taking on a costume piece with more color, such as a coat, a sweater, or a tie. There were to be no complete costume changes in the show, but through the use of hats, coats and aprons, the ensemble would effectively show the transition from one character to another. I thought this was an interesting idea but not completely feasible because of the size of the cast.

Days later, the scenic designer Dennis Williams and I would agreed that I would restrict the color palette for the costumes to light browns, going more towards tans and oranges, and he would keep his pallet in the darker wood shades, so the cast would be less likely to blend in.

Figure 38. Production photograph of the scenic environment
My second design meeting was with Dr. Pettiford-Wates, Dennis Williams, and Ron Keller, the scenic design supervisor for the production. In this meeting, I got a sense of where my costumes fit into the world of the scenic environment, which was still in development. It was important and useful to talk about costume transitions that would affect the scenic transitions. The meeting was helpful because I could clearly see how the scenic designer was blocking the movement of the play. I presented my preliminary renderings and fabric samples taken from the Reproductionfabric.com website. I told the director that after going through stock at Theater Four/Barksedale Theatre and our costume stock, our original monochromatic color scheme for the ensemble would have to be changed to blue. This would save us money and time, but it would also keep the cast from blending in with the background, while preserving our natural color concept. In Hooverville, the ensemble needed to look extremely disheveled and ragged so that it could be juxtaposed with the Weedpatch camp’s clean and orderly environment. We talked about the cast wearing clean aprons and the men changing their shirts to enforce the change in environment for the Joads.
Final Costume Renderings

The Grapes of Wrath

In the second design meeting with the director, Ron Keller and I talked about the pride of the Joads. They felt that the Joads would have a strong sense of pride in the way that they presented themselves, or at least in the first act when the family is just starting out on their journey. This conversation directly affected the way I finished my final renderings, some of the ragged hems and patchwork that I had in my preliminary sketches disappeared.

I start my renderings by deciding on the paper and the medium which I am going to use. For this set of renderings, I broke out of my usual rendering style and chose fashion recycled paper and soft pastels, which can get extremely messy, so I used a fixative in between layers. I used the chalk the same way I use gouache. Starting with a light base of color and then deciding which areas need more color or need to be highlighted and shadowed. I chose to buy very expensive Rembrandt soft pastels – and this decision paid off, as the color coverage was amazing, the colors mixed beautifully, and I rendered with a lot of movement. I paint the same way, so my first layer of color was very defined and less blended. So, when Ron Keller and Toni Leslie James, the head of the costume department, pointed out that the way I rendered was pulling the focus from the costumes themselves, I went back in and blinded the pastels, darkening the prints and adding more shading to make the clothes look worn and less dramatic. The color of the recycled paper made all the colors pop. I prefer to use color paper when doing renderings because I like bold, dramatic statements when I design and white paper can sometimes wash out all of the color that a designer lays down.

The following pages are my final renderings. If we built that costume in the costume shop, I included the fabric swatch.
Figure 40.
Figure 41.
PA JOAD

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

Figure 42.
GRANMA JOAD

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

Figure 43.
Figure 45.
Figure 46.
Figure 47.
ROSE OF SHARON

THE GRAPES OF WRATH
Figure 50.
Figure 51.
Build Process
Over-Dyeing and Bleaching Fabric Samples

Designing *The Grapes of Wrath* has proved to be a balancing act between light and dark, hope and despair, survival and oblivion. In the process of organizing my color palette, I had to think about the amount of disparity that these costumes would need to reflect. Some would argue that the costumes need to be worn-looking, but determining the extent to which they would appear worn was the true challenge of this piece, as I wanted the Joad family to look *worn*, not thread-bare. So, their clothing needed to be over-dyed to give them a well-used and overly washed look.

The very first thing I did before deciding on the final fabrics was to take my fabric samples from Reproductionfabrics.com and bleach them. When that failed to remove enough color, I turned to Rite dye’s white wash to lighten the fabrics. Then I turned the fabrics upside down and dyed the fabric in Rite dye, focusing on tan and pearl grey. This process is called over-dying and is commonly used to soften or darken a fabric that is going to be used on stage. This process was important because I needed to see how light the fabrics could become without losing their patterns altogether and to see what color I could dye the fabric to make it look dirty and worn.

The fabric samples below are examples of fabrics that I dyed and white washed. One side is bleached or white-washed and the other side is dyed tan. Even though my color palette was based in blue, most costume pieces were dyed tan so they would have a dust-coated look about them.
Figure 52. White washed fabric samples.
Figure 53. White washed and over dyed fabric samples.
Hello all!

I'm working with the artist, David Caudle, on the Scottsboro Boys. David takes the distressing of clothing to a high plane and has agreed to come to VCU free of charge to do a tutorial on the distressing of clothing. He has a masters in costume and scenic art from Florida State and happens to also be an accomplished and published playwright. His current play is featured in this month's VCU English department magazine. I've done a lot of distressing myself, but I'm totally fascinated by David's work and thrilled he's working on our show. Yesterday he gave Cailin, Nicky and I a brief tutorial, and I realized it's all in the highlights.

1. He washes everything in powdered Cascade dishwasher detergent. This breaks down the fabric.
2. He does any over-dying required.
3. He hits it with sandpaper or a metal grater or file if needed.
4. Paints in the shadows and any dirt. Usually done with a hand held spray bottle. He also uses liquid leather paints extremely watered down. They do not dry clean out.
5. Using a very light grey or med gray, he dry brushed the highlights where they naturally occur on slightly damp fabric.
6. He dry brushes a watered down yellow into the highlights for the aged effect.

Examples of his distressing for the Boys are evident in these clothes, which were brand-spanking new.

Figure 54. Distressed jean jacket next to the original jacket for *Scottsboro Boys*. 
Distressing Costumes for *The Grapes of Wrath*

The letter on the last page was sent to us by professor Toni-Leslie James from her production of *Scottsboro Boys*, which was a primary source for our own distressing process. There was an extreme amount of distressing and painting required to accurately portray the clothing of this period. I think that for a play like *The Grapes of Wrath*, the distressing process can become all-consuming.

There was so much to accomplish and each piece called for a certain level of distressing. We used several techniques to get the clothes to the point where we felt they were properly distressed. First, we dyed them or bleached them; then, we used Cascade to break down the fibers. Josh used at least half a box per load to get the costumes to fade and soften. The Cascade also helped to make costumes that were newly bought look old and sun-bleached. Then, we had the students grate the clothes with sandpaper, rashers and cheese graters to create holes at stress points near elbows, knees and necklines. On several dress coats, we used bleach and leather dyes on the stitching or seam lines of the garments to make them look faded in certain locations. After a week of doing this, I had to re-assess the impact this was having on the clothes. From my point of view, it was not achieving a very dramatic effect, so I decided to turn to Shumutz (Wax stick used to replicate mud and dirt), a common theatrical distressing and dirtying agent. Shumutz is set into a costume by using heat, so we first applied blow dryers to one piece at a time.

![Figure 55. Example of wholes put into costume for *The Grapes of Wrath*](image)

However, then the amount of clothes began to outnumber the hands holding the blow dryers, so we put the clothes in the dryer. We left the clothes in the dryer for at least a half an hour per load. This process was probably the most effective way to get theses clothes to a point were the lights
would not drown out all of our work. This process was very slow and we continued distressing them up until final dress. This is my second show distressing costumes and both times the costume shop staff has had to distress the costumes up until the last possible moment. Both times, it was about the level of distressing needed to please the director and the designer and seeing the effect of the newly distressed layer under the production lights.

Figure 56. An example of Schumutz being used on costumes to make them look dirty
Figure 57. Example of distressing on Olivia Luna’s dress
Fittings and Final Costume Selections
for *The Grapes of Wrath*

When we came back from winter break, rehearsals started and I sent out an e-mail to outline the order of fittings and to remind everyone that time was limited and that several people still needed to come into the shop to have their measurements taken. On the first day of rehearsals, we had two fittings with Marta who played Ma Joad and Jai, our Rose of Sharon. They tried on their muslin dresses and, other than a few minor changes, the dresses fit them fine. I was very specific about where the fullness needed to sit. Rose of Sharon goes through various stages of pregnancy, so getting the right fullness to accommodate a baby pad was key to shaping the dress. I wanted the fullness to be consolidated on either side of Jai in the front and the back because she was going to have a baby bump which would create its own fullness.

The rest of the fittings did not go the same way because Stage Management created a sign-up sheet for the actors but did not always tell us when the actors were coming in. The other hurdle with fittings and measurements was casting; despite the director’s best efforts, the casting was only halfway complete. As of the second week, I was still asking Stage Management for a time to meet with the actors playing Uncle John, Granma and all of the children. The problems I had with this process ranged from actors living so far away that they did not want to come in until rehearsal, to children having school work, which made it impossible for them to attend a fitting before their rehearsal.

One actor playing Uncle John made us aware of the fact that union rules said he had a ten-hour turn around before having to return to a production. While all of these reasons were legitimate, they did nothing to help the stress placed on me by a demanding production schedule. All of the men’s fittings went very smoothly and everyone fit into the pieces made for them. Most of the costumes were pulled or bought specifically for each actor, so it was important to me that the clothes be comfortable and look casual. I made my final costume selections based on what each piece offered each actor. For example, I bought a green dress for Olivia Luna, but two days later, I went back to Halcyon, a Vintage store where I bought many of my key pieces, and found a beautiful blue dress that
worked within my color palette. In that case, I scrapped the green dress for a back-up and put Olivia in the blue dress.

![Figure 58. Jenny Hann in Costume](image)

Jenny Hann and Nicole Carter, played ensemble parts and, while all of the girls fit into the dresses that I either pulled or bought from Halcyon, I spent a lot of time switching around their final costumes. I wanted them to look feminine and I wanted the dresses to say something about the characters they needed to play. When rehearsals started and the director assigned parts, it made assigning the correct dress to each actor much easier. For example, Jenny plays a wife and a teenager daughter in this play, so I needed to give her something that could transition with the help of a
sweater or a headscarf. Because Nicole is the only woman in the play who plays a male, she needed a
dress that could accommodate this transition, and this wrap dress was a perfect choice.

Figure 59. Nicole Carter in Costume.
Wigs and Make-up for *The Grapes of Wrath*

Originally, I did not want to use wigs and wanted to keep the make-up minimal, as I wanted everyone to look as natural as possible. However, as casting moved along, Chris Bass Randolph was cast in the role of Granma and, while her age was right, her hair was a red-orange color that I had not expected, and I pulled several wigs. I pulled a couple of possible wigs for actresses that either did not want to cut their hair or had hair that was so short it did not appear feminine. Many of my research images had women wearing short bobs and I hoped I could get this in the play, but despite my best efforts, the director and the actors were against the idea. Also, it turned out that the director was more against using wigs than I was, so Chris was the only female who wore a wig in the show.

![Figure 60. Chris Randolf Bass in costume and wig.](image)

Make-up turned out to be a very important element – more important than I originally
planned. The director wanted the boys to have old bruises on their faces and for the cast to look messy with dirt smeared on their faces. After consulting with Maura, a professor in the costume department, I went and bought Texas dirt and Plains dirt at Premier Costumes, a local costume store. Texas dirt and Plains dirt are loose-tinted powders that can be used to distress costumes or, in this case, to smudge actors’ faces for an authentic Dust Bowl existence. Dr. Pettiford-Wates wanted the Joad children and the ensemble to have dirt on their faces from the top of show while the Joads' characters started applying make-up at intermission and continued to apply it from then on.
My goals coming to this production process were simply to create an accurate portrait of a farming family during the Depression era. I feel that the director’s goals were geared along the same lines. However, she also wanted a stylized version of this show and I was all for that, but ultimately, my costumes came back to what I could call truth, or as close to the truth as possible. There is a moment in the play when Journey Entzminger, a child actress, stands up from behind a crate and says that her brother is starving and cannot hold down any food. And, in that moment, I saw my truth as the beauty of the show that I helped to design. I wanted to represent the brutal honesty of the book, capturing the reality of a sharecropper’s family in the 1930s. Sometimes, I feel that designers spend too much time in theatre trying to capture a dream, instead of embracing reality, which is what helps us to see the truth of this world, even if it is a private truth. As artists and designers, we tend to focus inward and forget about reality. As a society, we glorify the idea of wealth and we only see the worth in expensive items. But, The Grapes of Wrath is a show that references the Bible, so I made some inferences as well. Jesus was a king with no throne and, yet, he was still the King of Kings, living meekly and humbly without weakening the greatness of his image here on earth. Yet, when we show people on stage, we cannot transcend this need to pretty the poor. I see the Joads as a symbol, Steinbeck’s symbol of what Christ stood for – helping your fellow man.
from working with a director during the stressful time of a technical week to collaborating between two costume shops, I learned a lot during this production process. I am not going to pretend this process was easy. Because *The Grapes of Wrath* was the first full collaboration between Barksdale and VCU, a lot of things that we take for granted in the process of our normal technical week were ignored, such as transporting student workers from the costume shop to Barksdale. The actual technical rehearsal in costumes started at six every night, which made it hard to get done with my classes and make it there with all the costumes that had notes from the previous night. I was a one-woman traveling caravan during this technical process. If it were not for my assistant who had his own car, I would have had an even harder time finishing this show.
Figure 63. Production photograph of the family heading west.

This was also the first technical rehearsal process in which I have been involved during which there were so many snow days that school cancellations effectively closed the costume shop and shut down dress rehearsal for a night. When I learned that school had been cancelled one morning, I was heading into Barkesdale to continue distressing costumes with another graduate student, Josh Quinn. There was no one in the costume shop so I assumed there would not be any work done for that night’s dress rehearsal. I decided not to attend dress that night, which prompted the director to send me a
page-and-a-half-long letter about her disappointment in my performance up to that point. Recalling these events, I would say that while working as a designer, I learned that you always show up. The fact that I went that night and brought the notes from the following night is irrelevant; the costume designer should be present for the cast and the director because rehearsal is a time to be supportive, even as much as it is the time to accomplish work.

From the beginning, I was told by Ginnie Willard, the production supervisor for Barkesdale Theatre, that as soon as the show was in the theatre, the Barksdale staff would take over the play. However, this happened only on a very marginal scale. A week after the play opened, I was called and e-mailed by Sue Griffin, the costume shop manager for Theatre Four/ Barksdale Theatre, and Rick Brandt, the play’s stage manager, to find out who was doing the repairs for the play. Firstly, they should not have been calling me at this point; they should have been calling Karl Green, the VCU shop manager. Looking back, I should have let them discuss the issues of moving large
quantities of costumes back and forth and collaborating on repairs and helping with distressing. In the future, the costume shop managers need to have a very active role in organizing the dress rehearsal process and delineating the workload. I ran back and forth for weeks, replacing and fixing costumes, before those tasks fell to a stage management freshman on run crew.

**Conclusion**

Now, with all said and done, this was an amazing collaborative design process. Working on such an epic and universal play like *The Grapes of Wrath* showed me what it means to move an audience through my costume designs centered on the strength of spirituality, the kindness of sharing, the importance of family teachings and passing down the spirit of survival to the next generation. The kindness that it takes to help others, even when you are starving, is the message I will always remember from *The Grapes of Wrath*. For me, this play is about the bonds of family, as the Joads kept moving through pain and death and, like them, we gain strength from laughter and tears. “Easy you got to have patience. Why Tom. - us people will go on livin’ when all them people is gone. Why Tom, we’re the people that live. They ain’t gonna wipe us out. Why, we’re the people- we go on” (*Galati 65*). This moving and poignant folk wisdom, spoken by Ma in *The Grapes of Wrath* is part of the substantive message this play conveys to its public. I constantly related to it spiritually whenever I felt as though I was losing my focus and my patience was running out; I found the determination to continue on and allow the development of my costume designs to support the important artistic interpretation of this play.
Figure 65. Production photograph of ma packing up belongings
Works Cited


Disfarmer Gallery. Black and white photographs of rural America in the 1940’s. 2003

<http://www.disfarmer.com>


Addendum

Song of Solomon 2:1 (King James Version)
Rank: 857 Book of Song of Solomon Chapter 2

1 I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. 2 Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women. 3 Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. 4 Let him lead me to the banquet hall, and let his banner over me be love. 5 Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am

Revelation 14:19 (King James Version)
Rank: 7848 Book of Revelation Chapter 14

And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. (KJV)

6 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language and people. 7 He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." 8 A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,' which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."" 9 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand," 10 They, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 1
## Appendix

A page from the Costume Plot and Budget for *The Grapes of Wrath*

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<th>Item</th>
<th>Vender</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<td>coat-pull pants-buy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>henley</td>
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<td>target</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>low top boots</td>
<td>pull</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hankerchief/bandana</td>
<td>pull</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>hankerchief</td>
<td>pull</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>tall boots</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>socks</td>
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<td>&quot;t&quot; shirt</td>
<td>target</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
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"t" shirt  
jeans  
coyboy boots  
socks  
hankerchief/bandana  
pull  

gentelmans emporium  
pull  

$80.00  
pull  

JIM CASY  
wife beater  
little dress coat-  
overalls  
cap  
shoes (old dress  
shoes)  
fingerless gloves  
socks  
pull  

pull  

pull  

$80.00  

pull  

total  

$370.00  

A page from the Run Plot for The Grapes of Wrath

Character | Actor | pg.63 leaving camp | pg. 65 weedpatch camp | Pg.70 up north
---|---|---|---|---
TOM | * | * | * | *
CASY |  |  |  | *
PA JOAD | * | * | * | *
GRANPA |  |  |  | *
MULEY |  |  |  | *
NOAH | * | * | * | *
AL |  |  |  | *
UNCLE JOHN | * | * | * | *
WINFIELD | * | * | * | *
FLOYD |  |  |  | *
WILLY |  |  |  | *
CONNIE |  |  |  | *
MA JOAD | * | * | * | *
GRANMA |  |  |  | *
ROSEOFSHARON |  |  |  | *
RUTHE |  |  |  | *
ELIZABETH |  |  |  | *
SANDRY |  |  |  | *
ALI'S GIRL |  |  |  | *
MRS. WAINRIGHT |  |  |  | *
AGGIE WAINRIGHT |  |  |  | *
5 SALESMEN |  |  |  | *
PROPRIETOR |  |  |  | *
DUST BOWL GROUP |  |  |  | *
MAN GOING BACK |  |  |  | *
YOUNG MAN |  |  |  | *
GAS ATTENDENT |  |  |  | *
OWNER |  |  |  | *
MAYOR OF HOOVER |  |  |  | *
CONTRACTOR |  |  |  | *
DEPUTY SHERIFF |  |  |  | *
OFFICER |  |  |  | *
Pages from the Costume Run Chart for Cast and Crew

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<tr>
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<td>II-3</td>
<td>Without (Coat)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Joe Carlson</td>
<td>II-3</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Randolph</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Boots, Socks, Glasses, Dress, Apron, Headscarf, Shoes, thigh highs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRANMA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Donnelly</td>
<td>4A,6A</td>
<td>Shawl, Red Shirt/Long Johns/t shirt, Jeans, Boots, Hat, Bandana, Jean Coat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL JOAD</td>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Bloch</td>
<td>4A,6A,2A</td>
<td>Reddish T shirt, Long Johns, Overalls, Boots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOAH JOAD</td>
<td>I / II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>II 1</td>
<td>Blue shirt/Badge, Blue Jeans, Cowboy hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancer/Man w/ Club</td>
<td>II 2</td>
<td>belt/gun holster, Jeans, Bandana, Plaid shirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jai Goodman</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Dress, Apron, Head Scarf, Shoes, *baby pad (2), Hair Barrett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSE OF SHARON</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo Wilson</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>White Henley, Gray/ tee shirt, Overalls, Straw Hat, Socks, Boots, T shirt, Blue Dress Shirt, Work Pants, Suspenders, Boots, Socks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNCLE JOHN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley Pendleton</td>
<td>I/II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNIE RIVERS</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dancer, Bandana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARACTER</td>
<td>ACT/SCENE</td>
<td>COSTUME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Gunter</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Greyed Stripe Shirt&lt;br&gt;Faded Overalls&lt;br&gt;Cowboy Boots&lt;br&gt;Undershirt&lt;br&gt;Bandana&lt;br&gt;Distressed hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar Man</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MULEY GRAVES</td>
<td>I 2</td>
<td>Coat (distressed) &lt;br&gt;gloves(fingerless)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Webster</td>
<td>I/II</td>
<td>Henley&lt;br&gt;Vest&lt;br&gt;Pants&lt;br&gt;Shoes&lt;br&gt;Bandana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensemble</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Aggie Officer</td>
<td>I 8A</td>
<td>Blue Flannel Shirt&lt;br&gt;Belt w/ green pouch&lt;br&gt;Hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proprietor</td>
<td>II 1</td>
<td>White Long John shirt&lt;br&gt;Tan overalls&lt;br&gt;Hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floyd</td>
<td>II 1</td>
<td>Gray top&lt;br&gt;Brown Cap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weed Patch Director</td>
<td>II 2</td>
<td>Work Coat&lt;br&gt;Brown Hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Webster, cont.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ensemble cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrator 3</td>
<td>II 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man 2</td>
<td>II 3/4</td>
<td>Ensemble cost.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vita

Kenann Modjeska Quander was born December 14, 1979, in Washington D.C. She graduated from Hammond High School, Columbia, Maryland in 1998. She received her associate degree in fashion design from The Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, New York in 2000 and received her bachelor of fine arts in theatre from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia in 2003. In 2003, she was awarded an internship from The Academy of Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles, California.